

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (29-5-1994 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Men who had been with Jesus

Acts 4:13

Bible Reading: Acts 4:7-22

### Introduction

Today we are going to see the impact which was made on the authorities which had Peter and John arrested. Picture the scene. The leaders of political and religious life, rulers, elders, teachers of the law, the High Priest and all his family assembled, all the power, wisdom, prestige and dignity. And there in the midst are two raw young Galilean fishermen, speaking with great freedom and forthrightness. Speaking of the crimes of the religious leaders in crucifying Jesus, and then, to the hearer's annoyance, preaching that He is alive from the dead now. He is the stone that was rejected, and is now the chief cornerstone. The authorities saw the courage and the boldness of these men, and realizing that they were ordinary unschooled men, concluded that they had been with Jesus.

We are going to examine the striking characteristics of these men, that caused the authorities to reach such a conclusion. Their secret was indeed that they had been with Jesus, and this secret can be ours too.

### The boldness and courage of Peter and John

We find such astonishing courage in the message Peter and John preached, and the manner they adopted. They spoke with freedom, plainness, openness, and did not flinch from addressing the leaders of the nation about their sins and mistake in crucifying Christ. The last thing the authorities would have wanted to hear was that, having crucified Jesus, He was now alive and active and performing miracles – but Peter and John did not conceal this from them. Despite their angry reaction and their power to imprison them, or worse, the disciples withheld nothing. They were totally confident and unashamed before such a daunting audience.

Yet these were the men who had been such cowards when Jesus was arrested. Peter had denied Jesus in front of a mere servant girl. Everything was so changed now. Now they were bold, fearless and courageous. They were not worried about the outcome of being linked with Jesus.

This was a characteristic of all New Testament preaching. Jesus spoke boldly (John 7:26). Peter spoke plainly at Pentecost (Acts 2:29). All the church spoke boldly (Acts 4:31). Paul spoke fearlessly in Damascus and later in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27,29). Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly in Antioch, Pisidian Antioch and Iconium, Ephesus, before Festus, and finally in Rome (Acts 13:4; 14:3; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31). Apollus spoke boldly at the Synagogue in Ephesus (Acts 18:26). Paul asked for prayer that he might speak boldly (Ephesians 6:19,20). He was bold in preaching at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:2) and Corinth (2 Corinthians 3:12; 7:4). He mentioned it in Philippians 1:20.

Also note how much God uses persons and things which, in the world's eyes, are nothing – unschooled, ordinary men, a rod, a jaw-bone of an ass, five stones, a mustard seed, five barley loaves. We can all take heart. We may be hesitant, halting, caught in a circle of fear and worry, lacking in conviction, and speak the truth as if it is a lie. Yet God delights to take weak things, base things which are despised, and make something of them (1 Corinthians 1:27,28).

When Luther was on trial at the commencement of the Reformation, surrounded by the Emperor, princes, dukes, archbishops, bishops, he declared, “I cannot submit my faith either to Pope or councils because they have frequently erred. Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture I cannot and will not retract. Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. Amen.”

When John Bunyan was arrested for preaching in Restoration England, the magistrate told him he must not preach. “I shall preach tomorrow with God's help” Bunyan declared. “Then you will go to prison again.” “I will preach when I get out.” “You will be hanged or have life imprisonment.” “If I am in prison till moss grows on my eyelids, I can only say that I will preach whenever I get the chance.”

#### The secret of Peter and John

Why were these men so courageous and bold? Did they just have more than their fair share of courageousness? Were they naturally reckless or foolhardy? Luke answer – they had been with the Lord. Some, perhaps all, of the priests and judges had tried Jesus a few weeks before. Jesus' courage and composure had left a deep impression. They wondered who Peter and John reminded them of. Why, Jesus, of course. They were just like Him. They had been with Him. That explains it!

Peter and John had indeed been with Jesus for three years. They had watched Him closely and witnessed how courageous and fearless He was. One of the greatest compliments came from the enemies of Jesus: **Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men because you pay no attention to who they are** (Matthew 21:16). Sadly, while Jesus was with the disciples those three years, they rarely followed His example in this way. But after the Resurrection, the disciples started to be like Him. They kept in touch with the risen Lord, He filled them with His Holy Spirit, and at last they became like Him. Jesus had promised them earlier that when they were brought before kings and princes for His name's sake, He would give them the wisdom and the words they needed (Luke 21:15). This promise was fulfilled now.

