

THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM

Acts 5:11
Matt. 16:18

Now study Christ's church which he set up in his early ministry and which he later turned over to the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is one of the most interest-^{ing} studies. This church as we think of the Passover, and then, we think of Pentecost. They were great days with the Jews and there were seven weeks between the two. Jesus was crucified the day before the Passover. And the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost.

The things which Jesus did and taught in person up to the Passover, he continued to do and teach by the Spirit through the church after Pentecost.

There was an interruption of 50 days. During the first 40 days he showed himself to be alive by many infallible proofs. Appearing to Mary Magdalene, to Peter, to the two on their way to Emmanus, to Thomas, to the Disciples while Thomas was absent, to the seven Disciples, and in the mountains to the eleven. And then to the 500 brethren. And he was taken up. Now during the last 10 days, 120 Disciples were waiting and preparing for the promise of the Father.

Now they are not called a church until Acts 5:11. But they were a church in fact. The institution which Jesus established, first localized itself, in the church at Jerusalem.

This is the Genesis and the early development of the church. And the nucleus here for this church started out with a small group of baptized believers who were trained - John 1:35-51.

We shall see that the church had its roots in the Old Testament. The new fellowship was born out of the older community. The old Israel. This is what we understand when Jesus said, I will build my church. And you think of his intentions. To the time of Moses, Stephen mentioned that that was the church in the wilderness, with our fathers. Acts 7:38. There is nothing that strengthens us as the conviction that this was a new creation. An elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

The origin of the church and the result of the church's reception of the promise at Pentecost leads us to see that it was called out - more than just an assembly. They were a peculiar people, who had an element of mission and service. They were involved in responsibility. And God had set these people free and there was a sense of togetherness and a sense of fellowship. The word, koinonia, represents this idea. It means to have a share in. To come into communion - to come into fellowship. Which is the dominate meaning and the dominate idea.

Now the local church was related to the members of other churches where the same activity of God in Christ was manifest. This was a body of men and women which had been brought together in Christ Jesus to form this society.

They have been spoken of as a free church. First they accepted the Gospel of Jesus. Second, they separated their lives from paganism. Third, they brought forth fruits of righteousness.

The accepted word was the foundation of the church at Jerusalem. And without this acceptance there would have been no local assembly. They won their members - they were voluntarily received. And the new members devoted themselves to teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

There was no relationship in a constituted (authority) over them by the state. There was a (clear line) between the church and the world. Also, there was a clear line that they were separate from the Roman Emperor and the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. There was no idea of a union between the government and the church. They were looked upon as strangers and as pilgrims.

Now we shall see that within the local congregations there were found different officers, such as elders, deacons, bishops, ministers, teachers, etc. Phil. 1:1, Acts 20:28.

We shall also note that when the missionary advance began, the original character of the Jerusalem church maintained in the new churches that were established. They increased in membership. And the concept was still maintained. That is, the new mission churches from Jerusalem church still preached, they spent time teaching, there was emphasis on conversion and faith. But we do not discover any centralized church authority for the local churches were independent. Yet they had a wonderful relationship - one to another. We see this later on - Paul in his letters directs a message to the local assembly in different cities.

Now the Jerusalem church had a custom of meeting and getting together as Martyr gave an account saying - on the day called Sunday, all who lives in the city or in the country - gather together in one place. And the writings of the Apostles and Prophets are read for as long as the time will permit. When the reader has ceased, the over seer instructs us by word of mouth, exhorting us to put these good things into practice. Then we all rise together and pray.

From the earliest times there was indication that Christians came together for worship on Sunday. This was the day that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Of course, they had other meetings, we are sure to help and look after the needs of the church. But I thought it well to say these few remarks -- the beginning

of the church at Jerusalem as being free.

Let me point out now a few things about the Jerusalem church as to its membership. Second, as to its government, which I have already mentioned. And third, as to its fellowship.

I. First, membership. The Jerusalem Church had a cosmopolitan membership. That is, I mean to say, it included all classes and conditions. There were ladies like Johanna and Suzanna from Herod's court. There was Mary, a carpenter's widow. There was a distinguished lawyer, Joseph of Arimathea. There was a scholar, Nicodemus. Now keep in mind these fellowships with the Galilean fishermen - like Peter and John, Simon, Matthew - the tax collector. All of these were in the same organization. The membership grew rapidly and the church enrolled rich land owners as well as penniless Greek speaking Jewish women. They later on converted some of the Pharisees.

