

May 31, 2015  
Church Planting  
*Who is Your God?*  
Acts 12:19b-24

**Opening words:** A.W. Tozer once wrote, "*I remind you that there are churches so completely out of the hands of God that if the Holy Spirit withdrew from them, they wouldn't find it out for many months.*" That quote makes me ask you this question. How long do you think it would take for us to discover the Holy Spirit had withdrawn from Western Reserve? Would the Holy Spirit's exit be an instant discovery? Would the Holy Spirit's exit be a slow erosion? How many would never notice the Holy Spirit was gone? Do you think the Holy Spirit left Western Reserve years ago? Do you think the Holy Spirit is here now?

This is sermon number twenty-four in my sermon series called *Church Planting*. During the summer months, I have been preaching through the Book of Acts. This is no small task because Acts has so much to offer. Human effort and determination are not enough to revive the church. It is the Holy Spirit who created the church originally and it will be the Holy Spirit who revives the church again. Our scripture lesson for today is Acts 12:19b-24. Let me call this message *Who is Your God?*

**Acts 12b-24** Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. <sup>20</sup> He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.

<sup>21</sup> On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. <sup>22</sup> They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." <sup>23</sup> Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

<sup>24</sup> But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

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We find ourselves in the twelfth chapter of Acts. So much has happened to this point. You would need an excellent memory to remember everything. It will have to suffice to say that the Holy Spirit has been on the move. The once confused disciples have been transformed into apostles, who have discovered both insight and courage. The miracles performed through them give their words credibility. Countless souls have been saved. The church is taking giant leaps forward. It is about to move from a regional movement to an international one. In other words, the focus is about to shift from the original twelve disciples (including Mathias) to the greatest missionary the church has ever known, Paul. This morning's scripture acts as a bridge between the twelve and Paul.

According to the text, Herod, the Roman authority in that corner of the world, went to Judea to the harbor town of Caesarea. The day began like every other day. Herod was working. On his agenda were the representatives of the cities of Tyre and Sidon. They proposed peace with Herod because they were dependent on the king's territory for food. Herod accepted the terms of the agreement and made it a public announcement. Trying to impress his people, he wore his royal robes as he sat on his royal throne. He delivered a powerful message, whose words have grown silent years ago. Yet, at that moment, they energized the people; they went wild. At that moment, they saw him as something more than a man. Verse 22 says, *"This is the voice of a god, not a man."* Herod's large ego must have grown even bigger. He must have felt like the crowd was right, he was a god. Then the unthinkable happened. This magnificent scene of political power is ruined by human weakness. The author of Acts says it was the work of an angel. He died because of his own arrogance; he did not give his praise to God. Our modern world would say he had a stroke or an aneurism, maybe a heart attack. Two thousand years later, the cause of death really doesn't matter. The only thing that really matters is that Herod, the one-time god in the eyes of the people, is dead. The story reminds us how fast life can change. The story also reminds us of how easy it is to mix up our priorities. The top priority in your life must be God! If you can remember that simple fact, say, **"Amen!"** That leads us to our question for today: who is your god?

Look at the story one more time with me. Herod had done everything to impress the people. He wore his royal robe as he sat on the royal throne. His message was powerfully delivered and well thought out. He wanted to make an impression and he did. The general population didn't just see him as a political leader, they saw him as their god. Verse 22 says it clearly, *"This is the voice of a god."* There is nothing wrong with supporting your political leaders! However, there is something wrong with making them your god. There is only one true God. He must be the top priority in your life. Let me ask you the question again. Who is your god?

Last week, I told you only only 32% of the world's population is Christian. That means 68% of our world's population has a different understanding of God than you do. Islam, 23% of the world's population, has a different understanding of God than you. The Hebrew faith, .22% of the world's population, has a different understanding of God than you. The Asian regions, Hinduism and Buddhism, 13% and 6% respectively of the the world's population, have a different understanding of God than you. There are many who do not believe there is a god. We call them atheists; they make up 2% of the world's population. However, the story is not about theological differences. The story is about mixed-up priorities. This is the truth. You can claim Christianity as your own and still have other gods. Who is your god?

There is a dark side to that question. How many stories have you heard lately that revolve around the word "embezzlement"? There is nothing wrong with money, but you cannot make it your god. How many lives do you know have been ruined by alcohol? Cirrhosis of the liver is a horrible way to die. How many heroin related deaths have

been reported on our local news lately? What kind of a mind puts that into their body? Child pornography must be at an all-time high. It makes me sick to my stomach. Do I have to go on? Do I really have to go on? Our local news is filled with people who have made sinister things their god, it is their top priority. It is only that dark thing that really matters to them. They will sacrifice everything else in life for it. However, this is our question for the day.

