

Church History I

First Baptist Church Dandridge
 Dr. Justin Terrell
 Jterrell@fbcddt.org

Session One

“The Beginning of the Church” (1)

1. Resurrection

Principle Beginning: While some might argue that the practical beginning of the church took place at Pentecost (Acts 2), the principle beginning took place the moment Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. This event was literally and figuratively a moment of spiritual awakening for a new age. The resurrection is the principle beginning of the church for several reasons.

- a. **The resurrection marked the completion of Jesus’ redemptive mission from the Father to reconcile sinners back to God.** Even after living a perfect life and dying a sacrificial death, the work of redemption wasn’t complete until Jesus rose from the dead. Only after the resurrection was God satisfied with the work of the Son and considered it complete (Rom. 4:24-25), thus enabling those who believe to be born again and included among God’s people – which is the church.
- b. **The resurrection resulted in Jesus becoming a sample of the new life that all believers receive upon faith,** which is initiated at conversion (justification) and completed at the Second Coming (glorification). This isn’t to say that Jesus was the first believer, but we might say that he was the first “church member,” as the “Head” and “Chief Shepherd” of the church. Water baptism was instituted to be an outward symbol of this inward reality.
- c. **The resurrection took place on the “first day” of the week (Sunday), which began the initial phase of “the new heavens and new earth”** (Rev. 21:1; Isa. 65:17), where God will recreate the world and universe to be an everlasting dominion for he and his people, the church. Just as God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, the eighth day (resurrection Sunday) represents a new creation week, which results in a new people (church) headed for a new place (heaven), where believers will “rest” with God for eternity. The early church recognized this by meeting on Sundays for worship, “*The Lord’s Day.*”

Summary: Jesus established the church the moment he was raised from the dead, where he (1) completed God’s mission to provide the only means of entering the church, i.e., salvation, (2) introduced the new life that all believers receive, (3) became “Head” of the church, and (4) began the initial phase of God’s final recreation of the world, where the church will live for eternity. According to Nick Needham, “*The entire history of the Christian Church is rooted in one central reality – the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If Jesus of Nazareth had not risen, there would be no Church history*” (Needham, Vol. 1, 48).

2. Commissioning

Before Jesus went to Jerusalem to make atonement for sin, he previewed for his disciples that he would be establishing his church. After Peter's confession, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,*" Jesus said, "*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matt. 16:16, 18). Jesus established that his church would be built on the life-changing truth of the gospel (i.e., Peter's confession; the spiritual conversion of unbelievers), and that nothing in the universe would have the power to prevent its success. So, after Jesus was raised from the dead, he commissioned his disciples to take the gospel to the nations, and promised to be with them always, empowering them and ensuring the church's future success until he returns.

- a. **Matthew 28:18–20** – "*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*"
 - **One Verb/Three Participles:** Jesus commissioned the disciples to "*make disciples of all nations,*" which is the primary task of the church. How would they accomplish this task? (1) "*Go*" – they would take the gospel to all nations (people groups), no matter the distance or demographic; (2) "*Baptize*" – they would evangelize the lost, resulting in conversions and baptisms; (3) "*Teach*" – they would teach Scripture, helping new converts learn how to follow Christ in practical ways, which should result in the converts repeating the process with others. In essence, the disciples would reproduce themselves in the lives of others, all by connecting them to Christ and helping them learn how to follow him. What we will see throughout church history is the fulfillment of this commission, which is still being accomplished 2000 years later. This commission remains the main task of the church.
 - **Bookends of Assurance:** Jesus bookended the Great Commission with the powerful claim that he had been given "*all authority in heaven and on earth,*" and the promise that he would be with them "*always, to the end of the age.*" This claim and promise supports what Jesus said to the disciples following Peter's confession (Matt. 16:16-18) – nothing will be able to stop what Christ is doing in the world through his people. Jesus will supply the power, resources, and protection the church needs to accomplish God's will. As we will see throughout church history, this promise has stood the test of time.
- b. **Acts 1:6–8** – "*So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*"
 - **Kingdom:** Like many Jews in the first century, the disciples assumed that Jesus would bring the final consummation of God's kingdom (i.e., the new heavens and new earth) at the completion of his earthly ministry. However, Jesus tells them that the work of evangelism

and church growth must take place before the kingdom will arrive. So, rather than focusing on the future, they should set their hearts on accomplishing Christ's mission today.

