

When Fallen People Follow Jesus (Acts 4:13-22)

Every sequence has a consequence. If we eat bad food, smoke, drink excessively, fail to get enough rest, and expose ourselves to lots of drama, we age faster and live less time. This has been proven by numerous studies.

- Study 1 - [Stress and Aging: Five Ways Chronic Stress Can Affect the Aging Process](#)
- Study 2 - [Sleep Deprivation Linked to Aging Skin](#)

Conversely, if we eat healthy, exercise regularly, drink in moderation (1 Timothy 5:23), and avoid stressful people and situations we tend to be healthier and live longer. Generally speaking, the quantity and quality of our life on earth is predicted by the nature of the things we put in it. Every sequence has a consequence.

There are consequences to spending time with people. We are influenced by the people we interact with. In the interactions of work, leisure, and love they rub off on us. The company we keep eventually and invariably contributes something to our conduct, to our conversation, to our contemplations, and to the essence of who we are - *our character* (1 Corinthians 5:6, 9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 2 Timothy 2:22). Consider the words of the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth. He says, "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'" (1 Corinthians 15:33) And the converse is also true. That is, there are tremendous benefits to spending time with a good person.

People who consistently keep company with Christ are radically changed for the better. In His fellowship they receive His uncanny manners, His determination to win, His commitment to the Father's will, and His love for the lost. Such people eventually become chief change agents in Heaven's charge against the gates of hell.

This chapter will show what happens to fallen people who follow Jesus. They become courageous, more capable, and the catalysts for change.

The Observation of Outsiders (Acts 4:13-17)

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. ¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶ saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name."

Acts 4:13 The confidence of the apostles could not be missed. However, it looked nothing like the confidence of the council (Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3:3-6; Acts 22:3). They Sanhedrin council members were proud of their great learning, their positions as spiritual leaders, and their associations. These fishermen had none of

those things and yet stood before them without fear. Although they lacked formal education they were not afraid to go into the temple and teach and could use logic and Scripture to defeat an opponent (Acts 2:16-22; 2:25-35; 4:11). Although they were not schooled in the work of leading the congregation they had no problem (1) calling for people to repent and follow Christ, (2) teaching them how to follow, and (3) training others to do the same.

As the council marveled at the boldness of the Galileans they suddenly became aware of the cause of the confidence, the basis of the boldness, and the source of their sound teaching: *they had been with Jesus*.

- Jesus Exhibited Learning Beyond Explanation (Luke 2:41-47; John 7:15)
- Jesus Easily Defeated His Enemies in Arguments (Matthew 22:15-22 - Jesus uses Scripture and logic to defeat the Pharisees and Herodians; Matthew 22:23-33 - Jesus uses only the Pentateuch to prove resurrection and defeat the false doctrine of the Sadducees; Matthew 22:41-46 - Jesus proves that his enemies' have a model of messiah that is too limited and that it cannot be reconciled with Scripture.)
- Jesus Used Miracles to Prove His Message (Matthew 9:1-8 - the raising of the paralytic proves His claim to having the power to forgive sins; John 8:56-9:11 - the healing of the man born blind proved His claim to deity; John 11:1-44 - the raising of Lazarus proved His claim to be the resurrection).

The rabble rousing rabbi from Nazareth had left a painful impression on the religious leaders of His day. His disciples' were leaving the same impression. F.F. Bruce says it this way:

None could match him in his sure handling of the scriptures, his unerring ability to go back to first principles for the confirming of his own teaching and the discomfiture of his opponents. And plainly he had imparted something of that same gift to his disciples. Not only so, but he had supported his teaching with the mighty works which he performed; now Peter and John were doing the same.
Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Book of the Acts* (p. 95). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Jesus pattern of life, poise under fire, and power to effect change for good were not forgotten. The memory is fresh in the minds of the men who murdered Him. And now they are confronted by a motley crew of men that are just like Him.

The consequence of keeping company with Christ has caused the disciples to have His character. They look like their Leader.

The apostles, men who once fled in the face of fierce opposition, now stand toe-to-toe with their enemies. They are confident, they are capable, and they are causing a change for good. Why? Even their enemies cannot deny the effects of spending time with Jesus. Robert Coleman, author of the classic *Master Plan of Evangelism* puts it this way

Jesus chose from the larger group about him the Twelve “that they might be with him” (Mark 3:14; see Luke 6:13). He added, of course, that he was going to send them forth “to preach, and to have authority to cast out devils,” but often we fail to realize what came first. Jesus made it clear that before these men were “to preach” or “to cast out devils” they were to be “with him.” In fact, this personal appointment to be in constant association with him was as much a part of their ordination commission as the authority to evangelize. Indeed, it was for the moment even more important, for it was the necessary preparation for the other.

Coleman, R. E. (2006). *The master plan of evangelism* (p. 35). Grand Rapids, MI: Revell.

The point is summarized in Mark 3:14

¹⁴ Then He appointed twelve, that they might **be with Him** and that He might send them out to preach

Much time alone with Jesus is the secret to becoming like Jesus.

Acts 4:14 Jesus had said that his followers, when called upon to give answers to those in authority, would be given a message both irrefutable and irresistible (Luke 21:14-15). The logic could not be contradicted; the healed man was standing there before them. And the explanation of Peter was not just sound it was so compelling that thousands, by the grace of God, conceded their guilt and had made the choice to trust Christ. What is the Sanhedrin going to do?

