



These Men Have Been With Jesus

By David Wilkerson
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In Acts 3, shortly after the resurrection, we find Peter and John going to the temple to worship. Just outside the temple gate sat a beggar who'd been crippled from birth. This man had never walked a step in his life. He had to be carried to the gate daily to make his living from begging.

When the beggar saw Peter and John approaching, he asked them for alms. Peter answered him, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee" (Acts 3:6). Peter then prayed for the beggar, saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (3:6). Instantly, the man was healed. In utter joy, he began running through the temple, jumping up and down, shouting, "Jesus healed me!"

Everyone in the temple marveled at the sight. They recognized the man as the cripple who had been begging at the gate for years. When Peter and John saw the crowds gathering, they began preaching Christ. They spoke boldly, urging, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (3:19). Thousands were saved: "Many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand" (4:4).

Yet, while Peter and John were preaching, the synagogue rulers "came upon them, being grieved" (4:1-2). These backslidden shepherds were mad that God had performed a miracle through Jesus' disciples. And they responded by throwing Peter and John in jail. The next day, they put the two disciples on trial. And every religious authority in Jerusalem was present: "Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together" (4:6). These high and mighty men asked the disciples, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (4:7).

What a farcical question! These men knew exactly whose name was being preached. They'd seen a crippled man running about, crying out that Jesus had healed him. They'd seen 5,000 people confessing their sins and calling on Christ's name to cleanse them. They'd even seen some of their own priests converted, confessing that they'd helped to crucify the Son of God. These rulers had to know there was power in Jesus' name. But they purposely blinded themselves to it.

Suddenly, Peter was emboldened by the Holy Ghost. He answered the rulers, "His name is Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the man you crucified just weeks ago. God raised him from the dead. And now he's the power that healed this man. No one can be saved by any other name. You'll be lost if you don't call on Christ's name" (see 4:9-12).

The synagogue rulers sat stunned. Scripture says, "They marveled [admired them]; and they took knowledge of them, that they had

been with Jesus" (4:13). The phrase "took knowledge" comes from a root word meaning "known by some distinguishing mark." Some power had taken hold of Peter and John. And it distinguished them from everyone else who had appeared in that court. This power was so obvious and clear to all, the rulers "could say nothing against it" (4:14).

What was this mark that distinguished Peter and John? It was the presence of Jesus. They had Christ's own likeness and Spirit. Those synagogue rulers realized, "We crucified Jesus. Yet, he's still speaking today - working miracles, preaching repentance, moving on to the people - through these two unlearned men."

In that very hour, Peter and John were fulfilling Jesus' command to testify of him "beginning in Jerusalem." You see, they were witnessing through Christ's presence in their lives. Likewise, I believe this will be God's powerful witness in these last days. It won't come through preaching alone. It will come also through men and women who "have been with Jesus": shutting themselves in with him, spending time in his presence, seeking him with all their heart and soul. The Holy Spirit will distinguish such servants with his power. And the world will say of them, "That person has been with Christ."

Here are four distinguishing marks of those who have been with Jesus:

1. They Hunger for a Greater Measure of Christ.

Those who spend time with Jesus can't get enough of him. Their hearts continually cry out to know the Master better, to draw closer to him, to grow in the knowledge of his ways.

Paul states, "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7). "God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Romans 12:3). What is this "measure" Paul speaks of? It means a limited amount. In other words, we've all received a certain amount of the saving knowledge of Christ.

For some believers, this initial measure is all they ever desire. They want just enough of Jesus to escape judgment, to feel forgiven, to keep a good reputation, to endure an hour of church each Sunday. Such people are in "maintenance mode." And they give Jesus only the bare requirements: church attendance, a muttered daily prayer, perhaps a quick glance at Scripture. In short, these Christians avoid getting too close to Jesus. They know if they read much of his Word or spend any time praying, the Holy Spirit will make demands on their lives. And the one thing they don't want to change is their lifestyle. In their minds, getting to know Jesus puts everything they value at risk.

Yet Paul desired the following for every believer: "And he gave some, apostles... prophets... evangelists... pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints... till we all come in... the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children,

tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men...whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-15).