Now let me point out the idea of a rich man's church or a poor man's church is really not Scriptural. The church at Jerusalem was for no class exclusively. In a local church, as no where else on earth, it ought to be true that the rich and the poor meet together. That is to say, the great old man, Robert E. Lee - with all of his dignity was a member of a church in which there were poor uneducated people. The Lord is the maker of them all. And the brotherhood of man is impractical apart from Jesus Christ. This really is the only bond of union. Now this is the only point in life where we see the standards disappear. The philosophies of the schools, the philosophies of government, the customs of nations - there should be no clash between the classes because we are all brothers.

It is wonderful that this first church demonstrated the master's teaching. And how wonderfully true it can become today in your church and in my church.

I read a story about a church having a campaign, that ran through Thanksgiving. And there was such high interest on a given Sunday, the sermon was called off, and the laymen who wished to speak - could speak. There were six men who responded. Two of them were businessmen, one was a lawyer, one was a professor, and one was a missionary, and one a laboring man. No speaker repeated what another had said. And not one of them spoke more than six minutes. The last speaker was the laboring man. He said, "I should like to say to the new members and the strangers that I am about the smallest pebble on this beach. There are men in this church worth millions more than I am. For I am not worth anything but they treat me as a brother."

Now that was a great statement - and that truly was the sentiment in the Jerusalem Church. I think it would be impossible for us to over-state the quality of believers, in the sense that it was here experienced in this church.

II. Second, the government.

Now I have already noted that the government in this church was of a democratic nature. That it was a free local congregation. Now the 1st chapter of Acts, and we discover the election of a successor to Judas, is under consideration. Peter took the initiative by sighting the prophesy of David, to the case in point, and stating the qualifications to the office. Incidentally he says, Judas fell from an office. Not from a state of salvation. And Peter does not presume to nominate - much less appoint the apostle. We discover that the record is clear and positive. That the case was submitted to the entire company of men and women. Second, that they nominated Barnabas and Matthias. Third, that they prayed the Lord to show which of the two he did choose. They wrote Barnabas on one slip or table or ball - and Matthias on another - and shook them up and Matthias fell out first. The word for lot here is clergy. From the translation comes the word clergy or ministry. It was the last use of lots by the Christians.

Because the Holy Spirit comes immediately as their guide. And they have a better means of ascertaining the will of God.

In the government of the church we take note that the church had grown to enormous proportions. Jerusalem Church had a great membership. And the business was conducted in the same democratic way as when it numbered 120. And the 12 called the multitude of the disciples to them and said, it is not proper that we should leave the word of God and minister to tables.

Now this is found in Acts 6. When in Verses 1-6 - the Brethren were to look out among them for seven men of good reputation - full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom - whom they will appoint over this business. And then the preachers were to give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And the same pleased the whole multitude, the whole church, and the whole congregation. And we remember that this was an unmistakable reference to the whole congregation of believers. When internal trouble arose, they put the matter before the church.

It was settled by creating an office to care for the temporal needs of the church.

Now this new office was to make it possible for the pastors to devote themselves to two jobs. One was prayer and one was preaching.

Now this is the first record of the management of the affairs in the church. And it was the establishment of the office of Deacon.

The complaint was on the part of the Grecians - that their widows were neglected in the daily administration. That was the problem. It would not do to have the church divided on a matter of that kind. There had to be a solution to that problem. So they ordered the whole church as a body to select the men who would

attend to this financial and secular matter.

They ordained these men to this work by prayer and the laying on of hands. And these seven men took charge of this matter and received it from the Apostles. Now that was the solution to the problem. And it was handled by a democratic procedure.

When Moses was leader, it was suggested to him by Jethro, that he appoint judges to judge the small matters - and let Moses judge the matters Godward. And it seems that this was the plan here in the church - to put the temporal matters into the (hands of laymen). And they were to find suitable men to do this.

But we cannot leave the word of God to serve tables. And so the ^{Laymen} Deacons were elected to serve the tables.

Now they were elected to serve the tables of the poor. They were elected to serve the table of the Lord's supper. And one fine man said they were elected to serve the table of the Pastor.

