

HAS THIS MAN BEEN WITH JESUS?: Acts 4: 13.

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Acts 4:1-22.

This Sunday is as close as possible to the date I preached my first sermon as Pastor of Crich Baptist Church twenty years ago. During that time, the world has changed considerably. My family has grown up. Our various commitments have changed. In the wider world, there have been events like 9/11, the financial crash of 2008, Brexit, the relentless spiritual and moral decline of our nation and of the West in general, and then the pandemic which we are still living with at this moment.

In that time, as a church, the congregation has stayed about the same size. Friends have gone to glory. Others have moved on for a variety of reasons. We have established friendships as we have served the Lord together. Yet for all the time spent there have been few conversions or baptisms to recount. There have been more funerals than weddings to conduct. These last two years have seen us busy with the building works. There is still a way to go yet but we are seeing progress.

It is interesting to look at the experience of the apostles in Acts 4:12-13. We admire and wish to copy their boldness. But that boldness comes out of what we see in verse 13, that these people had been with Jesus. It therefore asks a question of myself after twenty years, but of all of us, "Have we been with Jesus?" Because the Sanhedrin had concluded something important and correct about Peter and John, that their boldness did not come from themselves but was the result of being with Jesus. The more we have been with Jesus, the more we will have something to say and say it boldly.

1. The Jesus to be with

There are fake types of 'Jesus' just as there are fake experiences. We need to make sure that we are spending time with the true Jesus, the one who said 'Come unto me and I will give you rest' and who promises never to leave us or forsake us. It must be a privilege for people to be able to spend time with the Queen. We have the privilege of being able to spend time with greatest Person that has ever been. Our Lord is living and is involved in our lives. He listens, understands, responds, cares, confronts, encourages and matures us. The Jesus to be with is the Jesus of Scripture.

His was a life of sincere obedience as we find described in the gospel accounts. We are spending time with someone who had true and deep love for God. We learn to love what He loves and to hate what He hates (Psalms 45:6-7). He hates man-made religion and hypocrisy carried out using His Name for cover. He hates greed, status-seeking, lying

and violence. We discovered this when we were converted and then came to Him for cleansing.

The Jesus we spend time with is the Jesus who gave up His life of sincere obedience on the cross (See Isaiah 53:4-6). It was not an abstract death but a particular death. By that death He secured wonderful benefits for His people. These benefits were specific, individual and everlasting. His people were always intended to have the benefits of them. It is all so simple and comprehensible. It results in us being able to agree with what Paul says in Galatians 2:20 and Philippians 3:8-11.

2. We keep the wrong company.

Nothing good will follow if we spend time in the wrong company. We can spend time with unbelief and nothing good follows from that. This is the kind of attitude that brought down upon the generation in the wilderness the judgment of God (Psalm 78:17-20). It doubts that there is a way forward. We can spend time with fear and again the results are negative. If dominated by fear we are always wondering whether God will really help us, or whether we will really be given grace to make a contribution to His cause. We can spend too much time with past disappointments and live too much with these dragging us downwards. We can all be guilty of spending too much time with each of these rather than with the true Jesus.

3. So let's all resolve to spend more time with Jesus.

We have perhaps had more time in the pandemic, especially during the lockdowns, to spend time with the Lord. We might have realized that we were previously suffering from an epidemic of being too busy. So we must resolve to do some simple things to ensure we are spending time with Jesus. We must open the Bible and drink in the details of or Lord's life and ministry. Pray with adoration and praise with joy. We should have faith in Him and, if we preach, to preach a real Christ to all until the Lord calls us home to glory.