Acts 4:15-17 Trying to maintain a semblance of being in control they commanded the apostles and the lame man **to go aside out of the council**. This was done so that they could talk among themselves about this situation. What they said in their private counsel is a tragic testimony to their commitment to corruption and lack of love for the truth. They want to silence the witnesses. But how? They admitted that **a notable miracle had been done through them** and that **it was evident**. They admitted that they could not deny the miracle and that the message was spreading. With no argument against Peter's response and no ability to deny the miracle they resort to threatening:

let us threaten them, that from now on they speak to no more in this name.

Do not miss the fact that they do not deny the miracle or the message. What is the problem? They simply do not have a place for the truth of Jesus in their lives. Jesus had said as much:

⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. ⁴⁴ You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. (John 8:42-45, NKJV)

This brings us to a hard lesson in missional living:

The gospel that we present cannot be believed or received unless God graciously grants the listeners both aptitude and appetite for it.

The Courage of Christ Showing Through (Acts 4:18-22)

¹⁸ So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” ²¹ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. ²² For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

Acts 4:18-20 Having concocted a weak and corrupt scheme for suppressing the truth the apostles were called back in. They were then **commanded not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus**. You have to wonder if anyone said, "They have been with Jesus. They teach like him, perform miracles like him, and respond with irrefutable logic like Him when they are cross examined. Guys, threatening Jesus did not work. And it ain't gonna work on his disciples. They are going to look us in the eye and tell us that they are going to keep doing what they are doing." You have to wonder.

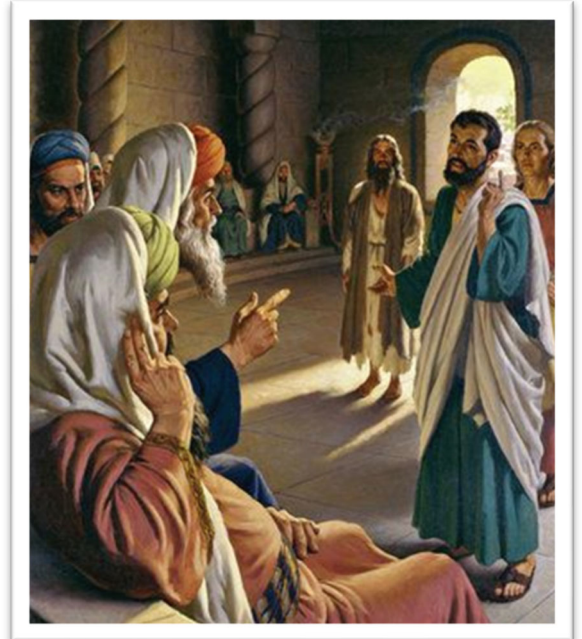


Figure 4: Peter and John on trial before the Sanhedrin.

Peter and John answered them with sarcasm and their mission statement.

- The Sarcasm - I am reminded of times that people turn a party into a consultation when they find out that they are talking with a medical or legal professional. Peter and John do that in this hearing. “Hey, Y'all are judges! I mean this is the Sanhedrin, right? How fortuitous. Judge this: Is it right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God. C'mon now. Do your thing. **You judge.**”
- The Mission Statement - They made it clear that they (1) speak what they have seen and heard and (2) they cannot do otherwise. They are Jesus' witnesses (Acts 1:8). That is their mission.

Acts 4:21-22 It was the end of the conversation. What started out as a judgement of the men turned into a judgement of the judges. When it was all said and done there was no way of punishing the preachers **because of the people**. The leadership is hamstrung by the fact that they fear the people (Matthew 21:26; Luke 20:19). The contrast could hardly be more stark: Where the apostles fear only God, the Sanhedrin fear only men.

Luke adds a note for the sake of the readership. For those who may think that the miracle was being blown out of proportion and that the Sanhedrin could have argued against it he says **the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed**. There were not medical journals saying that the healing was highly unusual. But the experience of the people at the time of Luke's writing was enough to indicate that the age of the man made the miracle even more marvelous.

Final Thoughts

What are we to do in the light of the truths advanced and affirmed by this passage? Going beyond mere intellectual ascent to these facts how should we then live? We must wholly reject the idea that we are condemned to the mediocrity or criminal behaviors of our past. The notion that we can never have the skill and

courage to explain the truth, defend the faith, or help do great and lasting good must be regarded as untrue. We have the mind of Christ and are destined to do good works (Ephesians 2:10).

The key to better character is trusting Christ and then spending time with Him. That is, if we are to escape in practice the gravity of our depravity we must spend time with the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what we see in Peter and John. They are still regarded as ignorant. But they are also seen as dangerous. Like their Master they are Spirit-filled men through whom God is changing the world.

Questions for Missional Community Discussion

1. What caused the disciples to change so drastically (Mark 3:14; Acts 4:13)?
2. Are you spending time with Jesus daily? What is the consequence of keeping company with Christ?
3. Why are the Sadducees and the other members of the Sanhedrin unable to say anything against Peter's preaching from Acts 4:1-12? See Luke 21:10-15.
4. What time of day would be good for a meeting with Jesus? How can you ensure that such a meeting will not be overrun by interruptions distractions? (Luke 5:16)