

Monday Week 44 Birth of the Early Church

Bible Reading: Acts 1:1-8

Q 173 What promise did Jesus give the disciples?

A. Jesus promised that the Holy Ghost would give them power to be witnesses of Him.

Every Sunday a small girl went to the community center where there was a church service. She learned the songs and memory verses. She listened carefully to the Bible story. When she would go home, she would try to remember everything she learned and tell her family what she had heard. She wanted them to know what the Bible said and how Jesus loved them too.

Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would give them power to be witnesses. God would use them to tell others about Him. God's Spirit would live in their hearts. He would give them power to show others that Jesus loved them. You can also be a witness. Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit and make you His witness.

Thinking Deeper

Lee was a milkman who made home deliveries. One of his stops was to a house in the country on a 23 acre parcel of land. Lee didn't mind making that stop except on Saturdays when the father of the family was home. That man kept talking to him about Jesus. It made Lee nervous. He couldn't get away from what he had heard. That man was persistent and persuasive. Months went by and the milkman became miserable. He recognized that he was a sinner and needed a savior. Finally, Lee gave in to the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart. He repented of his sins and trusted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. It was because of that man who kept telling him about Jesus. That's what Lee said at the man's funeral.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he was with his disciples. They were excited that he would now bring back Israel to its proper place. Would he overthrow Rome and re-establish Israel as a sovereign nation with its own king? "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus turned the question. They wanted to know what Jesus would do. Jesus was about to tell them what they would do. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me."

We often pray that God will send a revival of His Spirit and do great things. He turns it to us. When we are filled with His Spirit He will make us His witnesses. His plan is to work through us to do His will. Who is the Lee in your life?

Tuesday Week 44 Birth of the Early Church

Bible Reading: Acts 1:9-11

Q 174 How did Jesus return to heaven?

A. Jesus was taken up into a cloud.

A lawyer from Pennsylvania was traveling. He stopped at a shop for a short break. He parked his car in the parking lot. But the lawyer disappeared. No one knew where he went. The police looked for clues, but could not find out anything about him. To this day no one knows where he went. Did someone kidnap him? Did he disappear on purpose? No one knows. It is a mystery that has not been solved. Jesus also disappeared one day.

Jesus was with his disciples on a mountain. He talked with them. Then he was taken up into a cloud. He disappeared. This event is called the Ascension. The disciples watched this happen. As they kept staring up at the cloud, two men in white stood beside them and told them that Jesus was taken up into heaven. They said that Jesus would come again in the clouds the same way that he was taken. Some day Jesus is coming back again. Be sure to be ready when he comes.

Thinking Deeper

Miracles make some people nervous. In this culture that is so fixated on naturalism, the supernatural is often looked upon with suspicion and spoken of with derision. Speak about the Bible as the Word of God and people call you an ignorant relic of some bygone era. Believe in creation and you are on par with people who believed in a flat earth. Promote personal heart-felt relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and you are a fanatic. So there are Christians who shy away from overtly emphasizing anything miraculous. The supposed “quest for the historical Jesus” was an attempt by nervous theologians, trying to “demythologize” the story of Jesus.

The story of Jesus is full, from the womb to the empty tomb, of the miraculous. It is just there. If it is a made up story, it should be shelved with the tales and abandoned as irrelevant. But there is power in this story. And the power is good. There is force in its righteous claims. And the force is positive. There is transformation in its promises. And the transformation is virtuous. There is truth in the story, and the truth has not been contradicted. There is light in the story, and the darkness has not extinguished it. Jesus ascended into heaven. Jesus is coming again.

Wednesday Week 44 Birth of the Early Church

Bible Reading: Acts 1:12-14; Acts 2:1-4

Q 175 What happened to the disciples on the day of Pentecost?

A. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

In 1872, D.L. Moody was a great preacher. But he was working too hard. Some ladies told him they were praying that he would get his strength from God's Holy Spirit, and not from his own hard work. Mr. Moody began praying for that strength, too. One day while walking on a busy New York street, he suddenly became overcome with a sense of God's Spirit. He found a room where he could pray. He was filled with the Spirit. From that day on his work for God was different.* He was a mighty preacher and many people found God when they heard him preach. He had the power of God's Spirit on him like the disciples did on the day of Pentecost.