*officers or needed - David once said
not the poor keep
by Lord's Supper
rich*

Now we know that in the development of things, there were Pastors who were shepherds - over seers. There were evangelists, missionaries, but these men who were to take on this temporal duty of the church - their wives were also to be faithful. They were to be rich in religious character and experience. They were to possess the confidence of the congregation. Because they were going to handle the public funds of the congregation.

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They were elected by the church. There was prayer made for them and hands were laid upon them. Then these things belonged to the ceremony of the ordination of deacons. Now as a result of the solution to this problem which

had confronted the church and those governing it - Acts 6:7 says the word of God increased and multitudes were converted.

According to the record of the first church - it would be wise for us in our churches, in the affairs which we have to follow the same worthy example in the management of our own affairs. If we should seek to be Scriptural and democratic.

III. The Fellowship

I should like to say a few things now about how this fellowship was united. The Jerusalem Church was unique and you find the account of this in the early chapters in the book of Acts and especially do we find the wonderful matter in Chapter 2 and 3. Perhaps it would be well for us to mention some of these things about their fellowship.

First, the place. They were united all together in one place. The Bible says. Chapter 2:1. That one accord - a little later - all that believed were together, the Scripture says. Still later they were all on Solomon's porch.

The members of this church had the church going habit. And they continued it steadfastly.

Now the Jerusalem church started out wonderful but a tragic note had to be sounded a little later on when a writer wrote - "not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is."

Church going is a good habit in itself. Many blessings attend it. And when

people miss church - they miss a great deal.

I remember reading a story of Deacon John Williams of Richmond. He was a regular attendant of all of the services of his church. He walked 4/5 the distance around the globe going to the First Baptist Church. A son in law once asked him when he started to prayer meeting one evening, Mr. Williams, do you always feel like going to church. No, not always. But I make it a rule to go always - because I ought. Most of the time it is a delight. And other times, a duty.

Wouldn't it be marvelous if we could find this in our own fellowship - united in the place. Suppose each local congregation would have that unity - that the first church had - wouldn't it be marvelous.

2 Second, as to purpose. They were all of one accord - V. 1 says. Their minds were concentrated on one thing - the coming of the promised Spirit.

Now curiosity prompted them to ask, Lord doth thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel. Jesus rebuked them for their curiosity - he said it was not for them to know the long period or the short period of time. The important thing for them was the equipment for service - but ye shall receive power when the whole spirit has come upon you.

Bidden to tarry until the comforter came, they obeyed united. They knew what they needed and they agreed in that knowledge. Day after day passed without sign of fulfillment. But they stayed together. And as far as I know, the Spirit comes not upon a divided church. That is why we need a oneness of purpose. It is better for a few members in harmony and singleness of spirit than to have a large number of people linked by descension and torn by discord. Of one mind in the Lord. This is evidence of strength in that church.

3 Third - the matter of prayer. This fellowship also enjoyed a united prayer - they all continued with one accord - in one place it says, in prayer. It was a praying church. A 120 people - for 10 days - they spent in this prayer service. Now these people agreed on earth as touching one thing. And God was more ready to bless than they were to receive.

Prayer prepared them to receive. They were constantly attending the prayers. Acts 2:42.

They lived greatly - when troubles came - they would pray. There were those who tried to stop their preaching and the Disciples turned aside to pray. They asked God to help them do their part. Knowing full well that he would do his part - Acts 4:23-31.

By prayer this church triumphed over persecution. Troubles were fast. And many. The church had no recourse but to pray when Peter was put into prison. Acts 12:5-12. God delivered Peter from prison and from the soldiers. And by prayer this church triumphed over this state of persecution.

4 Fourth, there was great power. This fellowship enjoyed the matter of power. It says that V. 3 - that tongues of fire sat upon each of them. And not tongues of fire - they could not have endured fire. But these tongues were like fire. And they began to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And began to speak in other tongues - and this experience was common to all.

Now let me explain something to you at this point. What was lost at Babel was regained at Pentecost. Jesus had kept his word. Their prayers were answered. Evidences of the Spirit's presence were external. There was the sound of a wind indicating that the life bringing power of the spirit - the wind blows where it will.

And thou hearst the sound of it and not knows from whence it comes or where it goes. Everyone born of the spirit heard the sound.

Second, there appeared lambent tongues like that of fire - purifying them. They all began to speak with their tongues so that the crowds from different parts of the world heard the Gospel in their own language. The intent of the spirit was that they should be Christ's witnesses. The multitudes wondered - they were amazed - they were confounded.

