

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 363
Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8
Verses: Acts 4:13-14
Topic: They Had Been With Jesus
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Acts 4:13-14 ASV Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. (14) And seeing the man that was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

The language here is strong – unlearned is literally agrammatōi – illiterate, unlettered. Ignorant is idiotai – from which we get the word “idiot” or “idiotic” literally a “private” person incapable of any sort of public life. Peter and John were hillbillies, Galilean bumpkins, fishermen from the boondocks. But the gift of the Holy Spirit made them fluent, wise and bold.

The Holy Spirit did not leave them ignorant but made them wise, somewhere along the way they learned Greek and wrote gospels and epistles and some of the finest literature anyone has ever seen in the Petrine Epistles, John’s Gospel and Revelation.

Why did Jesus choose such people to lead His Church? Few denominations today would credential the unlearned and the ignorant. They were chosen not for how much they knew to start with, but for how much they could learn and believe as they went along. They were chosen to be disciples, not experts.

They were also carrying less “baggage” from the old order and could adapt more readily to the new order without the huge intellectual conflicts that Nicodemus, Paul and others faced.

Ignorance is not an asset. In fact the Holy Spirit got rid of their ignorance and increasingly filled them with wisdom. Conversion and education are frequently linked and Wesley used to say: “Sell your bed and buy a book.”

Formal education seldom produces good leadership and there is an oft-quoted statistic that the more educated the clergy, the smaller the churches. In fact pastors without any formal theological training lead many of the world’s largest and fastest growing churches. However these pastors are all wise people and life-long learners, keen readers and sharp thinkers.

I have noticed that when talking to pastors over 45 it is impossible to tell whether they have been to bible college. What does stand out is the difference between life-long learners and those who stopped reading much after graduation. The life-long learners are true leaders with large churches. Whether their learning has been formal or informal does not seem to matter – as long as they are learning and

leading!

God does things through conventional people and through unconventional people, He works through scholars like Ezra and Paul and through fishermen like Peter and John. Moses and Daniel were highly educated, Amos and Samson were not. God uses each of us according to His will.

“and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” The transformation that Pentecost had brought was one of wisdom and it was noted by the Sanhedrin. The last time they had seen Peter and John was during the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin. When they had been with Jesus, they had been timid, but now they were bold as brass. Before Peter had denied Christ and John had been silent. Now Peter was preaching powerfully and giving testimony to Jesus before them.

“They had been with Jesus” is also a political comment – these were the ones who were at the trial, and now they were healing people, these were the ring-leaders. These are the one to go for. Peter, John (and James) soon became targets of persecution.

“They had been with Jesus” is also a comment about discipleship – Peter and John had learned from the Master and were now doing His works before them.

Being with Jesus is risky. If we are identifiably allied with Jesus and His works we become targets for persecution. This is particularly so in Muslim and Communist countries but can even apply in Western workplaces.

“And seeing the man that was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.” The evidence was the problem. Healing is good. Healing is from God. To speak against such a miracle would invite wrath and derision. So they remained silent.

Deep down they knew that they, and their religious system, were being undermined. This was alternative religion, outside of the Temple, outside of the priesthood, outside of the way things were ordered.

God undermines all our attempts to fence Him in. He will choose fishermen to rebuke High Priests and show that the glory and power of God are not human qualities attained by education but divine qualities received through faith in the name of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:20-21 ASV (20) Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (21) For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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