

“What is the ‘Amazing’ Evidence We’ve Been with Jesus?”

Acts 4:13–14

Rev. Lynn Downing

April 10, 2016 • Evening Sermon

Prayer:

Father, we pray that You will grant Your blessing now as we wait before You. We pray that You will speak to our minds, our hearts and to the conduct of our lives. Speak to our habits and to the areas where we need to experience changes in order to experience stronger intimacy with Yourself. We pray that You will open this passage that is before us and grant a clear understanding of it. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Savior, Amen.

Acts 1 through Acts 5 are very busy chapters and before I get to the passage and focus for this study, I want to give a little sequential summary of what is going on here. There is the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. When that was set forth there was a great confusion on the part of people who didn’t understand what was happening. In fact there were some accusation about lack of sobriety on the part of the people and Peter came quickly to the rescue and began to explain that this was a fulfilment of prophecy and also recited from memory with great articulation what the Old Testament said would take place on this day. When the people were puzzled further he began to preach further and the outcome of this was that 3,000 men (not sure how many women) came to saving faith in Christ.

One of the verses that has impressed me in the Scriptures for a long time is in Acts 2:42 which I think represents a sudden life style change in those that are referred to here. We don’t know exactly the number of hours that were involved but from the 3,000 being converted they began to experience this kind of life style change. Acts 2:42–43 says [42] *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* [43] *And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.* That represents a drastic life style change for those who had heard. I think we would be remiss not to note that and to call attention to it for self-evaluation given by the Holy Spirit and not just us looking at ourselves but asking the Holy Spirit to show us areas where that kind of life style needs to show up and be characteristic of us.

Then Peter and John were used in Acts 3 to heal a lame beggar. Peter and John were not too far removed from their former preoccupations, their former ways of making a living, but they had the three years in the presence of Christ and now with Pentecost having taken place they were empowered in a completely different way. So what we have here is once again, people being drawn to them. There are other places in Scripture where when miracles take place there are people who are uninformed as to what is really happening being from the power of the Holy Spirit, and so they think those performing the miracles are someone very special. In that they were Apostles, they were special but it’s important to note here that Peter and John immediately rejected the adulation of the crowd and Peter preaches Christ again.

Here comes the second sermon and as Peter was finishing this preaching the religious leaders of the day show up and begin to resist something very interesting. They resist that Peter has healed this lame beggar but they are not so much interested in him as they are of the Name by which he has been healed. So here again Peter and John have the opportunity to represent Christ and they do that. They preach Him straightforwardly and with authority. The people who have come to resist this take hold of Peter and John but they don’t do it with any roughness

because they are afraid of the crowd. It is late in the day at this point and they put them in jail overnight or they detain them overnight because they want to question them the next morning as to the Name they used to heal this lame beggar.

They are tried and questioned by the authorities the next day and so the text I want to focus on for this study is Acts 4:13–14 which says *[13] Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. [14] But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.* So the interrogation was put on pause. It doesn't say that in Scripture but the way the wording is given shows that their focus is not necessarily for a few moments on the Name they used to heal the lame beggar but it's on what happened to these men. As they took into consideration this accomplishment of healing this man, now the authorities take note of the fact that Peter and John are very articulate and bold and that in spite of the fact that they are untrained common men, the authorities can't get over what is taking place.

That is how we arrive at these verses in Acts 4 and it brings me to a question I want to ask you. Is there anything amazing or astonishing about you that can only be explained about the obviousness that you have been and continue to be with Jesus? These authorities were astonished over the actions they accomplished, with the boldness and articulation of which they spoke and then it indicates that they recognized they had been with Jesus. They are not giving any spiritual result to this necessarily. I think they are simply recognizing the historic association of these men as followers of Jesus. These men are not capable of understanding what would happen to people who had been under the instruction of Christ and now under the instruction of the illumining of the Holy Spirit.

So Peter and John have two major pluses. They had been with Jesus and now they are still with Jesus through the Holy Spirit that is with them. So the Spirit of Christ is filling their lives and there is the secret by which they speak so clearly, boldly and with articulation. It is obviously the name of Christ that they use in order to bring this lame man to full health.