Evidences of the spirit's presence was also internal.

First, a clear insight into the Scriptures these people had. The crowds thought the Disciples were drunk. But Peter quotes at length from the prophesy that fits the situation and declares it is a fulfillment. That they were drunk -but theirs was a spiritual intoxication. And the wine which they drank was the new wine of the Kingdom.

Peter preached a brief but convincing sermon, of 22 verses - 10 verses were quotations from Joel and David - and the other 12 were interpretations and applications of those ten.

Second, the evidence of the spirit's presence. There was a holy boldness. All of the apostles had fled and Jesus was arrested. They denied him thrice. Now what a change - Peter and John were here in the presence of the whole throng of people with fearlessness - and they impressed the rulers, the elders, the Scribes. The record reads - and behold the boldness of Peter and John. The group in John Marx homeprayed. Grant to thy servants - that with all boldness they would speak thy word. And they so spake.

Third, there was a burning zeal. A new passion. Energy came with a spirit,

upon this church. I think the fishing nets lost their charm. Persecution was but a wind to scatter them like seed. They went everywhere preaching the word. They were flexible in their zeal - these early believers. And the persecution caused them to spread rapidly.

Fourth, there was marvelous results. The spiritual power was a thing from within. It comes from above and dwells in and works through the believer. Under one sermon - 3,000 were converted. But when you think of 10 days of prayer and of witnessing - then something must come from it. So 3,000 were converted.

Two chapters later there were 5,000 men who were believers.

Further on the Disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly. And a great multitude of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Now these large results were achieved in a short time, of say 3 1/2 years.

So the church at Jerusalem was a church of great power and experienced great growth. But it had the spirit.

5 Now Fifth, let us see what this fellowship practiced.

The church at Jerusalem practiced a certain ordinance. And they practiced baptism. And of course they had received the spirit. But the spirit you must remember had entered the world before Pentecost. He moved upon the face of the waters in the first chapters of Genesis. He strolled with wicked men in the 6th chapter of Genesis. And David prayed, take not thy Holy Spirit from me. I Peter 1:11.

We read that Zechariah and Elizabeth prophesied under the spirit's power. And Jesus breathed upon his Disciples to receive the spirit in John 20:22.

Now under the old dispensation a bad man saw and had the spirit of prophesy. But under the new dispensation, the spirit is given to none but good men. And he keeps them good.

I guess a good way to remember this is that the spirit is in the believer. And not on them as in the Old Testament. Two things are true of every spirit guided worker in the book of Acts. He was directed in the way he should go and he was given the right word to speak. This was true, for example, of Phillip. He was directed where to go and what to preach when he got there. And there was a unity of practice in this new church under the leadership of the Spirit.

As I have noted, there was baptism, which was administered to those who received the preached word. Those who obeyed and repented, then they were baptized. There was faith, first of all, however. And upon regeneration and repentance, there was faith. And the Jerusalem church observed the same order that John proclaimed ahead of the Messiah. First, you must bring forth fruits of repentance. And this is the same thing that the Jerusalem church practiced and preached. Acts 8:34-39, Acts 8:4, Acts 10:47, and Luke 24:47.

Now the other ordinance we have not time to treat these completely - was the Lord's Supper. The church in Jerusalem practiced this new ordinance which was instituted by Jesus, the night of his betrayal - the Passover. And this symbolized the vital relationship of the believer with the invisible king. Now this was the new covenant.

Now the Jerusalem church saw this.

First, as an (abiding memorial to their Lord.)

Second, as an impressive enforcement of (dependence on the merits of his death as a sacrifice for sin.)

Third, as a (constant reminder of their need spiritually) to participate with him as the bread of life.

Fourth, as (a bond of a new brotherhood.)

Fifth, as a (token of his return.)

Therefore baptism and the Lord's Supper. These were the two outward forms in the new society. They were divinely created and baptism was administered once for all. The Lord's Supper was administered frequently - possibly sometimes weekly in Jerusalem. No human authority can really add any other ordinance. These two were practiced by the church in Jerusalem.

In baptism, we have a symbol that we are in Christ.

In the (Lord's Supper), there is a symbol that Christ is in us.

