

SANCTIFICATION V BE IMITATORS OF JESUS

By Ron Harvey

Text: Acts 4:13 *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned men and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*

INTRODUCTION

Now Peter and John had been arrested for preaching Jesus to the people. (Acts 4:1-3) Specifically, they were preaching that Jesus was raised from the dead. And this didn't sit well with the religious sect called the Sadducees. You see, the Sadducees argued that there was no resurrection from the dead. And this was their pet doctrine. And they loved to argue about it. And they disputed often with the Pharisees over the doctrine of the resurrection. And when Peter and John preached to the people that Jesus was raised from the dead, this infuriated the Sadducees. And the head of the temple along with a group of Sadducees laid hands on Peter and John one evening and arrested them.

And it says they put them in hold until the next day. (v.3) I suspect this means that they put them in prison. Literally the words mean that they took them into custody. Now I doubt that they put them up in the local Holiday Inn. Rather, it is more likely they were bound in the local dungeon.

At any rate, the next day Peter and John were brought out and lo and behold, all the important religious people of the Jews were gathered together. It says in verse 5, the rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together. And Annas the high priest and Caiaphas were there. Now Annas was the first High Priest which was appointed by Rome over the province of Judea. And he served for a short time until he got into trouble with the Roman authorities over some capital punishment issues. But Annas hung around the temple and still had a great deal of influence even after he was ousted. He was kind of like a "High Priest Emeritus." Even though his sons succeeded him in the High Priest position, Annas still was an important figure.

You will remember that when Jesus was arrested the night before his crucifixion he was brought first to Annas and then to the official High Priest, Caiaphas. (See John 18:13)

So, along with the rulers and elders and scribes there was Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas and someone called John and Alexander. These were most likely very influential religious people. And then, there were the relatives of Caiaphas. Perhaps these were the men who were in line to succeed to the High Priesthood.

And Peter and John were brought out and set in the midst of all these religious bigwigs. (v.7)

Now you have to remember that Peter and John were fishermen by trade. They did not have a college degree or a religious degree certified by the Rabbis. And they were not the most respected members of society. They would never have been featured on the society pages of the Israeli Commercial Appeal. And they were probably shabbily dressed. They had been in custody all night and were most likely somewhat odorous and unkempt. And they were placed in the midst of all these religious upitty ups who were undoubtedly adorned in their prestigious robes and with their self-righteous attitudes on full display.

And Peter preached a little sermon to them in which he again reiterated that God raised Jesus from the dead.

This man, *whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.* (v.10)

And our text says,

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned men and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. (v.13)

Now notice that they perceived that Peter and John were unlearned and ignorant men. It didn't take them long to peg Peter and John as fishermen. When Peter spoke they perceived that he was an unlearned man. They suspected this also from their general appearance and their obvious station in life. The word ignorant is the Greek word from which we get our word idiot. (idiotai) But this word does not mean so much lacking in intelligence, but lacking in learning and lacking in social status.

Notice, (v.13) it says *they marveled*. Now they didn't marvel at Peter's eloquence or his brilliant sermon. But they marveled at his boldness. You see, Peter and John had already been arrested the night before for preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And now, the first words out of Peter's mouth are, "You crucified him, but God raised him up."

Now that is boldness. Peter was treading on thin ice already and he repeats the offensive sermon. And *they marveled* at the boldness of Peter and John.

But what I want to focus on this afternoon concerns the next statement which says,

They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. (v.13)

What a tribute to Peter and John. Unlearned men? Yes. "Idiotais" in the Greek language? Maybe. And yet, it was evident to all these religious officials that they had been with Jesus.

Now the thing that convinced them that Peter and John had been with Jesus was their boldness. This was one characteristic of Jesus that was so well known to them. They remembered how Jesus stood among the scribes and Pharisees and called them snakes and pronounced a curse upon them. They remembered how Jesus preached with authority. They remembered how the Roman officers said, "No man ever spake as this man."

And now, Peter and John, in the face of scourging and death, exemplify the same boldness. And the Jews marveled and they took note that Peter and John had been with Jesus.

Now we have been lately considering the doctrine of sanctification and spiritual growth. And we have now arrived to consider the nature of spiritual growth. Here I am a weak vessel. I call myself a Christian and yet I know I am not all I should be. I have believed in Jesus. I have a sense that Jesus died for me. I trust that I am ultimately accepted by God on the basis of his righteousness. But what is my spiritual goal in this life? What am I to be? What am I to do?

And I think our duty and our goal in this life is summed up in some sense by Paul in Epesians 5:1.

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.

The word “followers” is a little weak in this translation. Some versions translate the word as imitators. Be ye therefore imitators of God. The Greek word is mimetes (mim-ay-tace). It is similar to our word mimic. And so, Paul says, be mimickers of God. And this is the ultimate goal of spiritual growth – that we would be like God, or, like Jesus.