The third reason I think the leaders didn't put two and two together is because it follows up quickly by saying in Acts 4:14, *[14] But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.* The healed man who is a great example was standing beside them when he had been unable to stand for all these previous years. Seeing this, the authorities had nothing to say in opposition. I think they wanted to say something but they were speechless as to how to answer what was taking place.

So we come back to this question. I will probably ask it a few more times as we go through this study. Is there anything amazing or astonishing about you that can only be explained by the obviousness that you have been and continue on an ongoing basis to be with Jesus? Before we get into ways to give answers to this I want to clarify something and offer a caveat here because we don't want to think in the wrong direction. Be careful not to misinterpret the question. The question is not really about me or you. The question is about the obviousness of Christ in our life.

There is a statement Paul makes in Philippians where there were actually people who preached in order to make him jealous. He with maturity, nobility and rightness said 'that's alright just so Jesus is preached.' We want to be careful that if the Lord uses us to do something significant we don't polish our nails, as the old saying goes, as if it were us who did the accomplishing. Preaching, teaching the Word of God and accomplishing matters in ministry must be empowered by the Spirit. I love the ending of what we call the Lord's Prayer. It says

‘Thine is the Kingdom, Thine is the power, Thine is the glory forever.’ There is the caveat. Be careful not to misinterpret the question for the idea is not to draw attention to ourselves.

Obviously, Peter and John didn’t draw attention to themselves. They quickly disavowed any quality that was native to themselves which would explain why they were able to do what they had just done and why they were able to speak in the way they had spoken. A notable reality is that Jesus stuck out in them and they were happy for that to be the case instead of them sticking out and hiding Him. So I say again, is there anything amazing or astonishing about us that can only be explained by the obviousness that we have been and continue to be with Jesus? The religious leaders didn’t really understand what was going on here but we do and that’s important that we understand what is going on.

These events are post Pentecost. The Holy Spirit had been promised and He has now come. So all the events that are taking place here are in the post Pentecost power of the presence of the Holy Spirit. We have that same benefit. We don’t have it any less than they do except that we’re not Apostles. We have not been called on to receive and record the Word of God that would be canonized and preserved for generations, centuries and millennia. We do have the benefit of the Holy Spirit to illumine the Canon, the Word of God, which is the Spirit who gave it and there is really no justifiable reason for lack of evidence that we have been with Jesus, unless we haven’t been.

There are two ways that we might not have been. If we have never confessed our sins, giving our heart and life to Christ and asking Him to be our Savior and Master then we haven’t been with Jesus. Let’s say we have gone through that process by the empowering and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit where we have given our life to Christ. Could it be that we’ve gone through that process but not too long after that we began to let that slip and we began to not be with Him on any kind of ongoing intimacy building basis? Perhaps you see where I’m going with this.

Let’s look at Psalm 25. I want to read this from the ESV and NASV. Psalm 25:14 says *[14] The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant* (ESV). The word friendship is what I am interested here. This is in fact a warm and rich sounding word and in its meaning here as well. Now here is Psalm 25:14 in the NASV; *The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, And He will make them know His covenant.* So the word friendship is used in one version and the word secret is used in another version. What is the real word? It is one of the few places you find this in the Scripture but I will show you another place in a moment. The word that is translated for friendship and secret here is actually intimacy in its original form so it could read very clearly like this; the intimacy of or with the Lord is for those who fear Him.

Now let’s look in Proverbs 3. It is the same word we are looking at but we’ll see it in a different context. Proverbs 3:32 says *[32] for the devious person is an abomination to the LORD, but the upright are in his confidence* (ESV). Proverbs 3:32 in the NASV says, *For the devious are an abomination to the LORD; But He is intimate with the upright.* Whether it is called friendship, secret, or in His confidence I’d rather just go right to the heart of the matter and say as the NASV that He is intimate with the upright. I’m not sure whether you have given much thought to this but that is astounding to me and it has been for a long time.

I started using the word intimacy to describe the desirable relationship with Christ or the way we can be enriched and strengthened in our relationship with Him, about twenty years ago. I have never stopped using it because it seems to be the right one that not only describes but calls us to that kind of relationship. So here is a given. When we have intimacy with Christ He

becomes the center of conversation and the explanation for who we actually are. That is what was going on with Peter and John. The men who were making the observation didn't understand but we do. It puts us in the position of not only understanding but we want to say 'Lord, give me an intensification of that intimacy so that as people see me they see Christ. As people hear me and are around me they are able to notice the characteristics of Christ.'