Sixth, possession. Another thing about the fellowship here was the unity they had in possessions. That is, Acts 2:4, 4:32-37, some people used these Scriptures to say that the rich and the poor should put all of their property into a common fund and all have equal access to treasury. But Jesus never commanded anybody to give all of his goods away and to cast it except for his own good in the case of the (rich young ruler). The goods was the obstacle in his way of coming into the kingdom. The Bible is it's own best interpreter here. The matter of community of goods here is shown that it was (purely voluntary). Nobody was pressured into this.

Ananias - while the land remained, did it not remain thine own, Peter said. The thing about the death of those two people, is that they wanted credit for great liberality without in fact, being very liberal, and that is why God struck

them dead.

Trust and stewardship was taught by Paul - but not socialism. We must not miss the force of this community goods. It speaks well for the faith and the enthusiasm, and the devotion of the members. They felt that perhaps Christ's return was eminent. The situation was unusual. They had a great revival in progress. As I have said that in a period of 3 1/2 years they had hundreds of thousands of converts come into this church. Now some of these people lost their means of support by coming to be Christians. Thousands remained in Jerusalem longer than they expected - who were travelers. They were without places to sleep and without food - and that's why the church made common use and common cause and everyone was moved to put it to the disposal of the church to meet the emergency and the needs which the church had at that time. In fact, they participated (according to the ability) To create a common fund to meet the necessity of that hour. Now this is not socialism. We have here just simply a lesson on church policy caring for a need.

Last, persecution. The church triumphed over persecution. First, the Sadducees who were enraged by the doctrine of the resurrection - they were materialists, no angel, no spirit, no general judgement. And Peter preached as an eye-witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On Pentecost, he said, this Jesus, God raised up - which we are witnesses--Acts 2:31. He mentioned this many times. With great power, the Disciples gave testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Acts 4:32. They were convincing. Their preaching was earnest and their earnest living commended their cause to the people.

Second, there was the Pharisees. They were angered by Stephen's wonders and signs. It was the value of their trying to hold the oldest dispensation. And Stephen was proving that the superiority of Christ's sacrifice and priesthood was supreme. They were not able to resist the wisdom of the spirit with which he

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spake. In other words, I guess he beat them in the debate. They stopped their ears, they rushed on him like a dog, they stoned him. And of course, these persecutors put him to death. But in his prayer, he had a part in witnessing and winning one of the greatest Pharisees, the Apostle Paul.

Now persecution was not confined to the individual. But it spread and swept all the church of Jerusalem. And they went preaching and crowds gave heed with one accord to this. And the ablest Pharisees were converted. There the church won its greatest convert.

The Jewish state also persecuted the church at Jerusalem. Herrod, the King, put his hand forth to harm some of the church. James was beheaded. Peter was put in prison - but the angel released Peter. And the angel of judgement smoked Herrod. And worms ate his corrupt body. The word of God grew and multiplied. No weapon formed against a faithful and fearless church could prosper.

May it be so that there is too much association today between the world and the church. There is too much compromising on the attitude of the church. Are we not timid in opposing error in doctrine and wickedness.

The pastor today who will dress and look like the world and will lead people into a hoax, of believing that he has something new as a revelation. The world flocks to him and they say he has the Gospel they need. But the Scripture says whoe be unto you when the world speaks well of you. A church and a preacher must be courageous and they must be true. But the same God that cared for the Jerusalem church cares for those who will serve him. And maybe it is a struggle.

Now do not mistake me, I have not said tonight that the Jerusalem church was a perfect church. There were misunderstandings in the church - even about missionary work. Acts 15:23-25. But I believe that their organization was

democratic, very simple, it was built around Jesus Christ, and their unity of fellowship was built upon a common faith. And their unity of fellowship was built upon faith and their great purpose was spiritual and redemptive. They did not magnify it. They didn't magnify classes of people - but there was responsibility to care for all of the membership. And they had great unity in their loyalty, their hopes, their tasks, and their power. This was Christ's first church. It is by his calling, his selection, by the enlightenment and leadership which he had given them. He purchased it with his own blood. And he had endowed them with power to win the world and they multiplied. And from this church at Jerusalem - the little churches and the big churches throughout this world have finally come to be his bride. This is truly a great triumphant story.

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wrote kind - missions in Ger -
Eng. landscape seen from air - churches, tall
stately spires - by culture hand marks when the
weather is bad - lead us home -
competing sight see them appear out of the mist.