Who is your god? The question is not aimed at someone else. The question is aimed at you. It is a personal question. Who is *your* god? I feel comfortable saying this. There is no sinister little activity going on within our congregation, but that doesn't mean we don't have our gods. Your god is the top priority in your life. What is your top priority? Is the top priority in your life your country? It would be easy to make the United States of America your god. We live in the greatest country in the world. Is your top priority in your life this church? This is an incredible time in the history of this church. We are solid while many mainline protestant congregations are dying. Is your top priority your clan, your family and friends? Our community is filled with many wonderful people. It would be easy to make them your god. What is your top priority? What is your god? Your god cannot be any of those good things. However, your top priority must be God, himself. Never forget, our God is a jealous God. Exodus 34:14 says it clearly, *"Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God."* That is what makes our question of the day so important. If you are ready to answer the question, who is your god, say, **"Amen!"**

### **Country**

Who is your god? Has anyone here made the United States of America their god? Sitting in the center of Public Square in Cleveland is the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. It was designed by Levi Scofield and was opened on July 4, 1894. It stands as a reminder of the soldiers and sailors who died during the Civil War from Cuyahoga County. It is a cheap date because it is open to the public free of charge. From an academic standpoint, it is an excellent example of civil religion. What is civil religion? It is when we mix our faith and our patriotism. Civil Religion communicates to the world that God loves your country more than any other country. Abraham Lincoln once said, *"The question is not if God is on our side, the question is are we on God's side."*

America is a great place! It is my personal opinion that we live in the greatest country in the world. I have visited other countries but I have never wanted to stay. I am always ready to come home. With all of our problems and challenges, we still have freedom and opportunity. If you can't make it here, then you can't make it anywhere. One of the hot topics in our country is illegal aliens. They are coming in record numbers, over and under fences, crossing rivers and seas. It is easy to be mad at them, but do you know the truth? I am a compassionate person. If I lived where they live, I would be one of them. I have seen their countries and I am not impressed. You should be proud of America! So wear your flag ties. Wear your flag shirts. Fly your flags in front of your house and light those fireworks on Independence Day. We have so much,

but don't make America your god. You could easily make America your god, but don't do it. If you are lucky, you will live in America for one hundred years. You are going to spend eternity in heaven with God. God must be your god. If you can remember to keep God your god, say, "**Amen!**" Who is your god?

### **Church**

The piece of scripture that has influenced my life the most is Acts 2:42-47. It says:

**They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

I believe those words hold the key to our future success. That early church did four things. First, they devoted themselves to the apostle's teachings. We do not have the apostles, but we can devote ourselves to the Bible. Second, they devoted themselves to the fellowship, other believers. Third, they devoted themselves to the breaking of bread, communion. Fourth, they devoted themselves to prayer. What a surprise! People wanted to be part of that kind of movement. The early church grew larger every day.

This church is not a perfect place, but we have our moments. My formula for success is simple. All we have to do is learn about Jesus and care for one another. If we fail to do those two things, we will die. If we do those things then we will thrive. Obviously, somebody is getting something out of this church, because we are growing at a healthy rate. This is the truth. I am always humbled by the generosity of this church. I am humbled by the generosity of your time, talent and financial resources. Western Reserve has become a special place in this community and it would be easy to make this church your god. However, don't do it! This church is only a vehicle of God. It can't save your soul alone. Jesus, himself, is your only hope of salvation. If you remember to keep God your god, then say, "**Amen!**" Who is your god?

### **Clan**

About a year ago, I began watching Ken Burn's documentary on World War II, *The War*. My father served during that war, so I felt some attachment. I particularly found the interviews of the survivors interesting. That generation is dying quickly. One night they interviewed a native-American soldier who was in the infantry. Years after the conflict, he cried about the day he took a German life with his own hands. Death did not come suddenly. The soldier died slowly. Before he passed, he called out. According to the man interviewed, he didn't call out for a medic. He called out for his mother,

twice. Don't tell me being a mother isn't important. Don't tell me family and friends aren't important. Do you get along better with your family or your friends?

This community is filled with many good people. This community is a real community, in every sense of the word. We care about one another. We support one another. We pray for and sacrifice for one another. It would be easy to make the people in your life, your clan, your god. A lonely person has no family or friends. But, God must be your god. If you can remember to keep God your god, then say, "**Amen!**" Who is your god?

When the great missionary David Livingstone died, his body was buried in England where he was born. However, his heart was buried in the Africa he loved. It was placed in a hole near the base of a tall tree in a small African village. Where is your heart? If you can find your heart, then you can find your god. Who is your god? If you can remember to keep God your god, then say, "**Amen!**"