

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 9-23-18

To Adult Teachers: September 23 our teenage group at church will be visiting adult classes asking the following questions:

- 1). What is your purpose in this life?
- 2). Why do you go to church?
- 3). What should Central (or the church's) purpose be?
- 4). What is your role at Central?
- 5). What is the best part (or your favorite part) about church?
- 6). Why is church so important in our walk with Christ?

In addition to the teens' questions we will study John 7:37-44. Discussion questions are:

1. Tell of a time in your spiritual journey when you were asking the wrong questions.
2. What evidence is there in the text that Jesus shouted his message about the Spirit? Why would he shout?
3. How would the daily water ceremony and people singing Isaiah 12:3 set the stage for Jesus' shouting, "If anyone is thirsty..."?
4. What is the analogy between thirst quenching water and the gift of the Holy Spirit?
5. What is the significance of this statement: "Primarily Christianity is direct experience with God. It is God's thinking, God's attitudes, God's Spirit penetrating you."
 - a. How does II Peter 1:4 verify that statement?
6. Were you able to identify with Charles Spurgeon's statement: "Some of us know what it is to be too happy to live. The love of God has been so overpoweringly experienced by us on some occasions till we almost had to ask God to stop the delight for we could endure no more. And if God had not veiled his glory and his love a bit we would have died for joy."
7. Why is it so important to have the gift of the Holy Spirit? What is lost without it? (Galatians 5:22-23)
8. Was it helpful to you to learn that in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit and the presence of God are the same thing?
 - a. How does that help you?
9. What is the significance of the New Testament closing with an invitation to quench your thirst? (Rev. 22:17)
10. Could you identify with the following questions Bud asked this morning about being emotionally dry:
 - a. Have you ever been so dry in your emotional life you could hardly love anyone?
 - b. Have you ever noticed someone else being loving toward a person you were apathetic about?
11. If you wanted to know for sure if the Holy Spirit is living in you would you be willing to ask an old friend:
 - "Am I less worried than I used to be?"
 - "Am I a better person than when you first got to know me?"
 - "Do I have more integrity than I used to have?"
 - "Am I more loving and approachable than I used to be?"
 - "Am I changing?"

Sermon: *The Gift of the Spirit*

John 7:37-44

One of the consistent problems that surfaces when people are spiritually searching is that of asking the wrong questions. Wrong questions like, "Which is the most doctrinally correct church?" or "Is their worship traditional or contemporary?" or "Do they have a ministry that meets my needs?" or "Is the preaching interesting?" Those aren't insignificant questions; they are just not the first, great question a person should ask. If a person has been lost in the desert for several days without water and by some mysterious means is told he will be given the answer to one question about water, what is the right question? Is it, "Which kind of water is best, Aquafina or Nestle?" Is it, "Which container has the most water, a liter or a quart?" Is it, "Are those flavored waters as thirst quenching as plain water?" The right question is, "Where can I find water?" Indeed that is the only question a thirsty man would ask about water.

On the last day of the Feast he stood up and said, *"If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink. Streams of living water will flow from within him. And by this he meant the Spirit whom those who believed in him were later to receive."*

The Feast of the Tabernacles was an 8-day-long feast held in Jerusalem. Jesus knew there were people at the feast who were looking for him to kill him. And yet there is a message on Jesus' heart that is so important he shouts it. If he had been unnoticed before he is not now. He doesn't give a nice, calm speech. He yells. What could be so important about this message that he would risk his life to deliver it? The Feast of the Tabernacles was an annual feast in which the people of God remembered their forefathers' years of wandering in the wilderness before they got to the Promised Land. During those 8 days they participated in activities which reminded them of life in the wilderness. They would live in lean-tos rather than their houses to remind themselves how God took care of them when they lived in tents and had no houses. Another reminder was when every day a priest would go to the pool of Siloam, draw water, and put it in a golden pitcher. The people would follow along behind the priest as he made his way to the Temple and they would sing Isaiah 12, *"With joy we will draw water from the wells of salvation."* Then, at the altar in the Temple, the priest would pour it out every day. That served as a reminder to them of the time in the wilderness when God provided water from a rock. As Jesus watches this water ceremony for 7 days, finally on the eighth and final day of the Feast he screams a message. Something has been building in him and is ready to just explode. He shouts a message about the water. He says, "I know what the real rock is and I know what the real provision is and I know what the real water is. Come to me and you will not only receive water but living water. Not only will you receive living water but it will flow out from you. Others will benefit from what is in you."

