

## Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ

May 5, 2019

To Adult Teachers:

May 5, we will study Hebrews 11:8-40. This passage is not the text for the day's sermon, which is based on Acts 1:6-8. Rather, it is a passage that will expand on some of the themes in the sermon. Particularly, the purpose is to show that even the great faith heroes of the past were straining to live into God's future instead of returning to some idealized past. Discussion questions are:

1. What decade of your life would you refer to as your "glory days"? Why?
2. A man in his eighties once said, "People always talk about wanting to go back to the good old days, but I was there and they weren't that good!" What do you think he meant by that?
3. Read Genesis 12:1, 4-5 and Hebrews 11:8-10. What did Abraham leave behind in order to be obedient to God's call? What are some ways in which his life was less secure, less convenient, and more difficult than it had been prior to God's call?
4. Read Hebrews 11:13-16. How tempted to you think Abraham was to return to the life he had enjoyed before God called him? Why did he not return to that life?
5. How much of what God promised Abraham did he receive in his lifetime? What do you think kept him faithful to his commitment in spite of sometimes discouraging realities?
6. Look again at Hebrews 11:15-16. What does this passage have to say about churches that make their past the hero, who measure all current activities and achievements by the standard of "how it used to be" back in the good old days?
7. Read Hebrews 11:20-22. In what ways did these show a faith orientation toward the future instead of a desire to return to the past?
8. Read Hebrews 11:39-40. Who has received the "better" blessings of God, us or the great faith heroes of the past? How might we be blessed more fully if we invest ourselves in striving for God's future?

### Sermon: *Glory Days*

#### Acts 1:6-8

Looking at the identity and mission of the church through the lens of Acts 1. Broad outlines: Acts written by Luke, who also wrote, um, Luke. Acts is the sequel. Both addressed to the same person, Theophilus. Acts begins by describing the book of Luke as the account of everything that Jesus *began* to do and teach. Acts is what Jesus *continues* to do and teach. Luke and Acts are not about Jesus and the church; they're both about Jesus.

Our identity: we are the literal and physical eyes, ears, hands, and feet of Jesus on earth.

Our mission: to continue doing the work he began.

1. *Read* Acts 1:3. Jesus devoted himself to teaching about the kingdom of God. It's not surprising. The disciples know something about the kingdom of God. They were raised on Bible stories. Stories about the glory days of King David and King Solomon. David and Solomon sat on the throne, but it was God himself in charge! Oh, back then their nation was really something. Great prosperity, free from

foreign domination, enemies defeated and held at bay. Most other nations envied them and those who didn't feared them. The longing to return to those glory days throbbed in the heart of every Jew. Yes, they knew about the kingdom. And they knew that the kingdom was one of Jesus' favorite topics, especially when it came to his famous parables. The kingdom of God is a central theme in the book of Luke. Mentioned 39 times. It was the core of his teaching.

