

What is Church?

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Lesson 1: Created for Community

In the beginning...

- God created the heavens and the earth
- The Spirit of God hovered over the waters.
- God created man in his image – Gen 1:26-27
 - **God exists in community** – let us make man in our image...plural.
 - God exists in Trinitarian community (Father, Son and Spirit)
- Just as God exists in community, mankind was created for community.
- Gen 2:18 – not good for man to be alone...man is made for community with other people
- Gen 3:8 – God walked with them in the garden. God was present with them in the garden

Sin – the breaking of community

Gen 3:8 – they hid from the Lord.

- Community had been broken

Gen 3:12 – community with Eve was also strained

Gen 3:22-24

- 3:22 – like “us”
- banished from the garden – community with God (trinity)

We were made for community. Sin broke that community. Community must then be restored.

Concept/words for sin in Hebrew OT:

- chatha – most used word, to miss the mark/point
- avah – bent/crooked
- aval – lacking integrity (iniquity)
- avar – to cross/transgress
- ma'al – breach of trust
- pasha – revolt/rebellion against authority, particularly God's.

Sin breaks community, particularly the community of God.

- See this again with the Noah story
- The world had become so sinful that evil was everywhere and all were estranged from community with God. Except Noah. God found grace/favor with him.

The challenge/mission

- For the image of God to be restored within us
- When that is done in full, it unites us and restores us into a community of faith that are “God's people.”

Covenant – Covenant is God’s restorative process to reconstitute a people for himself. He calls together a community that is bound by a covenant to be his people.

Covenants in the ancient world

How do you make a legally binding agreement today?

If you lived on a deserted island how would you make one with the other person?

How about in the ancient world?

In Bible these agreements are called “covenants”.

Word = 286 times in the OT

Covenant defined – “an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance.” – George Mendenhall

Covenant is an agreement God makes with humanity in general or a particular person or people at a given time.

What are some covenants you can think of in the Bible?

- Noah covenant – will not destroy the earth by water (Gen 9:9)
- Abraham – chosen people, promised land, descendants to bless the nations (Gen 15:18)
- Moses – Sinai covenant/Torah (Ex 19:5) – this is the most central covenant of the OT
 - Includes everything from worship to holiness to sacrifices
- David – king on the throne from his lineage
- New covenant
 - Jeremiah points to a “new covenant” in Jer 31
 - Jesus and the New covenant – that God is saving people from their sins through the DBR of Jesus and creating a new people for himself forever...those who put their faith in Christ and become new creation.

Way covenant is used:

- We think of “make a covenant”
- Literally it is “cut a covenant”
 - Gen 31:44
 - Judges 2:2
- Why cut?

What makes something legally binding today? – Signature

What made something legally binding in their day?

- Gen 15:1-20 – cutting the animals in half
- What does this mean?
- If I don't keep my end of the deal let it be to me like it has been to these animals
- *Who walked between the pieces?*- Only God!

God takes the greater share of the deal – the blessings/promises, curses, etc.

Suzerain-Vassal (Hittite) treaties in the ANE

He is the “greater party”

Format of such treaties

1. Preamble: Invoke name of gods
2. Historical prologue (calling this “defining the relationship”)
3. Stipulations/requirements of both parties and required place to keep the record for future reference
4. Calling of witnesses
5. Blessings and curses for keeping/breaking the covenant

	Gen 15	Exodus 20	Joshua 24
Preamble	15:7	20:2	24:2
Historical Prologue	15:7	20:2	24:3-13
Requirements	15:17	20:3-17	24:14-15
Witnesses			24:22, 26
Blessings & Curses	15:12-17	20:5-7, 12	24:19-26

Genesis 15:

1. Gen 15:7
2. Gen 15:7
3. Gen 15:7
4. Gen 15:7-21

Exodus 20:

1. I am the Lord
2. Who brought you out of Egypt
3. 10 commandments
4. Blessings and curses found throughout the chapter (5-7, 12)

The whole book of Deut reads like one of these treaties. See this link -

<http://www.fivesolas.com/suzerain.htm>

Joshua 24:

1. Joshua 24:1-2

2. Joshua 24:3-13
3. Joshua 24:14-15
4. Joshua 24:22
5. Joshua 24:19-26

Joshua doesn't really make a new covenant here...he reaffirms the old agreement between God and the people. Remember, these people were not at Sinai.

