

Pentecost was a great day. There were hundreds of thousands of people in Jerusalem for the feast and perhaps as many as a hundred thousand gathered on the Temple area when the Holy Spirit came. Pentecost was a great day because three thousand were converted, because it inaugurated the church, the body of Christ--the church for whom Jesus Christ gave His life on the cross at Calvary.

The last period of Biblical history begins with Pentecost and concludes with the close of the New Testament in the writing of the book of the Revelation. Pentecost began the period, which is the period of the church--the beginning of it at Pentecost, and the continuation of it spreading throughout the empire is recorded in the book of Acts in the missionary journeys of Paul and as also reflected in the epistles that were written by Paul, John and James.

Perhaps after Pentecost, the most important thing that happened was the conversion of the apostle Paul as recorded in the ninth chapter of the book of Acts. This occurred just a few years after the death and resurrection of Christ, four or five perhaps. The conversion of Paul was so important because here was a prepared vessel, educated, trained, keen, thoughtful in every way, whom God now called to Himself and set as the great missionary of the early church.

After Paul's conversion he apparently spent three years in Arabia. During this time we presume that he was rethinking all of the things that he had learned in his training as a Jewish rabbi. He was rethinking them all in the light of the fact that he had seen Jesus, risen from the dead on that road to Damascus. After that Paul went back to his home in Tarsus and he was there for several years--perhaps eight to ten. There it must have been very difficult for this man because he had left Tarsus as the pride of the Jewish community of the city and now he had come back to Tarsus as the despised, hated one of the Jewish community because he had come back as a Christian. God asked him to live there to witness to his own people and to live in front of them as a Christian man. So he was there for a while until he was called over to the work in Antioch by Barnabas and from there they were sent on what we know as the first missionary journey. You will find this recorded in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of the book of Acts.

About this same time, James was writing an epistle to the churches in Palestine so you can tell what was going on in Antioch in the north by reading Acts 13 and you can tell what was going on in Judea in the south by reading the epistle of James.

The second missionary journey followed very quickly and you will find a record of this in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of the book of Acts. Between the first and second missionary journeys, there was a council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) and in that council a very important question was decided. The question was, Is it necessary to do anything but believe in order to be saved? The answer was, no it is not necessary. The only thing that is necessary to salvation is to believe in Jesus Christ. Nothing else needs to be added. The thing they were trying to add in those days was circumcision. We add a lot of other things today, but the council decreed without any hesitation or without any doubt that faith in Jesus Christ is sufficient for salvation.

The second journey followed and Paul went a little farther in distance. He wrote two or three epistles during that time.

The third missionary journey which you find recorded in Acts 18-21, Paul went farther, then over into Europe, having received the call from Greece (the Macedonian call) and he wrote several epistles, I and II Corinthians and Romans and some think also Galatians on the journey.

After he came back from the third missionary journey, Paul was arrested, you recall, in Jerusalem and then began a series of imprisonments which finally led him to a prison in Rome and eventually led him to his death. He was imprisoned because the Jews charged him with treason. Actually they could not prove their charge and so in the slow process of legal things in those days, it took a while before he could be acquitted. Personally, I think Paul was acquitted by default during his first confinement in Rome when he was there under house arrest, and then he was released for two years. But then he was returned to prison after Nero burned Rome as one of the leaders of the Christians on whom this burning had been blamed. Paul, during his first confinement in Rome, wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. During his release after his acquittal by default, he wrote I Timothy and Titus and then during the second imprisonment in Rome when he was finally beheaded, he wrote II Timothy. The last of his books then was II Timothy and one can see from this book that Paul himself knew that his life was about to be ended.

The story of the church does not end there. We have the letters of Peter. We have the writing of Hebrews. We have Jude. We have the epistles of John and we have, of course, the gospel through out this period being written by the various ones and last of all we have the book of the Revelation itself. Now the Revelation projects us on into the future of the church--the history of the New Testament actually closes about the end of the first century--95 or 96 A.D. But God does not leave us in the dark as to what the future of the church would be like and in the Revelation we have a prediction of what the church will be like. We have a sampling of the churches in those days in the second and third chapters of Revelation and this sampling is also representative of churches in every day. You'll find churches today which like the church at Ephesus have lost their first love. You'll find churches today which like the church at Philadelphia had gone through the open doors that God had set before them. You'll find churches today like the church at Laodocia that was lukewarm in that it was rich and increased with goods and did not realize that before God it was wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. You'll find churches today as in those days, at whose doors Christ is knocking. This is a sad picture, an almost unbelievable picture that the Lord of the church would be outside of any church. And yet that is the picture you get in Revelation 3:20-21. The church of those days is like the church of today. We are like the church of those days. These things repeat in all the history of the church.

God also tells us something about the church in the coming days of the tribulation--not the true church for the true church will not be here, having been raptured before the tribulation comes. But a church will be here and that church is described in the seventeenth chapter of the Revelation, a mystery, Babylon the great, mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. Church life will go on, though not the true church

because we will have been taken to heaven to be with the Lord.

I have often wondered, sitting in a church service sometimes, if the Lord should come in the middle of the service whether the service would go on or not. In many churches I think it would go right on and I think there would not even be a ripple of disturbance in the whole congregation because so many who sit in our churches today are not true believers in Jesus Christ.

Christ is outside the door of the church because He is outside of the door of the heart. I think these things remind us that we ought to examine ourselves and examine our churches to see if Christ is in the church by being in the heart of its individual member, to see if Christ is Lord of that church directing its activities and its functions, by directing the activities and functions of the individual Christian. It is a tragic thing to read the story of the church as it is predicted in the book of the Revelation but it need not be true of any individual congregation. The church is no better than its weakest member, so what is true of the church is only true because it is true of its individual members. What is true of your church is true because it is true about you.

If you are a Christian today then be an active Christian. Do those things which God wants active Christian to do. You may never be another Paul or another Peter or another James but you can be the very best representative of Jesus Christ on this earth as it is possible to be with your personality and mental capacities and through your body.

If you are not a Christian today then the picture of you is the picture that you see at the close of the New Testament. It is Christ standing outside of the door of your heart saying, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and will open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me." But you have to open the door and until you do that He will stand outside and knock. If you open the door, He promises, "I will come in and will sup with thee." Will you open the door to the Saviour and know the peace that comes with forgiveness of sins? I hope you will do it, and I hope you will do it today.