- **A Promise and a Table of Contents:** Once again, Jesus promises the disciples to give them supernatural power and authority to be his “witnesses” (i.e., disciple-making), but he also reveals the extent of their public witness – the gospel will have no geographic bounds. Now, when the disciples heard this statement, they were probably shocked. They had just been persecuted in Jerusalem, rejected in Judea, were cultural enemies of those in Samaria, and were under severe oppression from those in Rome. Such a mission would be socially and ethnically unheard of. However, the power of the Holy Spirit would provide the means of fulfilling God's will. Acts 1:8 is also a “table of contents” for the book of Acts, because Luke describes the Spirit's work in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7); Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-11); and to the end of the Earth (Acts 13-28, Rome). Therefore, in the first “church history” book, Luke doesn't just tell us what happened, but gives us a demonstration of God's power through the gospel of Jesus Christ to reach the nations.

3. Pentecost

Practical Beginning: While the resurrection was the “principle beginning” of Christ's church, the day of Pentecost represents the “practical beginning,” where the Holy Spirit began drawing people to Christ through the message of the gospel, and people responded with faith, repentance, and believer's baptism. This event is the moment Christ began building his church.

- a. **Acts 2:1–14, 38** – *“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.” But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them... ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”*
- a. **Fulfilled Prophecy:** The day of Pentecost came as a fulfillment of prophecy on several levels.
 - **Jesus** predicted that such a day would arrive when he told the disciples that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit and become “witnesses” throughout the region and world (Acts 1:4-8). Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, there would be no salvation, no

witness, and no church. The Spirit's arrival and continued ministry is the fuel for evangelism and church growth – and that remains true today.

- **Old Testament Prophets** predicted that God would introduce a “*new covenant*” with his people, where he would send his Spirit to transform hearts and minds, bringing new life to those spiritually dead, and establishing an eternal relationship with his people, which is secured by God's grace (Isa. 32:15; Jer. 31-31-34; Ezk. 36:22-32; Joel 2:28-32).
 - **Abrahamic Covenant:** In Genesis 12:1-3, God promised Abraham that he would make him a great nation, and in him “*all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*” The New Testament later revealed that Abraham became a blessing to the whole world through his descendent, Jesus of Nazareth (Gal. 3:16). Therefore, Pentecost marked the moment when God began blessing the world with salvation, as the good news of Christ began making its way throughout the neighborhoods and nations – all according to promise.
- b. **Missional Explosion:** The Holy Spirit's arrival at Pentecost wasn't a random event in history. In God's providence, he ordained for the Holy Spirit to arrive at this precise moment because Jews from all over the surrounding nations were visiting Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. In essence, when the 120 believers began speaking in “tongues,” it wasn't ecstatic speech like modern charismatic movements portray, but it was known languages that everyone in the crowd could understand. Therefore, people from all different nations could hear the gospel in their own language. Not only did this miracle function as a means of communication, but it also served as a symbol of God reuniting people after separating them at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). Whereas God's judgment toward sin confused the languages of the people in Babel, sending them out to different regions of the world, he has now united people in language, drawing people together for himself through the gospel. Following Peter's sermon in Acts 2, Luke records that 3000 were saved and baptized – the church was born. Another intriguing aspect of this event is that eventually these people would take the gospel back to their homelands, which advances the church into distant regions. There's no coincidence all of this took place on “Pentecost” (Feast of Weeks), the Old Testament event that took place 50 days after Passover, where God's people brought in the “first fruits” of the harvest as a means of praising God for all that he would bring in the future. In redemptive history, the 3000 saved at Pentecost would be the first fruits of the abundant spiritual harvest God would reap through the gospel ministry until the return of Christ.
- c. **Spirit-Filled Community:** Following the events of Pentecost, Luke records that the church was experiencing incredible spiritual growth, fellowship, and outreach. “*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:42-27). That's the fruit of a church filled with the Holy Spirit.