Now then, the first thing we will consider this afternoon is that,

I. A Christian should be strikingly like Jesus.

Now this is what the religious leaders saw in Peter and John. If you will allow me to speculate on what they may have said, they may have said, “Hey, these two guys are just like that guy Jesus. Even though we are going to beat them and perhaps put them to death, they are speaking with the same boldness as Jesus.”

What a great compliment to Peter and John! And what a testimony to the grace of God that worked in Peter in such a short time. Remember, only a few days before, Peter had denied Jesus three times and once with a curse. But now, the Holy Spirit has worked in him and he has grown up spiritually and God’s grace has made him as bold as a lion.

I would suggest that we are an extension of the life of Christ on this earth. Jesus has returned to heaven for a time and yet he maintains a presence on earth. And that presence is in his people. And our actions represent him. When we speak or when we act, we do so on his behalf.

And so Paul says, *Be imitators of God.*

And if we are imitators of God, then people will look at us and say, “He or she has been with Jesus.”

Our text suggests first of all that,

A. We should imitate the boldness of Jesus.

When we consider the life of Jesus, we note that he never bowed to the rich. When the rich young ruler came to him, Jesus said, “Go, sell all that you have and give it to the poor and come back and follow me.”

He never cowed down to the nobility of this world. If he saw a Scribe or a Pharisee he would not hold back but would say, “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.”

When he spoke to a lawyer, he said, “Woe unto you lawyers, for ye bind heavy burdens upon men, while ye yourselves will not touch them with so much as one of your fingers.”

Jesus always spoke the truth without trembling. Jesus stood up tall and looked eye to eye with Annas and Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate and all the others. And not once did he blink in the face of danger.

And Paul says to us, “*Be imitators of God.*”

But boldness is only one of the many perfect features of Jesus. There are many others and we will study them for the rest of our lives and we will make our best efforts to imitate him.

Lest we get carried away with our boldness trying to imitate that one quality of Jesus,

B. We should imitate the loveliness of Jesus.

Never was a man so endowed with loveliness as this man Jesus. Though he was as bold as a warrior and full of courage, he was as gentle as a little lamb.

And one day he would call the little children to him and he would sit them on his knee and he would bless them.

And the next day you might see Jesus weeping at a gravesite and sharing in the grief that sin has brought on this world.

And day after day, when Jesus passed by, he would heal all manner of sickness and he would do all manner of good from morning ‘til night. And he was just good through and through. His disposition was full of kindness and gentleness. He wasn’t an angry or a sour man, but he was forgiving and full of pleasantness.

And Paul says to us, “*Be imitators of God.*”

Our duty is to get to know Jesus and then to be like him. Have you learned that Jesus was bold and courageous? Then be bold and courageous. Have you learned that Jesus was lovely in his disposition? Then, be lovely in your disposition. Have you learned that Jesus was gentle and forgiving? Then be gentle and forgiving. Have you learned that Jesus was full of kindness? Then, be kind to one another. Because,

Paul said, *Be ye imitators of God.*

C. We should imitate the humility of Jesus.

Never has there been a more humble man than Jesus.

Now, many times we strut around in pride and self exaltation as though we are somebody when in fact we are nobody. But Jesus walked through this life as though he was nobody when in fact, he was somebody. And that is humility.

Jesus bent down from the majesty of his divinity in order to speak to mankind on this earth. Never has there been a greater act of humility and condescension.

Jesus stooped down to pick up little children. Though his disciples tried to prevent them, Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

Jesus washed his disciples' feet though he was the Master and they were servants. And he wiped their feet dry with the towel after supper.

This is the Jesus that we worship. This is the one that we adore.

Though he was rich in heaven, Jesus became poor on the earth and he lived among the poor and he ate with them.

Arrogance and conceit and egotism is ugly anywhere, but it is unacceptable in God's Church. We are to be lowly and to esteem others better than ourselves.

And Paul says, *Be imitators of God.*

How long shall we go on? There are perhaps an infinite number of wonderful qualities of Jesus that we must learn about and then seek to imitate him.

D. We should imitate the mercy of Jesus.

My, my, how Jesus was filled with mercy for the weak and helpless in this world! Time doesn't allow to tell of all the acts of mercy which Jesus performed in his life on this earth. Poor, pitiful bodies were made whole. And, desperate lost souls were made alive. And Jesus was merciful because that is the very nature of Jesus. Jesus could never be anything else because in his very essence he is merciful.

Example: Now you will indulge me to brag on my wife, she and Jeannine have been visiting the sick and keeping the church well informed. And on one occasion Sonya visited with Bro. Frank. And Bro. Frank was uncomfortable and he needed his artificial teeth to be cleaned and inserted so he could eat. But, they had no tablets to put in the water to clean his artificial teeth. So, Sonya found a tooth brush and toothpaste and scrubbed his teeth and put them in his mouth. And he felt better and was able to eat. And he needed a shave and she lathered up his face and gave him a good shave. And she kissed him on the cheek and put on his glasses and he just felt better. And later, Bro. Frank's family told me Sonya was an "angel of mercy."