Paul was saying, in essence, "God has given these spiritual gifts so you may be filled up with Christ's Spirit. This is crucial, because deceivers are coming to rob you of your faith. If you're rooted in Christ and maturing in him, no deceptive doctrine will ever sway you. Yet the only way to grow to such maturity is by wanting more of Jesus."

Not every Christian aspires to this kind of maturity. Many believers prefer a gospel that speaks only of grace, love and forgiveness. Of course, these are marvelous biblical truths. But according to Paul, they consist of basic milk, and not the meat that a mature life requires. How can you grow to full stature in Christ, if you refuse to hear a gospel that provokes you to seek the Lord and walk in his holiness?

Hebrews tells us, "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14).

The writer is saying, "You've sat under good teaching and preaching long enough. By now, you ought to be teachers yourselves. Yet still, after all these years, you're in the same place as on the day you got saved. You know nothing of the meat of God's Word. You're still immature, not fully grown in his righteousness."

Sadly, this is why so many Christians fall for every spiritual fad that comes along. They're easily led astray, chasing after foolishness. But a mature believer isn't easily removed from his place of prayer. He knows that's where true revival is. And his discernment is always growing, because he spends quality time with Jesus

Many readers on our mailing list have expressed frustration over their lifeless church or their pastor's dead sermons. They write, "We can't find a fellowship that has any fire. We're hungry, but we aren't growing." Some people end their letters on a complaining note. Yet others go on to say they've decided simply to spend more time with Jesus, in prayer and his Word. Their letters are easily distinguished from the others. The Spirit of Christ emanates from every line.

You probably know such servants. They're always eager to share some new truth they've learned from their time with the Lord. After all, whatever fills up your heart can't help but come out in your life. By contrast, listen to other Christians' talk. They're fixated on sports, movies, TV, the Internet, fashions, hairstyles. You can tell what consumes most of their time and energy. They're marked by their addictions.

Yet those who are shut in with Jesus are being prepared for the days ahead. They're already receiving the comfort of Christ, deep in their souls. And though the whole world is in a panic, these believers remain at peace.

2. They Have a Holy Boldness And Spiritual Authority.

The more someone is with Jesus, the more that person becomes like Christ, in purity, holiness and love. In turn, his pure walk produces in him a great boldness for God. Scripture says, "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1). The word for bold in this verse means secure, confident. That's just the kind of boldness the synagogue rulers saw in Peter and John.

The Bible doesn't go into much detail about this scene. Yet, I can assure you, the religious leaders orchestrated it to be all pomp and ceremony. First, the dignitaries solemnly took their velvety seats. Then the high priests' relatives followed. Finally, in a moment of hushed anticipation, the robed high priests strutted in. Everyone bowed as the priests passed by, walking stiffly up the aisle toward the seat of judgment.

All of this was meant to intimidate Peter and John. It was as if the rulers were saying, "Take a sober look, fishermen. Consider the power and authority you're facing. You'd better speak softly to these leaders. They're important, highly regarded men."

But the disciples weren't intimidated at all. They'd been with Jesus for too long. I imagine Peter thinking, "Come on, let's get this meeting started. Just give me the pulpit and turn me loose. I've got a Word from God for this gathering. Thank you, Jesus, for allowing me to preach your name to these Christ-haters."

Suddenly, the court clerk shouted to the disciples, "Rise and face the judge." Peter and John looked up and saw the high priest staring at them in stony silence. The priest then intoned in a very official voice, "By what power, and in whose name, have you done this?" He was saying, in other words, "We're the law around here. And we didn't give you the authority to do these things. So, by whose authority did you act?"

The very next verse begins, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost..." (Acts 4:8). This tells me Peter wasn't going to deliver some lecture. And it wasn't going to be quiet or reserved. Peter was a Jesus-possessed man, bursting with the Holy Ghost. Remember, the two disciples had just recently come from the upper room. Talk about "having been with Jesus": Peter and John had fellowshiped with the resurrected Christ. And now Peter was possessed by the Spirit of the risen Lord himself. Those synagogue rulers were about to experience fire from heaven.