2. So it's only natural that they should ask the question in Acts 1:6 (*Read*). These men consistently misunderstood the nature of the kingdom. Parables intended to instruct still left them confused!
  - a. Will *you*? Parables about workers being delegated. Luke 19
  - b. *At this time*? Instantaneous vs. organic growth. Luke 13. Mustard seed and yeast.
  - c. *Restore* the kingdom. Take us back to past glory days.
  - d. *To Israel*? To *us* (and people like us). Parable of great banquet (Luke 14) makes it clear that the kingdom will include lots of "those people"—people who are not like us. First will be last and last will be first. Those expected to be last—the poor, the disenfranchised, the despised, the overlooked—will be first, and those expected at the head of the line—the powerful, the rich, the privileged—will be last. Luke 10: Priest and Levite vs. Samaritan.
3. Jesus' answer: (*Read*) Acts 1:7-8. Not me, but *you* (as my witnesses). Not now, but *when* the Holy Spirit comes on you. A whole different way of doing business. We are empowered to the task of kingdom building. But we can't go about it in the way a business organization would: seeing a need, figuring out a strategy, acting with speed and efficiency. Rather seeking the Spirit's presence and moving in time with Him.
4. We have our own misunderstandings about the kingdom: They're all related and each one leads to the next.
  - a. The kingdom is about returning to our glory days. Them: golden age of David and Solomon, tenth century B.C. Us: some golden age from the past. (When LC3 first began, tight sense of unity, there was an excited buzz whenever the church met. Or when University Church was going and growing great guns.) Listen to this from Thom Rainer in *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*: "The most pervasive and common thread of our autopsies was that the deceased churches lived for a long time with the past as hero." You cannot return to the glory days, because the conditions that led to them have changed. You can't reproduce the past! Cripple Creek and Central City, CO. Does that mean we don't have a future? Absolutely not! This is still the Lord's church and he is as passionate about saving the world around us as he ever was. There can be effective and exciting ministry ahead. But the future is probably going to look very different from the past.
  - b. The kingdom is about us. Thom Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*: "More than any one item, these dying churches focused on their own needs instead of others. They looked inwardly instead of outwardly. Their highest priorities were the way they've always done it, and that which made them the most comfortable. It was not just the past they revered. It was their personal good old days."
  - c. We think the church exists for the benefit us (and people like us). But it doesn't. **The church does not exist for us. We are the church, existing to benefit the world.** When we get this wrong, we have no future!
    - (1) Why? Two reasons:
      - (a) First, Peter Drucker: "An organization begins to die the day it begins to be run for the benefit of the insiders and not for the benefit of the outsiders." True of any organization, from GM down to the local Kiwanis club. But especially true of the church.
      - (b) And more importantly, when church is run for the benefit of insiders, it violates the will of its founder!

- (2) Objection: “But I have needs, and any church worth its salt should care enough to meet those needs.” Example: benefits on military bases. Met a lot of needs for airmen and their families. But it wasn’t a resort. The whole purpose was so that when the alarm sounded, they could scramble those B-52s, manned with people who had healthy bodies and clear minds. So churches often provide fun activities for kids and families, help for marriages in crisis, sports teams, meals and care when members are sick. But the end goal is not, “Now I’m so happy, and peaceful, and content and all my needs are met.” No, it’s “now you go share it with someone else.” Outward focus, Outward Focus, OUTWARD FOCUS!
- d. We think of the kingdom as the church-as-we-know-it. Biblically, there *is* a close tie between church and kingdom.
- (1) To say that the kingdom is the church gives the wrong impression. It gives the impression that kingdom work is what happens in the worship ministry, the Bible classes, and the small groups, building and grounds, communion preparation, church office. The kingdom is just church programs. But the kingdom is much bigger than church-as-we-know it.
  - (2) No, the kingdom is what happens when...teachers who are believers step into their classrooms and see each student as a gift from God. When Christian doctors and nurses treat patients not just with medical skill but with the Spirit of Jesus. When Christians see their neighborhood not just as a place to live, but a place to develop redemptive relationships. When church members go to work on Monday, understanding that they are the eyes, ears, hands and feet of Jesus!
  - (3) Kingdom work is not church-as-we-know-it. It’s what *you* do every day in your home, your neighborhood, your school, your workplace, your community, your world. Kingdom impacts all spheres of life. Kingdom work isn’t what you do for the programs and maintenance of the church; it’s what kind of a parent you are, how you approach your work, how you live in your neighborhood (seeing it as a mission field), how you strive to make a godly difference in the lives of hurting, messy people around you.
  - (4) Freeing thought. What you do *matters*! Not what you do at and for church stacks up brownie points toward a “Get out of hell free” card. No, what you do in your neighborhood, on your job, in your family, in your recreation, is all an opportunity to advance the rule of God in his world.
  - (5) So the question isn’t, “how do we get people to come to our church?” We judge “effective” programs by how many people joined the church as a result. No, it’s, “How do we take the presence of Jesus into our world, our sphere of influence?” And effectiveness is judged by how many people’s lives were positively impacted because they came into contact with the presence of Jesus!

Where is the kingdom of God? *Read* Luke 17:20-21. The kingdom of God is in your midst.