

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ

April 28, 2019

To Adult Teachers:

April 28, we will study Acts 1:1-5 and Luke 24:36-49. Discussion questions are:

1. Read Acts 1:1-5. In this passage, the writer identifies the last event he recorded in his first volume (the gospel of Luke). What was it? To what events does the author then refer that preceded that event?
2. Read Luke 24:36-43. What were some of the proofs Jesus gave his disciples that he was alive after the resurrection? What is the most convincing evidence of Jesus' resurrection to you?
3. Read Luke 24:44-49. What connections and/or parallels do you find between this passage and Acts 1:1-5?
4. How attentive do you think the disciples were to the teaching of Jesus in the forty-day period following the resurrection? Do you think they gave special importance to that instruction? What was the theme of that teaching?
5. The author says that his first volume was about what Jesus *began* to do and teach. The implication is that Acts is about what Jesus *continues* to do and teach. How can he continue his ministry when in the second verse of Acts, he ascends into heaven?
6. Jesus told his disciples to "wait." For what were they to wait? How well do you think they understood what they were waiting for? Given Jesus' other instructions to them, what do you think they might have wanted to do instead of waiting? Why was it important for them to wait? Why is sometimes important for us to wait?
7. If Jesus *continues* to do and teach his will through his disciples on earth, what does they say about our purpose as a group?
8. In the sermon, Mark said that the measure of a church is not whether it pleases me or meets my needs, but simply whether or not Jesus' presence is real there. In what ways can we make the presence of Jesus more real to our community?

Sermon: *Alive, Well, and Working*

Acts 1:1-5; Luke 24:36-39

Challenging question: Why is there a Central Church of Christ? Why should there continue to be a CCOC? Why are we here? Do we have a future? If so, what is it? What is our purpose? Important questions, underscored by little story:

Man goes to doctor; doctor asks to speak to wife. "Your husband is suffering from severe stress. If nothing changes, he will die. But you can change that. Get up before him, fix a nice breakfast, hug and kiss him on the way out the door. When he returns, have hot supper on table, sit him in favorite easy chair with TV to his favorite sports channel, fix him a sumptuous snack, then at the end of the evening, turn up the romantic fires. If you'll do all of that, he has many good years ahead of him." When she returns to waiting room, husband asks, "Well, what did the doctor say?" She replies, "He said you're going to die."

Application to CCOC: Thom Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, looks at churches that have died and points out common symptoms that were present in them. The first symptom is a long, slow, steady

decline. CCOC has that, along with a rapidly aging membership. Bottom line: we are not reaching and retaining younger generations. Let me be as bold and blunt as the doctor was with the man's wife: CCOC is going to die...unless. For next few weeks, I'm going to talk about the "unless." It's going to be a costly "unless." After I talk about the unless, when someone asks you what I said, I hope you get more out of it than just, "We're going to die." If that's all you get out of it, it's because you will have made a conscious decision not to pay the price.

Churches do that, you know. Chase Road in Dearborn for example. But they don't have to. Unless...

Some of you may already be reacting negatively. I know what he's going to say. He's going to say that we have to jazz up the worship service and make it all entertaining until we've changed it from a Church of Christ to "Six Flags over Jesus." And if you think that's what I'm going to say, you couldn't be more wrong.

Instead, I'm going to do what we do best in churches of Christ: go back to the early church, the one we read about in the book of Acts. Next few messages will be from the first chapter of Acts. I intend these messages to be hard-hitting, but I intend the conviction to come from the Holy Spirit, who speaks through his inspired Word.

