

WHO ARE WE SPENDING TIME WITH?

(Sermon Summary)

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Reading: Acts 4:1-22

The apostles Peter and John had done a good deed (v9) for which they were being punished. But the knowledge they had made them speak with boldness (v13) and with authority. They spoke like people who really meant what they were saying. They were not hypocrites. The religious leaders had a problem with the name of the Person that the disciples had been with. That 'name' vexed them (v2). They knew the answer to the question they asked in v7. Peter does not spare them their embarrassment but boldly proclaims that name (v10, v12). The religious leaders hate that name (v18) and feel guilt when they hear it (5:28). That He is self-evidently not a false teacher is a difficulty to people to this day.

Also, a problem to the religious leaders was the boldness of these men who were uneducated yet now spoke with great conviction. A similar comment had been made about the Lord Himself (John 7:15). There had been something special about the Lord Jesus. There was also something impressive about these men who were His followers.

The apostles teach us something. We reflect the people we spend our time with. We pick up the mannerisms of parents, teachers, lecturers, or preachers. Keeping company with Jesus had made these men, even by the admission of people who hated Him, bold and competent to handle Scripture. Peter shows he understand the word of God in v11. Who they had spent time with showed in the people they were and in the things that they said.

1. Spending time with the wrong people.

If we spend time with the wrong people, it will show in the people that we are. There are warnings to the young in Proverbs 1:10-15, Proverbs 13:20, 1 Corinthians 5:6 and 1 Corinthians 15:33. Corruption is very easy to catch. What we say and what we are can reflect the wrong company that we are keeping.

Often the worst person you can be left alone with is yourself. There are warnings about isolating ourselves (Proverbs 18:1). It can seem to be spiritually mature to be on our own but often is not. We can end up rehearsing old worries and fail to leave them with Him. We can re-hash old grievances and hurts. Unresolved questions and unconfessed sins remain intact. We may end up more jealous and more angry than we were before because we had spent time with ourselves.

Sometimes we try to understand who we are on our own. We may feel that we have had to rely upon ourselves in the past to survive. We get too used to feeling that we are 'on our own.' We can remove Christ from our thinking and get too used to being independent.

Sometimes being on our own with ourselves can feed our self-righteousness. It is like the Pharisee praying to himself (Luke 18:11). We can feel that we are not like these charismatics or health-and-wealth people. It can lead to pride and contempt that makes us dismissive of other people.

If this is who we are, then we have nothing of significance to say when the moment of challenge comes. We may have a lot to say but it will have little impact. We may end up instead being mechanical, hard and unsympathetic.

It is necessary to break into this cycle and to repent. We have to take ourselves in hand. We have to hunger and thirst after righteousness instead.

Of course, we will also be the losers if we spend time with the world. Shopping centres are full of adverts telling us to buy things we really do not need. If we are absorbed in this kind of thinking and pursuit, then we will have nothing to say when it matters. We will be too taken up with appearances, wealth, property, and the latest gear. We need to repent.

2. Spending time with the real Jesus.

We must endeavour to ensure that the Jesus we are spending time with is the real Jesus. He must be the one we find in the Bible, not one of our own imagining or the imagining of someone else. Scripture is breathed out by the Spirit. The pages of Scripture would breathe out to us the genuine Christ. He is then present to us.

We should try to get to the public meetings of the gathered church. We should try to attend the public worship on the Lord's Day and attend the Prayer Meeting. But it is always good to come to such times having been with Him already through the day and through the week (Matthew 6:5-6).

In life we tend to spend time with people that, when we come away from them, we feel we have more than when we first met them. We like people who add something to us. We like people who we come away from thinking that we are better people for having met with them. Sadly, we often spend time with 'another Jesus' and so we come away with little from that meeting. We stay with the same sins, the same fears, and the same burdens.

The Christ we need to spend time with is one who is love itself (1 John 4:7-12). This is the Christ that is pleased to save wretched sinners like us. He loves us in the unique and powerful way that the God-man can and does. He had renounced honours and privileges to come as a man. He dispensed with public acclamation and worship and embraced the cross for His people. The means of death appointed for Him was shameful and painful. It had disgrace attached to it. But there was nothing that He was not willing to endure and suffer to save us from our sins. In His forsakenness and thirst on the cross He pictured hell itself for us. This was for His own people's sake.

The day of small things that we live in is not evidence that He does not love us. We do not have the supports to our faith of seeing people regularly converted and baptized. We cannot read back God's love to us from outward success in the ministry. But the Lord waits to show such people His love independent of what we are accomplishing for Him. We can feel at times so fake as if we did not really belong to Him. He affirms to us that we do belong to Him and that we are dearly loved. We should not fret because we do not see revival. This can lose us access to His love as we are consumed with concern that we are false or doing something wrong. We conclude that we need to try harder or do more. Yet the Lord may be wanting to speak tenderly to us, and we are too taken up with these other concerns.

Knowing we are loved has some good results. Spending time with this Jesus results in us having more authority. We are not so intimidated because we have a fresh experience of His care for us personally. How good if people would say of us as preachers, Sunday School workers, husbands, wives, that these people have been with Jesus. The Charismatic Movement tries to offer a short-cut to feeling the love of Christ. But sanctification is a sure route to knowing the love of Christ. When we follow Christ and spend time with Him, then our obedience is happier, and our duties are more nobly undertaken. We have the humility that is able to repent and look for grace to help in time of need. It draws us away from the bad habits and ways that prevent us being like Jesus.

So we should stop more often to pray, to reflect, to love Him who first loved us. We should offer ourselves to Him as the raw material for Him to work upon.

The world at large actually needs us to be with Jesus. It needs our prayers, and it needs our witness.