What is Christianity essentially? Is it a bunch of correct doctrines? Is it a bunch of feelings about things? Is it a way to make the world a better place? Is it an ethical standard by which to live? Of course Christianity is all those things. But primarily Christianity is direct experience with God. It is God's thinking, God's attitudes, God's Spirit penetrating you. There is an obvious danger with being so "feelings" acclimated that you go with your feelings when the word of God seeks to direct you a different way. Feelings can be so subjective they become an enemy of

truth. But that is not to say that feelings are not extremely important in following Jesus. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Some of us know what it is to be too happy to live. The love of God has been so overpoweringly experienced by us on some occasions till we almost had to ask God to stop the delight for we could endure no more. And if God had not veiled his glory and his love a bit we would have died for joy." I understand experience can so override reason we lose sight of truth and experience becomes an idol. I've seen that happen and I do not respect it. But I want you to think about what Spurgeon said for a moment. Do you know what he is talking about? Have you experienced anything like what he is talking about? Do you read that and you say, "Is this guy in the same religion I am in?" What makes Biblical religion different from other kinds of religion is this: "We have been made partakers of the divine nature." (II Peter 1:4) The Spirit of God penetrates us directly. I know there are numerous folks here today who would say, "Listen, all this Holy Spirit stuff is for those on the fringe of Christianity. Just get out there and live a life of service and compassion and that will please God." Listen to me folks, living a compassionate and serving life is of no consequence unless you are filled with the Spirit of God. Direct personal contact with God is the essence of Christianity. That is the great privilege Jesus came to make possible. That's what he enabled us to do when at his death God tore the curtain that separated people from the symbolic dwelling place of God. When that curtain was torn people didn't rush in and pick up a stack of visitation cards saying, "Oh goody, now we can go do good deeds." People stood there in amazement that now they had direct contact with God! So let me ask you a very personal question: "How is your personal contact with God going?"

I cut my eyeteeth on Acts 2:38a. Somehow I never paid much attention to Acts 2:38b. Acts 2:38a says that when you are baptized you receive the remission of sins. That is the moment the heavens open and God pours out buckets of grace all over you. It is the most cleansing moment you will ever experience. Acts 2:38b says that when you are baptized you also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is the moment heaven comes down and enters your body in the form of the Holy Spirit. It is the most empowering moment you will ever experience. You can't get more short-changed than to leave the scene of your baptism feeling cleansed but not feeling empowered. The same process that enables you to experience forgiveness also enables you to experience power.

This morning let's take a look at:

HOW GOD PREPARES THE GIFT FOR US
HOW THE GIFT IS RECEIVED
HOW THE GIFT AFFECTS US

HOW GOD PREPARES THE GIFT FOR US

"Up to that time the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not been glorified." In John the glorification of Jesus refers to his death. When Jesus died the Holy Spirit came. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit and the presence of God are the same thing. Notice sometime how when the spirit of God descends on Gideon or Samson or David and they receive power for great deeds we are also told in the same passage, "God was with him." Remember David's famous prayer in Ps. 51? "Cast me not away from thy presence. Take not thy Holy Spirit from me." – Psalm 51:11 When Moses is speaking to God on the mountain God says, "You can go on to

Canaan but I will not go with you.” Moses replies, "If your presence doesn't go with us, don't send us." Finally God agrees to go with them by putting his Spirit in the tabernacle in the holy of holies. Over the Ark of the Covenant was the cloud of his presence, the shining glory of God. He tells Moses that is the place where I will meet with you.

The Holy Spirit of God was very active in the Old Testament. He came on Moses and Gideon and King Saul and David and Samson. So how could Jesus say the Spirit is yet to be given? Jesus has to be saying, "You know how the Spirit of God came upon people in the Old Testament? You ain't seen nothing yet. What the Holy Spirit is about to do is so much greater than what he did in days of old it is as if he hasn't even been here yet." He is saying, "The gift of God's presence that I am going to give you is so far beyond what was given to the great heroes of ancient times it pales in comparison." With a promise like that how dare any of us make excuses for the mediocrity of our lives? How dare we be driven by our problems and our fears?

A friend of mine told me that when he was a young boy he went to an auction a few miles from here because he heard John Wayne was going to be there. Indeed John Wayne was there, looked at the boy and his friend and said, "Howdy boys." Now that is the end of the story. But let me ask you, was that boy in the presence of John Wayne? Yes - but barely. Now if John Wayne had taken him aside and said, "Sonny, I'm thinking about making a movie where I get killed and I'd like to discuss with you the effect this will have on my image as a cowboy hero.", then he would have been much more in John Wayne's presence!