God has not changed. He wants us to be filled with His Spirit also. Jesus told us to ask for the Holy Spirit. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13).

*Nathan Oates, in Introduction to *I Believe in the Holy Ghost* by D.L. Moody, Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, 1997.

Thinking Deeper

Is speaking in unknown tongues "the evidence of the Holy Ghost?" Some people point to Pentecost as their proof that it is. One man who attended a Pentecostal church was denied membership because he didn't speak in tongues. He said he felt he had divine love in his heart and that was more important than tongues. That would reflect the sense of I Cor. 13:1. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." The word tongues can be translated as languages. Sanctified speech is important, but the Bible points to a greater issue than even angelic language. It is love. And "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5).

What is the purpose of tongues, as given at Pentecost? It was to convince unbelievers that the believers in Jesus had something real. Here is how the people from fifteen different language groups present responded. "And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another... how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"

"Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not" (1 Corinthians 14:22).

Thursday Week 44 Birth of the Early Church

Bible Reading: Acts 2:12-17, 22-24, 32-38

Q 176 What did Peter Preach at Pentecost that caused so many people to believe?

A. Peter preached that since Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah, was crucified by the wicked hands of the people, and rose again, they should repent.

A missionary went to an island where people had never heard about Jesus. He was able to preach to them. As he talked about man's sins and told what sin was, the chief of the tribe listened carefully. The more the preacher preached, the more angry the chief became. Finally he asked one of his men, "Who told that man about me?" Nobody had told the missionary about the chief. The word of God showed the chief what his sins were. He saw how sinful he was.

Peter's message at Pentecost made people see how wicked they were to have crucified Jesus. When they listened to Peter they realized that they had killed the Son of God. Many people were sorry for their sins. Many of them believed in Jesus as their savior and were baptized. This was the beginning of the Christian church.

Thinking Deeper

Charles Finney, the great nineteenth century evangelist, gave some advice about how to preach to be effective in bringing people to Christ. He emphasized the need to speak to the conscience. There are times when an appeal must be made to the intellect, but the intellect can often argue against the message. It is more difficult to argue with one's own conscience. What was so effective about Peter's Pentecostal message was how it pointedly spoke to the people's sense of right and wrong. The crucifixion of Jesus had been less than two months before, and was still fresh in the minds of his audience. When he showed how Jesus had fulfilled the O.T. prophecies of the Messiah, including that he would not see corruption, but that he was raised from the dead, they were convinced that they had killed God's Son. They had committed deicide. "When they heard this they were pricked in their hearts." Their consciences were smitten. Peter's message brought them to repentance and faith.

It is doubtful that Peter's approach would be welcomed in contemporary seeker friendly churches. He actually said they killed Jesus with "wicked hands." But Peter was effective. Three thousand people came to Christ and the church was born.

Friday Week 44 The Birth of the Early Church

Review the Week's Questions

Q 173 What promise did Jesus give the disciples?

A. Jesus promised that the Holy Ghost would give them power to be witnesses of him.

Q 174 How did Jesus return to heaven?

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One of the most important events in American history happened in what is called New England. The Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in December of 1620. They started a new community in a new country. The new colony was started with 102 people. It took several years before the people understood how to live in the new world. The first Thanksgiving was held in the fall of 1621. The Pilgrims gave thanks to God for their harvest and for His help in starting their life in the new world. These Pilgrims were part of the church. They were followers of Jesus. The church started many years before they ever came to America.

What Christians call the church began when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost. When Peter and the apostles preached, 3,000 people believed in Jesus as their Savior. They were baptized. A new thing was happening. What we call the church began to grow. If you are a follower of Jesus, you are part of that church.

Thinking Deeper

The church has emerged in many different forms. Some congregations are small, some are large. Some are rather wealthy, while others are poor. Some are highly organized while others are very simple. But all have the same beginning, and all come into the true church the same way. Jesus said, "Ye must be born again." People are born into the church. They are not part of the church by natural birth but by spiritual birth.

When the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they preached Jesus and people were added to the church. When Peter and the disciples preached at Pentecost and in the days that followed, people would believe and be baptized. The Bible says, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." From then on there was an identifiable entity called the church. That has lasted for two millennia and people are added the same way as they were in the early days. Preaching Christ as the Messiah, who died for sins, was buried and rose on the third day, is the way God has chosen to bring people into the church. We must keep preaching Christ.