Next week we will get into the New Covenant through Christ and see how God made a people for himself where he doesn't just dwell in temples or tabernacles but in us through his Holy Spirit.

Lesson 2: Ushering in a New Covenant

Covenant – formation of a relationship between two parties. Comes with stipulations, blessings and curses.

In OT there were several covenants where God established a relationship with people:

- Noah – not to destroy the earth again
- Abraham – father of many nations
- Moses – Sinai covenant and Torah given
- David – ruler on his throne from his descendants.

Didn't stop there - **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

- Hebrews 8 quotes Jer 31
- See 2 Cor 3:1-3

The people of God knew there would come a day when God would begin something new. They had a messianic hope. They didn't know all that entailed but they were looking forward to a better day.

We see that something new in Jesus.

- Jesus came to fulfill the law
- Jesus came to start something new
- By faith, the world could approach God apart from the Old Testament Law/Covenant and the lineage of Abraham...that Abraham would indeed bless many nations but that they wouldn't have to be a descendant of Abraham in a physical sense but in a faith sense (**Rom 4**)

So in Jesus, many old things took on new meaning (see **1 Peter 1:12**)

Jewish Messianic expectation – Jesus redefined their expectations.

- Didn't know the Messiah would be divine
 - There is only one God
 - So if the messiah is divine it must be God himself who comes down
- Didn't understand the messiah to be God's Son
 - Again, there is only one God
 - Son of God to them was the people of Israel (Exo 4:21-23)
- Christ/anoointed/Messiah
 - Used in ways you might not expect in the OT
 - Used of past kings of David's lineage
 - Used even of Cyrus king of Persia in Isa 45:1
 - Never used in the sense of a future divine ruler

Jesus is a connecting point between God's past covenants and the new covenant...you cannot talk about covenant without talking about the parties of the covenant...this is about God's

relationship with His people and how that is newly defined in Christ in the New Testament/Covenant:

- We don't spend much time examining those connections but they are worth spending some time on.

Jesus coming made the OT/Covenant obsolete and replaced it with something new/better/more complete:

- Again 2 Cor 3:1-3
- Romans 7:

Covenant connection with the OT: Read Matthew 1:1

- What do you notice here? - Covenants
 - Abraham – descendants/Hebrew people of God
 - David – kingship/throne

New priesthood

- Jesus is not a descendant of Moses, the other covenant guy...but there weren't any promises bound up in that.
 - He didn't need to be
 - Moses was part of the Law @ Sinai
 - Abraham was the lineage promise to the Hebrews
 - David was the kingdom/kingship promise to David about his descendants
 - There are no prophecies bound up on the descendants of Moses.
 - Moses was a Levite...remember his brother was Aaron, who became over the priesthood.
 - Jesus was of the tribe of Judah (**See Gen 49:10**)
 - Priests don't come out of the tribe of Judah...but out of Levi
 - Yet, Jesus was our High priest – see problem in **Hebrews 7:14**

New Temple:

- OT Location - Tabernacle/Temple – holy place. God's holiness among (OT) and then in his people (NT)
- John 1 – as taught Sunday morning...Jesus is Bethel (house of God)
- Once Jesus ascends to heaven at the right hand of God, we are Bethel...house/temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor 6:19**)

New King

- Of the line of David...heir of the Davidic throne
- David was king of the United Kingdom
- Those were the glory days of Israel
- To be restored under the Messiah

Festivals re-envisioned:

- **Passover – he is the lamb**
- **Day of atonement – he is the lamb/scapegoat**
- **Tabernacles – he is the living water and the light of the world**
- **Pentecost – leaves this one for the church to launch**

All that to say, the OT points us to Christ and the NT is best understood in light of the OT. There is continuity in the story and of meaning.

Covenant is community

- Every single covenant is not about an individual. It is about a community.
- First, community of descendants by physical lineage
- Second (NT) by faith lineage
 - In other words, the lineage is no longer determined by who your children are or who can trace back to Abraham or David, etc
 - The lineage is who has the same faith of Abraham, by which he and us both are declared righteous.

Kingdom of God & Church

- Jesus main message was the kingdom.
- It was the first thing he taught in Mark 1
- It was what got him killed – king of the Jews as opposed to Caesar

God reigns supreme. God has allowed this world to run its course but he also has a plan to redeem it and restore it back to how things were. That plan runs through the covenant, through Christ and to/through the Church.