And that's what we should be because Paul says,

Be imitators of God.

E. We should imitate the personal piety of Jesus.

Jesus was the most reverent and devout of all men. I suspect that Jesus logged more hours in prayer than all of us put together. Jesus would get up early in the morning and pray. And he would tuck the disciples in at night and retire to a quiet place to pray some more.

And Jesus considered always the will of God in every matter. And more importantly, he submitted himself continually to the will of God.

Jesus learned and memorized Scripture and it was always on his heart and on his tongue.

And Jesus always went to the temple for religious services.

And Jesus met often with his disciples to teach them and to show them how to live a holy life.

And Paul says, *Be imitators of God.*

I hope that one of our chief goals at our church will be for each one of us to be imitators of Jesus. This is spiritual growth -- that we would learn to be like him.

Now if you are like me, you are probably asking yourself, "How can I possibly be like Jesus? I am weak through and through. How can I get from where I am spiritually to where I need to be?"

Now I will finish this afternoon by trying to establish,

II. How a man can be like Jesus.

A. You must know Christ as your Redeemer before you can follow his example.

Many have acknowledged Jesus as a most excellent human being. They will agree that he was a holy man and a fine teacher and someone to be emulated. But they have all found it impossible to follow in his footsteps. Not one sinner has ever been able to imitate Jesus by his own strength. The old nature is too strong and overpowering and that principle of sin within will not allow you to imitate Him.

But, if you believe on Him and trust Him as your sacrifice for sin and if you lay all hope of salvation on Him and in none other then he will create a new life in you and empower you for righteous living.

You will never be able to imitate that perfect life of Jesus until he has imparted to you his Spirit and clothed you with his righteousness.

You say, so far so good. I have believed him and I have reason to believe that he has saved me and I have his righteousness by substitution and he does indwell me by his Spirit. But I still feel many deficiencies and feel so unable to imitate him. And I would say next,

B. You must have a thorough knowledge of the character of Christ.

Example: Have you ever noticed how a son tends to become like his father. My Mom used to tell me that quite often. Especially when I would do something she didn't appreciate, she would say, "Son, you are just like your father." But I noticed that in many ways I did become like him, both in good ways and bad ways. And that is because I was around him every day and I saw him every day and I listened to him every day. And I picked up his mannerisms and his forms of speech and his attitudes. And I found that I acted like him and became like him.

And if we are to become like Jesus, then we must observe him every day and we must look at him and listen to him and study him. And the more we are around him, the more we will become like him.

There is something transforming about the character of Christ. The more you observe it, the more you will be conformed to it.

And so, I hope as a church we will make a study of Jesus and that we will marvel at his perfections and that we in this way will be changed to be more like him.

Now you may say, I have done all that and I have looked with much admiration at the character of Christ and I still feel I have not traveled far in terms of spiritual growth and I am not a good imitator of him.

Let me then say that,

C. You must make efforts to put off the old, bad habits.

That may be what is standing in your way. You see, we have to put off the old before we can put on the new. When we believe in Jesus, our life is full of vile and sinful things. And in order to add good to our life, we must abandon the bad. We were full of pride and arrogance, but we look at Jesus and see that he is selfless and humble. And we must take stock of ourselves and lay aside those evil ways to make room for the character of Christ.

We were full of anger and hate. But we look at Jesus and he is full of kindness and gentleness and love. And we must lay aside those old sinful ways and put on the ways of Christ.

Read Ephesians 4:21-32

Example: You see here a bucket full of golf balls and each ball is labeled with a characteristic of our old nature. Lying, Pride, Anger, Covetousness, ect. Then, you see a second bucket and each ball is labeled with a characteristic peculiar to Jesus. Truthfulness, Humility, Love, Peace, Goodness, etc. And it is our duty to put the golf balls from Christ's bucket into our bucket. But wait, we can't get them in the first bucket because the bucket is full! We must first empty our bucket of that old garbage so peculiar to our old nature before we can fill it with the good qualities of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

We must all seek to be like Christ. And this is not an optional matter. For only those who are like Christ shall enter the gates of heaven. Many will come in that day to the gate and will expect the gate to open wide for one reason or another.

One may think it will open because he was very religious. But religion is not the medium of access there.

Another may think it will open to him because he was very learned in Bible matters. But learning alone will not open the gate.

Another thinks the gate will open because he was born into a Christian family. But heaven is not gained by birthright.

Finally there comes a poor man who had nothing much of the world to offer. He had no birthright, no riches and no formal learning. But he had learned to be an imitator of Christ. And he had fallen in love with Jesus and he had looked often at Jesus and had talked often with him and had become like him. And the gate will swing open wide for such a man, because only those like Christ are fit for the glories of heaven.

Now Christ imputes his righteousness to the sinner when he saves him. But he imparts righteousness to the sinner over the course of a lifetime. The unrighteous man shall never imitate Christ and will descend to hell in his unrighteousness. But the righteous man will learn of Christ and will imitate him and will enter the gates to be with Christ forever.