How would that be? I will share in a moment from Galatians 5 that talks about the fruits of the Spirit but I want to precede that with asking this question. How does one move into this intimacy with Christ that is available to us? First, is by asking the Holy Spirit to convict us of whatever quenches the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. You will have to study the content of the fruit in order to do that well but when you look at Galatians 5:22-23 you can say 'Lord, what of this fruit is hidden in my life, hidden to my family, hidden to my fellow believers?' How is it that I am quenching the Spirit due to a lack of sufficient intimacy that would make this visible and available for fellowship and instruction one with another? That is the first answer.

The question, remember is how does one move into such an intimate relationship with Christ? The second answer is, it is by sacrificial commitment to unhurried, worshipful, meditative communion with Him in the intimacy of being *Coram Deo*, that is before His Face. I use this phrase intentionally when I preach because I believe it is necessary for us to take into consideration each of these terms and words in order to be sufficiently impressed with the necessity and rich opportunity of the kind of relationship with Christ that we have.

Redemption is being delivered by the ransoming power of Christ of the cross out from under the jurisdiction, control and dominance of sin in our life. It leads one to use the passage in Philippians 4:13 where it says that since that has taken place I now can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, which means included in what I can do is I can pursue intimacy with Him. So why would I not? That is where the word sacrificial comes in. The question is how does one move into such an intimate relationship with Christ? It is by sacrificial commitment to unhurried, worshipful, meditative communion with Him in the intimacy of being before His Face.

The term sacrificial commitment can be seen in the progress that was made in the lives of the Disciples. Look at what happens, something unusual. Jesus would walk along and find people to call to be His Disciples and simply say 'Follow Me' and they would do it. There is no way to explain that except by the authority of the command that He gave and by the enabling, latching onto them spiritually speaking, so that they would let go of their income process and other activities prior to this call upon them. So they let go of a lot. They sacrificed whatever would keep them from the kind of ongoing building, strengthening intimacy with the Lord. It didn't really come to a head until the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost and they began to have that kind of deepened understanding.

But we too must understand the sacrificial commitment. Why would I use that terminology here? It is because that is exactly what it is. This unhurried, worshipful, meditative communion with the Lord will require and involve if we practice it, sacrificial commitment. I have not read in entirety the book by Jerry Bridges, *The Disciplines of Grace* but I plan to finish it soon. It along with others that are much like it, call for us to set times and block out other activities so that the focus that we're given in our relationship with the Lord can actually be described at some point as intimacy with Him.

That is the idea that is in this passage here where the religious authorities without understanding what they were saying but were recognizing men that were doing uncanny things

and they also put two and two together in this sense that they remembered the association that these men had followed another Man who had done the same kinds of things, healing people and disturbing the situation. I think that is as far as they were able to understand the relationship between the Disciples and Jesus but that is not as far as we understand.

We are called on to actually sacrificially pursue intimacy with Him so much so that the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23, [22] *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* [23] *gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law* become natural in our lives. Not a single one of those come natural to men and women. I'm talking about love for the Lord, love for the Lord's people and love for the lost. Real joy is only available in the Lord. When you read that list it's no wonder it's called the fruit of the Spirit. It is the only Person it could come from, with He Himself being given by the Father and the Son.

So why should we not at this point ask Him to make whatever changes in our schedule, our affinities or whatever would keep us from setting aside and guarding tenaciously the kind of intimacy with Him that would flow over into every other part of our life so that as people get to know us the thing that will impress them is the fruit of the Spirit, the presence of Christ to the extent that hopefully they wouldn't have to be astonished at that? They would say 'this is the way it ought to be.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Our Father we ask that You will help us to realize something of this level of importance, to be exactly that, of the highest importance. Every single one of us have room to grow in our intimacy with You, our Savior. Every one of us have exceptions that we make for the time that we should be spending waiting before You, before Your Face. So we pray that You will give to us this sacrificial commitment and that people will be able to see in us increasingly, the nature and character of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit and give praise to You but not be astonished, for we ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.