The church is the embodiment of the kingdom of God.

- Lord & Master
- Servant/Slaves
- Obedience, submission
- Evangelism – sharing the good news
 - This was a word used by Rome for the good deeds Caesar had done for them
 - Christ does even better!
 - Caesar brought victory followed by peace
 - Christ brought spiritual victory...victory against sin and death that is followed by true peace as he himself is our peace
- Reconciliation of the Jews & Gentiles in Christ – Eph 2 & 3
 - Here there is one true, new humanity that Christ reigns over

Next week – Christ’s teachings, ministry, etc that point to the church and the start of the church in Acts 2

Lesson 3: Salvation: Getting “In”

We talked about the OT people of God and the covenant:

- Came through Abraham to his physical descendants via circumcision as a sign of the covenant with the promise of the land and to be God’s people.
- Covenant @ Sinai gave more stipulations of God’s expectations and blessings to his people as God brought them into the land from Egypt
- Covenant w/ David – descendant on the throne

We see all of that fulfilled in Christ – Matthew 1:1 (already mentioned numerous times) links Jesus with all of this.

As mentioned last week at the Last Supper Jesus instituted a “new covenant” in his blood, rather than the blood of the Passover lamb or the sin offering lambs.

So Jesus has instituted a new covenant with a new people. Here is the question,

How does one become a part of this covenant community of faith?

- We will work through the NT to find this answer.

Start with the Gospels

- Matthew 28:19-20 – make disciples by teaching, baptizing, etc.
- John 1 – Jesus came into the world so that people can be born of God (1:12)
- John 3 – must be born again
 - John 3:14-21 – believing and living by the truth
- People talk about being “born again Christians” but that is redundant. If you are a Christian you have been “born again” of water and Spirit.
- John 5:24 – believing crosses one over from death to life
- John 6:47 – belief = eternal life (life of the ages)
 - This is not an equation for salvation
 - Jesus is making the point that faith is part of eternal life.
- Luke 8 – parable of the sower
 - The word comes and embeds itself into our lives
 - Do we believe it and produce fruit
 - Do we let it get choked out by other things?

Belief is more than mental agreement – pistis = trust. Trust requires a life that reflects the trust that you have.

- Kid jumping into the pool...do they or don’t they. Can their belief in their parent’s love outweigh the terror of the water?

During Jesus’ ministry they didn’t have the whole picture. There were even things the disciples didn’t get until after Jesus rose from the grave.

What does it mean to believe in Jesus or have faith in Jesus?

- To affirm who he is – the Son of God, Messiah
- To affirm what he did
 - Lived a sinless life
 - Taught with authority we are to live by (Matt 7)
 - Died on a cross, was buried and rose from the grave – conquering death
 - Invited us to follow him to new life

At this point, these are all still among the Jews.

Acts

- Acts 1 – Awaiting the Holy Spirit to come in power
- Acts 2 – Spirit comes and they proclaim the risen Lord Jesus as a fulfillment of Israel's prophecies
- Those who respond are told four things:
 - repent
 - be baptized
 - baptism is for the forgiveness of their sins
 - Receive the Holy Spirit

Sin:

- Christianity has boiled the Gospel down to sin and salvation
- It is much more than that – we covered this last year but I want to say it again, briefly
- The Gospel is how God is working in this world to make all things new (Rev 21:5) and to bring about a redemption/restoration of all things that even creation waits to see the sons of God redeemed (Rom 8).
- Part of that redemption and restoration is the forgiveness of sin via Jesus paying the price for us in his own sacrifice
- Another part is Jesus' resurrection – how he overcame death so that we can be raised to new life, redeemed/incorruptible bodies (1 Cor 15).
- Sin brings about death...Jesus gives us life

The question then is, who does God choose to give this life too? What is the process by which people are brought back into a right relationship with God and their sins can be atoned for but more than that – that you can LIVE eternally and abundantly.

Repentance:

- In the OT
 - Word that means "to turn"
 - OT – there were "ways" or "paths" in which people walk – either for righteousness or for wickedness. The idea is that repentance is a change of course or walking a new path. To do that requires a turn.

- Along with the idea of an initial “turn” to God, the same verb is used in the OT for a “return”. We see this repeated as a refrain through Amos 4.

When we offer an invitation for repentance...this is a call to return to the Lord or to turn in a particular place in your life back to God.