As Peter spoke, I don't picture him standing in one place, speaking in hushed tones. Rather, I see him pacing the courtroom, pointing and crying out, "You elders of Israel ask, 'By whose authority was this man healed?' Let me tell you." According to Acts 4, Peter's sermon is only four verses long. But I believe that's just a summary of what the apostle preached. I imagine Peter saying, "Listen, all of you. It was in Jesus Christ's name that this miracle was accomplished. It took place through his authority alone. You remember him, because you crucified him. But God raised him from the dead. He's alive. And everything you saw today was performed by his power."

The Boldness Peter Possessed Wasn't Some Loud, Brassy, Condemning Word.

We've already read that "the righteous are secure and confident as a lion" (see Proverbs 28:1). First of all, God's servants are secure in their identity in Christ. And second, they stand confident in Jesus' righteousness. Therefore, they have nothing to hide. They can stand before anyone with a clear conscience.

Peter had this kind of assurance as he preached. His aim wasn't to judge or belittle those religious leaders. He only wanted them to see their sin and repent. That's why he gave an altar call, saying, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved? (Acts 4:12).

Paul writes likewise, first declaring, "We were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:2). Then, a few verses later, the apostle makes clear, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children" (2:7).

Those who spend time in Jesus' presence become assured. That's why they aren't afraid to speak the truth. Yet they don't have to deliver their message in an overbearing voice. In every circumstance, they preach the gospel in love and mercy.

In the coming days, it's going to be important to have this bold assurance. Already, the winds of political correctness have made Jesus' name an offense to many. Soon, many believers are going to face persecution, and the unprepared will buckle under pressure. They'll end up cowering before Christ-haters.

During my recent preaching trip in Eastern Europe, a Polish pastor friend told me about a stand he had to take during the Communist years. He worked in a factory, and his foreman told him the Party bosses were coming in for an important meeting. The Party would be hosting some foreign dignitaries, and they needed the pastor to interpret. My friend agreed, with one condition: "I'm a Christian. I serve Jesus. So I won't drink." He knew that vodka flowed at those meetings, and he would be asked to partake. But the foreman agreed he wouldn't have to drink anything.

The next day, as soon as the meeting started, the vodka was passed around. The Communist boss took some, then the foreman did. But when the bottle came to the pastor, he refused. Everyone looked up in alarm. They urged him to have a drink with them. The Party boss glanced at the foreman, as if to say, "Why isn't he drinking? Does he think he's better than us?" The foreman glared at the pastor in a fury. But still the minister said no.

My friend was ready to be jailed on the spot. He could have been persecuted, tortured, separated from his loved ones for years. Yet, in his mind, there was no question but to obey. He had no fear whatsoever. Why? He'd been shut in with Jesus. That's the only way someone in those circumstances could possess such strength.

The next day, his foreman called him in. "You're a lucky man," he said. "The Party boss called me after the meeting. He said if he ever needs someone he can trust to go on a special mission, he wants you."

Those leaders marveled at the pastor's confidence and security. They knew he wasn't afraid of anything, including death. Even the heathen recognize that such boldness comes only from being with Jesus.

3. They Have Physical, Visible Evidence That God Is With Them.

As Peter and John stood waiting for judgment to be pronounced, the healed man stood alongside them. There, in flesh and blood, was living proof that Peter and John had been with Jesus. Now, as the synagogue rulers looked on, "beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it" (Acts 4:14). The rulers huddled, whispering, "What can we do? It's clear

to everybody in Jerusalem they've performed a true miracle. And we can't deny it" (see 4:16). So they let the disciples go.

What did Peter and John do when they were released? "They went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them" (4:23). The saints in Jerusalem rejoiced with the two disciples. Then they prayed: "Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus" (4:29-30). They were praying, in essence, "God, thank you for the boldness you've given our brothers. But we know this is just the beginning. Please, keep us all bold to speak with holy assurance. And provide visible evidence that you're with us."

No doubt, Peter and John had seen the look of resignation on the high priest's face when he realized they'd been with Jesus. Peter must have winked at John and said, "If only they knew. They only remember that we were with Jesus weeks ago. They don't realize we've been with the resurrected Master ever since. We were just with him, in the upper room. Then this morning we were with him, as we prayed in our cell. And as soon as we get out of here, we're going to meet him again, with the brethren."

This is what happens with men and women who spend time with Jesus. When they come away from their time with Christ, he's with them wherever they go.

