

The Start of the Early Church

1. Promises of Jesus:

- Luke 10:1-12
- John 15:18-27
- Acts 8:1

2. Gospel spread through martyrdom

- In the early church, martyrdom was a very real possibility – persecution took place in the early church, most was **REGIONAL** until about 250 when there was an edict issued directly against the Christians
- Pattern throughout history of church has been – **with persecution comes growth**
- Martyrdom – people going to their death for what they believe in Jesus
- **Do we silently blend in?** There's a bigger question...

3. How the church got the message out

1. **Preaching** – connection between Preaching and the sending out of His word – preaching in the streets, to anyone who would hear, in the churches – through preaching and proclamation of the word, many were coming to Christ, despite the threat of persecution
2. **Catechesis (training/teaching)** – teaching of what it meant to be a follower of Christ – before they were ever allowed to be a member, they had to go through training – early church took this from a 40 day period, stretched to 2 years, stretched to not until death bed because they thought sins after baptism would not be forgiven – sort of like discipleship
3. **House Churches** - u couldn't purchase a plot of land and build a church building – earliest believers were going to the temple – gathering wherever they could – when house churches were full, they started a new one
4. **Written works – Apologies (defenses for the faith)** – outlining exactly why we believe what we believe in a very public manner - put out in public – intentional so that people would understand what was going on with these Christians
5. **Social Work** - melding of the proclamation of God's word with the very things we're told to do in Scripture as far as meeting needs (James 1:27)
 - i. **Widows** - widows and orphans – early church said they'd take care of **widows** – took the resources of the church, drained them, no income –
 - ii. **Abortions** - many **abortions**, people leaving babies in ditches because they were not considered humans until age 1 – church took babies in
 - iii. **Orphans** - church took orphans in
 - iv. **Plagues** - many **plagues** that happened during this time – Christians stayed behind and cared for the sick – meant that some Christians died in giving aid to nonbelievers – had an amazing opportunity to share the Gospel to those who had need

- v. **Slaves** - reached out to **slaves** – preached the Gospel to everyone regardless of age, economic status, etc.
 - vi. **Women** - in a day and age where women was not regarded as anything except property – church gave them a place to serve – gave them a place in the eyes of God
 - vii. **Convicts and Prisoners**
 - viii. **It has always been the proclamation of the Gospel AND meeting needs** – if we only do the social work without the Gospel, we've done nothing – nothing to help the Kingdom
6. **Christians in our day and time do not stand out** – if we lived by what we actually believed, we WOULD stand out – most of the time, we don't even have that level of commitment – in early church, spread the gospel through being who they were in Christ – major force perpetually proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ – evangelism was already there.
4. **What was it like to live during this time? In flux from about inception to about 300s. and become more and more complex**
- 1. **Basic unit of the church was the house church** – usually in an urban setting – more and more churches growing well beyond their single house church and would plant – couldn't have a church building until the 4th century – so, at house churches, problem of who would lead. How do you control what the teaching is? How do you keep bad teaching from creeping in?
 - i. **Organized into structure** – cry of early church became “Rally to your **Bishop!**” – who was the bishop then? If there was just ONE house church, there would still be a bishop. If this house church multiplied, you'd have a bishop over two churches
 - 1. **Ordines Majores** – major orders
 - 2. **Ordines Minores** – minor orders
 - ii. **Apostolic Succession** – faith of the apostles handed down to teaching directly through the next generation – SEE FIRST CLEMENT – from Jesus to the 12, from the 12 to the many. – the 12 would have the best teaching - being disciplined by the guys who were disciplined by the disciples – people introduced themselves as “I studied underneath the guy who studied under John”
 - 1. Apostolic succession important because it was meant to protect the **PURITY OF THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH** – this later gets very abused – if you were disciplined by the disciples, you'd basically be a leader
 - 2. in earliest church, bishop was appointed through process of ordination and that **bishop was seen as accountable for correct teaching in the life of the church**
 - 3. **the early congregations chose the bishops** – selected as a leader by the congregation – disciplined and rose out of congregations – allowed to become leaders
 - 4. **Decision was ratified by neighboring bishops** – if congregation brought along someone that was being put forward to be a bishop (primarily for planting), how would they be ordained? Bishop chooses up a person, disciplines him, in order to protect the apostolic teaching, there had to be at least 2 other bishops to vouch for the new person. Protection of the main teaching so that there

were 3 bishops that had to approve of his character, how well he reflects Christianity in his character and teaching

5. by about 150, we start getting some bad bishops in the mix

iii. Role of Bishops

1. in charge of church disciples to baptize and to lead in Lord's Supper – Clement 44
2. early church didn't think about the best organizational structure because they did not believe that they would be here – they thought Christ was coming back tomorrow, therefore there wasn't a need to establish a hierarchy – but as that time period grew, systems had to grow – things had to be put in place to protect that teaching
3. by 150, there was more heresy arising in the church, and over 100 years since Christ went to heaven and He hasn't come back yet, persecution was rising, and all this lead to structure

Final Thoughts: In David Kinnaman's book "UnChristian" he says that the church has now garnered the reputation of being a place that stands for everything they are against. Is that legit? I believe he is right. Either we have become complacent, lazy, apathetic, or completely ignorant...the church has lost its power and impact on culture. We now find ourselves trying to survive and vie for attention. I believe we have ventured a long way from the commands of Christ and the early church. May we repent individually and as the church. However, with all of this in mind we are not to become bitter about the church. Have we messed up? Of course...but that doesn't mean we bail. Jesus is constant and his grace abounds evermore. Let us redeem what generations have lost. Let us individually take our call seriously and may we finally be the power and the force that Jesus has called us to be.