

Introduction:

1. The lesson before us will challenge our collective thinking as a congregation. It will challenge the leadership of this church. It will ask “How do we view ourselves and the growth of the congregation?” It will also challenge us individually to examine our mindset toward evangelism.
2. Across the nation, many congregations of God’s people are barely surviving. Some are not surviving at all—they are dying. In some communities that used to have a church, you find a building closed or sold. I could identify several in Texas that have closed their doors in the past three years. Why is that happening? What’s in store for the rest of us?
3. By contrast, some churches are growing. Yet, as they get close to 200, there may be a suggestion to peacefully divide and start a new work. There was a time when that may have been well suited to our culture. But is that best for God’s cause at the present time? When I obeyed the gospel in 1969, I heard that a church shouldn’t have more than 150-200 members. That was a widely held view. Widely held, but is it a biblical view?
4. We can talk all day and all night about evangelism, but if we don’t have the right view of the local church, we will never do the work of evangelism. This lesson is about the basics in evangelism because it addresses the very concept of converting people and our attitudes toward it. This is something that needs to be addressed because—believe it or not—some brethren think the church should not grow! This is not just about the Dowlen Road Church, but about every church of Christ. It is not just what the Lord wants for us, but what He wants for every congregation of His people.

The Lesson:**I. The Jerusalem church is our model.**

- A. We have long stood on the biblical position that the early church should be imitated.
 1. The very appeal that we make of going “Back to the Bible” is dependent upon our recognition that the early church establishes a pattern for us to follow. If the Jerusalem church is not a model for us to follow, then we have no model. There are some radicals who say there is no pattern for us to follow in the Bible, but that is not us.
 2. The record we have of the Jerusalem church from Acts 2 to Acts 15 shows that it conducted its affairs under the guidance of the apostles. What the apostles did was done under the watchful eye of the Holy Spirit as He guided the apostles into all truth, John 16:13; 14:26. Therefore, what the Jerusalem church practiced was the truth.
 3. But what was practiced in Jerusalem was practiced everywhere. The congregations of God’s people did not follow different standards from one place to another. The same pattern was taught in all the congregations, 1 Corinthians 4:17.
- B. It is our model in salvation.
 1. What was taught and practiced about salvation beginning at Jerusalem was the Lord’s will for all time. Listen to the command of Jesus as He instructed His apostles about their work (that was to begin in Jerusalem), Luke 24:47. What was taught by the apostles about salvation at Jerusalem was intended by Jesus to be preached to all nations.
 2. It is a simple matter to read Acts 2 and see the pattern of salvation that was repeated in all the churches throughout the book of Acts. They heard the gospel (2:14); believed the gospel (2:36-37); were told to repent and be baptized (2:38). They did what they were told to do and were saved (2:41, 47). This is the model we follow.
- C. It is our model in worship.
 1. What was practiced in worship in the Jerusalem church is our pattern, Acts 2:42. The only element of local church worship not found in this verse is singing. In this verse, we find teaching, praying, giving and the Lord’s Supper. Was singing neglected by this church?
 2. When Paul wrote to the Hebrew Christians (which included the church at Jerusalem), he noted the importance of singing in the worship assembly, Hebrews 2:12; 13:15.
 3. What was practiced at Jerusalem was practiced among all the churches. It is our model.
- D. It is our model with respect to organization.
 1. The first mention of elders and deacons is found in Jerusalem, Acts 11:29; 6:1-6.
 2. Those are the only offices in the local church. The Bible knows nothing of popes, cardinals, archbishops or presidents with respect to the church. Jerusalem is our model.

II. The Jerusalem church is our model in evangelism.

- A. If Jerusalem is our model in all these other things, why is it not our model with respect to evangelism? Why do some Christians have a different view of Jerusalem when it comes to saving the lost?
1. Something happened to the gospel after it left Jerusalem and before it got to America. In America, while Christians believe we should follow the Jerusalem pattern with respect to worship, etc., many believe we should not follow the Jerusalem model in evangelism.
 2. Do you remember what we said about the view that a church shouldn't have more than about 150-200 members? Many brethren think anything larger than that is just "too big."
 3. Size is relative. What would a Jerusalem Christian say about the size of our congregations? Wouldn't he wonder why they are so small? Something has happened in the thinking of Christians from the time of the Jerusalem church and our time.
- B. Take a look at soul-winning and growth in the Jerusalem church. As we look, ask the question: Was the Jerusalem church not what God wanted—growing, aggressive, and converting many souls to Jesus?
1. See Acts 2:41. On the very first day of the Jerusalem church it was comprised of 3,000 members. If a sound church today had that many members, we would be certain that it was not a sound church at all.
 2. See Acts 2:47. Conversions were ongoing in the Jerusalem church. This means that people were being taught the gospel every day.
 3. See Acts 4:4. Here we are, only two chapters after its beginning, and the Jerusalem church has grown to 5,000 men (the word used here indicates adult males). Sometimes I hear brethren say, "We don't believe in numbers." The Holy Spirit does. These are his numbers. Every number represents another soul snatched from the grasp of the devil!
 4. See Acts 5:14. By this time the church has grown so large that we aren't even given numbers. Instead, the Holy Spirit just says, "...increasingly added...multitudes..."
 5. See Acts 6:1, 7. God believes that His church should be in the multiplying business. So do we, because we believe the Jerusalem church is our model. Maybe we are not as good at math as they were, but we believe in the principle. We are not math atheists.
 6. See Acts 8:4. What a remarkable text! These brethren saw the big picture in evangelism. They thought they were supposed to save everybody. That was their mindset. Is it ours?
- C. If the Jerusalem church is our model in respect to plan of salvation, plan of worship, etc., should it not be our model in evangelism—seeking the lost?
1. This lesson is about our vision for the future. If we are convinced that we should not grow and should not aggressively seek the lost, then how will we fulfill the mission our Lord gave us? If we are convinced that we should not seek as many as we can, then how can we ever claim that we are following the Bible pattern?
 2. One preacher told me, "Where I preach we are not trying to bust out the walls." To that statement, I ask, "Why not?" At one church an elder told the preacher, "You have caused nothing but trouble for us two elders. You've got this whole congregation thinking they are supposed to be out converting the whole world." At another church, an elder said to me, "We wouldn't want 100 new converts this year if we could get them. There would be too many problems. Our building is not large enough. We don't have enough teachers. We don't have enough leadership. Besides, we like a small congregation."
- D. Someone may say, "Maybe that elder has a point. What about the problems and disadvantages encountered by growth?"
1. There are some things that are perceived as disadvantages. But advantages and disadvantages are not the issue for us. Though we might discuss those things, the key element is our mission. When Jesus sent the disciples out to preach he never told them to consider advantages or disadvantages of converting more people, but to preach.
 2. When a church thinks the way that one elder thought, evangelism is absolutely doomed!

Conclusion:

1. God wants all men saved, 1 Timothy 2:4. Like farmers, we have to sow more seed, Galatians 6:7b.
2. We have a great work to do. We are part of the greatest enterprise ever known to man.
3. We have a mission from God, Mark 16:15. Will we work to fulfill our mission—or will we fight against it with words and actions that undermine it? Let us believe that we are able to do His will.