4. They're Prepared for Any Crisis.

When a crisis strikes, you don't have time to build yourself up in prayer and faith. But those who've been with Jesus are always ready.

A couple wrote to our ministry recently in a spirit that revealed they'd been with Jesus. Their letter described an unthinkable tragedy. Their 24-year-old daughter had been out with a friend when a madman kidnapped both young women. He took them to an isolated place, where he let the daughter's friend go. Then he murdered the daughter in grisly fashion.

As the police described what happened, the couple was in shock. Their friends and neighbors wondered, "How could any parent survive this kind of tragedy? How can they live with the gruesome thought of what happened to their daughter?" Yet, within an hour, the Holy Spirit had come to that sorrowing couple, bringing supernatural comfort. Of course, in the painful days that followed, those grieving parents continued to ask God why. Yet, all the while, they experienced divine rest and peace.

Everyone who knew these parents was astonished at their calmness. Yet that couple had been prepared for their moment of crisis. They'd known all along that God would never allow anything to happen to them without an underlying purpose. And when the terrible news came, they didn't fall apart.

In fact, these parents and their surviving children soon began praying for the killer. The people in their town couldn't accept it. They called for blood. But the godly couple spoke and taught of God's ability to provide strength, no matter what they may face. The townspeople recognized their strength as coming only from Jesus. Soon they were saying of the couple, "They're a miracle. Those are true Jesus people."

I saw an example of such visible strength in Moscow, when I spoke to 1,200 pastors. These ministers had come from all over Russia,

as far away as Siberia. As I spoke, the Holy Spirit led me to ask them if any were considering quitting the ministry. Hundreds stampeded forward, each seeking prayer. I thought, "Lord, I didn't expect this. What do you want me to do with all these shepherds?"

The Holy Spirit reminded me of the months I'd spent in prayer for these ministers. He also reminded me of the love God had put in my heart for them. In fact, he had directed me to pray that every pastor who came to the conference would leave healed and encouraged. Now I realized God was answering that prayer, in a way I never could have imagined. I had been with Jesus all those months before, and now he stood with me here. The Spirit whispered, "Pray for them in the name of Jesus. I'll restore them."

As I prayed, a holy brokenness came down over those men. Soon there was tender weeping and joyful praising. I witnessed visible miracles of healing and renewal among those pastors. Recently, our Russian contact wrote to us of the Spirit's lasting work from that day: "We're hearing testimonies from everywhere. Those pastors have returned to their congregations saying, 'I've come home to lift up Jesus.'"

During one meeting in Russia, I talked with a pastor who'd been imprisoned for eighteen years. This man's face visibly shines with Christ. Today, he oversees 1,200 churches in Russia. Yet he endured incredible hardships while in prison. "Jesus was real to me," he testified, "more real than I've ever known in my lifetime."

Because of his Christ-like character, the minister was respected by everyone in the prison, including hardened inmates and spiteful guards. Then one day, the Holy Spirit whispered to the pastor, "You're going to be released from here in three days." And he told the minister to testify about it.

The pastor immediately sent word to his wife and congregation about the Holy Ghost's revelation. Then he began telling his fellow prisoners what God had told him. They laughed him to scorn, saying, "Nobody has ever been released from this place." The guards also mocked him, taunting, "You'll die here, preacher."

When the third day arrived, and the evening sky grew dark, a guard looked in on the pastor and shook his head. "Some God you've got," he sneered.

Then, just after 11 p.m., the loudspeaker came on. A voice called the pastor's name. "Come to the office immediately," it announced. "You've been released."

All the prisoners and guards were stunned. As the pastor walked by, he told each of them good-bye and wished them well. Finally, as he passed through the prison gate, he saw his wife waiting for him with flowers. As the pastor embraced her, he turned to look back at the prison where he'd spent eighteen years. His fellow prisoners were all standing at the windows. And they were yelling at the top of their lungs, "There is a God! There is a God! There is a God!"

God had given them visible evidence. And it happened through that godly pastor, who'd been with Jesus every day of his eighteen-year sentence. What greater evidence of God could there be, than a single life transformed by the supernatural power of Christ? May it be said of you, "That man, that woman, has been with Jesus." And may no one be able to deny it.

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