1. The book of Acts begins with the resurrection of Jesus. Read Acts 1:1-5. Actually, Acts begins with reference to a former book, written to the same person, Theophilus. We have one other book in the NT addressed to Theophilus: the gospel of Luke. Luke and Acts need to be taken together. Like seeing a movie sequel when you haven't seen the first part. It might make some sense, but there's so much you miss. Acts picks up right where Luke left off: the resurrection. The resurrection is the central fact. Luke: without the resurrection, the life of Jesus is a meaningless tragedy. Acts: without the resurrection, Christianity as a movement is pointless and stupid. It all hinges on one point: "Is Jesus Alive?" If he is not, then nothing else matters. If he is alive, then our identity centers on that reality.
2. Both Luke and Acts insist that the resurrection of Jesus was a bodily resurrection. Sometimes we slip into talking about Jesus being alive the way we talk about Aunt Sally at her funeral. "Aunt Sally is still alive. As long as there are warm chocolate-chip cookies on a cold winter's day, Aunt Sally is alive; as long as we can remember the trip to Yellowstone Park; as long as there are little girls with braids tied with pink ribbons..." It all gets real sentimental really quickly. But NO! Luke and Acts do not say that Jesus' memory lives on, or that his example continues to inspire us, or that he lives because we find reminders of him all around. They are adamant: his lifeless body that died on the cross came back to life! *Read* Luke 24:36-39. After his resurrection, he wasn't just a memory, or even a ghost. He was recognized by them the same way he was recognized before his death: by his body. His face, his voice, his mannerisms. And Acts begins by saying that he showed himself to them with many convincing proofs, over forty days.
3. But then, his body is taken up into heaven. So he's alive, but his body no longer walks the earth. He's in heaven. This has always been puzzling to me. Why all the fuss to show that his body is no longer dead if in the end his body is no longer with us? Then it dawned on me: it has to do with how Acts fits in as part 2 of Luke-Acts. Luke was about all that Jesus *began* to do and teach. Acts is about what he *continues* to do and teach! Acts makes the amazing claim that even though Jesus ascended to heaven, he continues to walk the earth in bodily form. From heaven, he poured his spirit into a different body. That body is still alive on earth. It has flesh and blood, bones and sinews. That body is the church, and Acts is the story of all that Jesus continues to do and teach through the church! The dominant description of the church in the NT is "the body of Christ." (*read*) 1 Corinthians 12:27.
4. Now, this demands a huge paradigm shift. Church isn't a building. Church isn't a service or a program or a group of programs. You don't "go to church." You *are* the church. The church does not exist for your benefit; you are the church, existing for the benefit of the world. *Rainer: Preference-*

Driven Church: “A significant number of the members moved the focus from others to themselves. And when a church moves in that direction, it is headed for decline then death.” Not, “What do I prefer? What makes me comfortable? What meets my needs?” But what will best enable us to connect with a lost and dying world that needs the good news of Jesus? All too often we have a consumer mentality about the church. I have my list of needs and I expect the church to meet them. We must come to understand that it’s not about you. The church doesn’t exist to meet your needs; you are the church, existing to meet the needs of the world. Measure of church is now how pleased, happy, comfortable you are there. The measure of a church is quite simple: is Jesus real there? And let’s get real about who Jesus was. *Read* Romans 15:2-3a. If we are about pleasing ourselves, then we are not about Jesus Christ. Take name off building, replace with “Church of Us”

5. And that also means that we have a clear mission. *Rainer* says that dying churches lost their sense of passion for the mission of Jesus. CCOC’s mission is good: “Central is a Christ-centered fellowship.” But is that our driving passion? Many churches have stopped asking what they should be doing; too busy doing what they had always done. Some statements collected from members of churches that died:
 - a. “We were going through the motions.”
 - b. “Everything we did seemed to be like we were in a rut or bad routine.”
 - c. “We became more attached to our ways of doing church than we did to asking the Lord what He wanted us to do.”
 - d. We were playing a game called church. We had no idea what we were really supposed to be doing.”
 - e. “We stopped asking what we should be doing for fear that it would require too much effort or change.”
6. But in fact, we do have a very clear mission: we are to continue the work of Jesus on earth so the world will know he’s alive. The work of Jesus is not done. Acts is the record of what Jesus *continues* to do and teach. We are to be about the very things we see him doing in Luke. The challenge is to allow the life of Jesus to be lived out in us, to do his work, allow His Spirit to move within us and among us so that the world will know that he is alive! On that resurrection morning 2,000 years ago, how did the disciples recognize the risen Jesus? How do you recognize anyone? They recognized his body. How will our world know Jesus is alive today? Only if they can recognize him in his body. Problem: what we call “church” often bears only a faint resemblance to Jesus. We have to be honest about that. The world sees us as the “Jesus Club” in our clubhouse doing whatever it is we do there. We are not out in the community interacting with the hopes, dreams, wants and needs of a hurting world. We are surrounded by a culture that wants little to do with the church, but still admires Jesus. Typical non-Christian doesn’t see much connection between Jesus and the church. The challenge: to be so consumed by the mission and sacrificial selflessness of Jesus that he can be recognized in us, his body.
7. Now, that’s not just a paradigm shift; it’s basically impossible. We are limited, weak, sin-prone individuals. How can we possibly be the very muscles and sinews of the Son of God? No way! Unless...look back at Acts 1:1-3. He gave instruction through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has one basic task. Not to zap us with supernatural power but to bear witness to Jesus. We can’t possibly be recognized as the body of Jesus apart from the work of the Holy Spirit within and among us.
 - a. How did the dead body of Jesus that was laid in the tomb become alive again? Holy Spirit power.
 - b. The Holy Spirit has resurrection power! CCOC as we know it is going to die. But we have a choice. Will it simply go out of existence, a mere memory, or will it be raised to new life in a form that none of us can predict or expect? It can, but not apart from Holy Spirit power.

8. And so, we need to be praying for his presence. Look at Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:16-18. Will you pray about the CCOC church and its mission? And your role in that mission?