Being in the presence of God is a matter of degrees. In the Old Testament God was present in the tabernacle when it glowed, yet there was always a barrier. When Moses said, "I want to see your face.", God says, "You can only see my back as I pass by." And that mere glimpse of God creates such a physiological reaction in Moses that his face glows so brightly he has to wear a veil. Being in the presence of God for one fleeting moment changed the way Moses looked. Just think of it, we have been invited to come near to the God whose presence changed the way Moses looked.

When Jacob wrestled with God it was at night. When day was about to dawn God said to him, "*The day is coming. You can't see my face.*", and he left. Jacob called that place "Peniel", the face of God. He was tremendously excited because he said, "I got that close and I'm alive to tell about it." And we have been invited to come near to that same God.

How do we get close to God? John said, "*The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory.*" – *John 1:14* Paul said, "*For God who said, 'Let there be light in the darkness,' has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.*" – *II Corinthians 4:6* That is the gift that was promised.

HOW THE GIFT IS RECEIVED

Jesus said if we come to him we will be like that rock in the wilderness pouring out life giving water to others. What does it mean to become a rock from which life-giving water flows?

Jesus said to receive the gift you have to be thirsty and you have to believe in him. “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.” – John 7:37-38.

Remember the final words of the New Testament? They are in Revelation 22. Among those final words are these: “Whoever is thirsty let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take of the free gift of the water of life.” – Revelation 22:17 The invitation isn’t, “Let all those who have high morals and good church attendance come.” The invitation isn’t, “Let all the religious come.” The invitation is, “Let all the thirsty come.”

HOW THE GIFT AFFECTS US

Jesus used the metaphor of water so let’s notice three things about water.

Water renews. Notice what happens when the Spirit is poured out like water into your heart: “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” – Romans 5:5 Have you ever been so dry in your emotional life you could hardly love anyone? Have you ever noticed someone else being loving toward a person you were apathetic about? If you admit your thirst, God will pour the water of the Holy Spirit into your soul. Admit your thirst to love. “God, I am having a hard time loving folks who are hard to love. I tend to resent and be jealous and even hate rather than love. God, I am so dry, so parched, so tired of not loving. I am thirsty!”

The number one ministry of the Holy Spirit is a spotlight ministry on Christ. Have you ever been in the theatre when they turned the lights off for a moment? It is pitch black. Then a spotlight comes on and shines on one person on stage. You see nothing else. The total focus is on that one person. If you want to learn to love like God, the Holy Spirit will help you by shining his light on the life of Christ. He will show you Jesus washing feet, giving people second chances, and even forgiving his crucifiers. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do that, “...the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.” – John 16:15 The way you can tell the Holy Spirit is living in you is not by some bizarre behavior that makes other people think you are a religious nut. The way you can tell the Holy Spirit is in you is when he does that to Jesus and your entire focus is on him. You just want to say to everybody, “Wow! Would you look at Jesus!” When the love of God becomes so real to you that it overcomes the rejection around you the Spirit of God is working. When no matter what other people say you feel loved, when you can handle criticism, when you don’t have to fish for affirmation, when you don’t need people to like you, the love of God has become a thirst quenching reality for you. You feed on it.

So, first, water renews and then, second, water cleanses. The first word in Holy Spirit is holy. All those little pockets of sin you have carried with you for so long will disappear when the Spirit of Holiness lives in you. The little pockets of prejudice and lust and pride and greed. If you want to know for sure if the Holy Spirit is living in you ask an old friend, “Am I less worried than I used to be? Am I a better person than when you first got to know me? Do I have more integrity than I used to have? Am I more loving and approachable than I used to be? Am I changing?”

Water renews, water cleanses, and, third, water flows out. If the Spirit of God lives in you then you are a rock that refreshes other people. You are either a fountain or a drain. Either you enhance the lives of others or you deplete them.

When you were baptized you were given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Are you using your gift? If you give me a gift of a pair of really nice snow skis I will probably say, "Thank you, those are really nice." Then I'll get on Ebay and try to sell them because I have no desire to ski. I know there are those who wish someone with a magic gift of touch would just pass through the audience touching people and imparting the gift of the Holy Spirit to them but that is not how it works. You have the gift. You received it when you were baptized. Now you have to decide it's worth the effort to learn how to ski. If you see someone and think, "I want to marry them.", what would you do? You'd get to know them, spend time with them. You do the same with the Holy Spirit. You let the Holy Spirit introduce you to Jesus. And the more time you spend getting to know Jesus, the more you will become aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life.

If you are willing to make Jesus your rock then you will become a fountain. All you need is to be so thirsty you are willing to come to Jesus.