We too can have the same companionship with the risen Lord that they had. A companionship which transforms can be ours as well as theirs. Inward communion with Him can be our experience too. Companionship and familiarity are available to all. They were with Jesus just as you and I can be. It is possible for us all to be “with Him”. When we go to our daily work, when we are compassed by distressing cares, when the affairs of secular life seem to close in on us like walls of a prison. It is hard but possible to think these all away, and carry with us into everything His Presence. He is not there to be put aside, but He sits within us at the table or in the study or at work. He travels with us, and enters our every day occupation. His presence is always

near, with its tender encircling, mighty protection and all-sufficing sweetness and power.

To be with Christ was not the prerogative of the apostles and spiritual giants. But it is possible for all of us. We too may be with Christ if we are rightly related to Him and keep in touch with Him hour by hour.

### Making the secret ours

Of course we know in theory we are with Him. We are always in a special way His people. **Surely I am with you always** (Matthew 28:20). **He is not far from each one of us** (Acts 17:27). But although we know the theory, how can we enjoy the reality of His presence? How can we benefit from this presence as those early disciples did? How can it make a difference in our lives?

Firstly we must ensure we are in a right relationship with the Lord. Nothing must come between us and the Lord. There can be no area of our life where He is not in control. In no part must we insist on having our own way. We must be totally and completely yielded to Him. His Lordship covers, in practice, everything. There must be no unconfessed and unforsaken sin in our lives. Is there something which we are doing or not doing which has not been confessed before Him? Is God putting His finger on something in my life? Is there yet an area unsurrendered? Is there a sin we are dallying with? We will not enjoy and benefit from the Lord's presence till that is dealt with. There must be obedience to God's will.

Confess and forsake sin is the first step. **If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness** (1 John 1:9). Christ's blood makes us clean and acceptable to God.

Then there needs to be a definite meeting with God every day. We need to be where we will hear His voice speak through His Word. We need to speak in reply through prayer. We need to be spending time with the Lord in unhurried fellowship. The lack of this is usually the cause of failure in Christian lives. No church attendance or prayer meeting attendance can make up for this. Failure in the secret place means failure everywhere else. There needs to be frank and full conversation with Him about our wants, discomforts, troubles, weaknesses, drawing from Him all our resources, allowing Him to fill us with the Spirit. Let us not live below our privileges; else we will make little progress.

**He must become greater. I must become less** (John 3:30). Dwell in Him. Live on Him. Do not look at weaknesses and self. Lean on Him. Rest on Him. Call on Him. Abide in Him. In His fullness is found all we need to live godly God-conscious lives. Many fail just here. They do not take time to be holy. We must go out and live our daily lives in dependence on Him. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and He indwells us. All we need is in Him. All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3; John 1:16). Beware of self-confidence and self-dependence. They are the road to ruin and failure.

John Barridge, a quaint and eccentric vicar from Bedfordshire, said that at one time He used the Lord as a healthy man would use a walking stick, leaning just an ounce

on it. “But now He is my whole crutch. No foot moves a step without Him. He is my all. I cast all my care on Him. My heart has no rest till it leans on Him wholly. Then I feel His peace. I go to Him for everything. Every care I cast on Him. It is His work to save. It is my work to look for help. In darkness, spiritual deadness, in the presence of sin – I go to Him in my weakness and simply look to Him.” Do you use Christ as a healthy man uses a walking stick, or as a crippled man uses a crutch?

What effect would it have on our Christian life if we attended to all these things? Character would be transformed because we are with Him. The servant would become like the master, just as garments in a perfumed drawer catch the fragrance. Christian growth is not about tinkering with this or that, but about keeping in touch with Christ. **We are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory** (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Having been with the Lord, we receive release and freedom to speak openly and boldly. He opens our lips, and the fountain overflows.

*“My heart is full of Christ and longs  
Its glorious matter to declare”  
(Charles Wesley)*

**In your hearts set Christ apart as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have** (1 Peter 3:15). **People who know their God are strong and do exploits** (Daniel 11:32 A.V.) It was said of John Knox that he feared the face of God so much that he never feared the face of men.