Part of being a child of God is having a heart that is set on him...that means we will be people who continue to turn back to and return to the Lord when our lives miss the mark.

- In the NT
 - The word is about a change of mind and is connected with things like remorse and regret (ABD, 672)
 - John and Jesus both called people to repent of their sin
 - This is not new with Peter in Acts 2 – Peter is carrying on a long line of teaching

If your heart moves beyond repentance you are in a bad place. Being unwilling to relent and turn to God shows a calloused heart that needs to be softened.

God does the saving but he also works on hearts that are submissive...that takes us to baptism.

Baptism:

- “Be baptized”
- Notice it is basically always written that way – passive verb. Action done to you.
- Baptism is something we submit to
- Baptism is tied to entry into the family of God.

Baptism in Acts:

- There were two things that clearly demarcated people from being out/in. Baptism and the Holy Spirit. Baptized people are always seen as being a part of the church. We see that also with the Holy Spirit...if/when someone receives it they are seen as part of the community of faith (always paired with baptism).
- Jews – Acts 2
- Gentiles – Acts 10
- Individuals and families throughout Acts from the Philippian jailor to so many others

Baptism in the letters

- Acts – baptism is part of a narrative
- In the letters, we get more explanation/teaching on baptism.

Paul’s letters - Galatians

Gal 3:26-29 – baptized into Christ is clothed/wrapped up in Christ. Baptized into Christ = belong to Christ. We are then his. We are his possession and people. Brought into complete unity in

spite of the traditional barriers the world puts in place. Jewish benediction – not a woman, a gentile or a slave but born a Jewish man!

Paul's letters – Romans & Colossians

Romans 6 – baptism gives us new life by what God does in us through submitting to it. Buried and raised...dead people don't do the work of resurrection!

- Old person is done away with
- New life

Same point in Colossians 2:12

General Letters - 1 Peter

1 Peter 3:21 – Noah saved through water, so are we. Again, it was God who did the saving.

So far we have belief/trust, repentance and baptism

Confession:

We haven't gotten to confession. This is typically paired with baptism but it is more than that. Confession comes with obedience because it makes no sense to confess a Lord who isn't really your Lord – 2 Cor 9:13

1 Tim 6:12 – confession before witnesses. Again, we think of this as going with baptism and conversion.

Think of this like marriage. How do you know these two people are married but these other two are not? Vows, witnesses, etc...they made a commitment and people publicly heard what they said and now they are bound to it.

What are we confessing?

- Jesus Christ is Lord – let's break that down
- Jesus – his name (God saves)
- Lord = master/ruler
- This should, at its core, be a confession of Jesus' resurrection as proof of his lordship as his resurrection, in the NT, is what confirms his lordship (**Phil 2:11**)

Last, receiving the Holy Spirit

We will spend all next week on this one.

Conclusion

Why all of this?

Because this is what it takes to empty ourselves of ourselves and fill ourselves with Jesus. It takes admitting we are part of the problem and that we have no authority to fix our own mess. But we know someone who does because he went through death and came out alive again and

invites us into his kind of eternal life. It takes submission so that God can mold and shape and transform our lives to be more like Jesus.

Can't do that without believing. Can't do that without repenting. Can't do that without uniting with Christ, clothing with Christ, having sins forgiven and receiving the HS!

Lesson 4: Church: The Holy Spirit Community

Gospels

- Jesus told them to anticipate the coming of the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit would serve in several capacities in the early church
 - Remind them of what Jesus taught
 - Counselor
 - Guide them in all truth
 - Help them when brought before rulers to have the words to say

Jesus' instructions - Acts 1:4, 8

- Wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit will give them power (dunamis)

Now this was typical of how they saw the Holy Spirit up to this time.

- OT – Holy Spirit would come on someone to give them power to do a particular task.
 - We see this most particularly in Judges
 - Othniel – Judges 3:10
 - Gideon – Judges 6:34
 - Jephthah – Judges 11:29
 - Samson – Judges 14:6 (enabled him to tear a lion to pieces)

So the HS was expected to come upon someone in power for a particular purpose and for a particular time.

What was different this time?

- Joel 2 is quoted – that in the later days the HS will be given to people great and small...indiscriminately.
- This time the HS became an integral part in the life of the believer.
- This is not just a partial or temporary indwelling for a particular purpose...instead, there is a new purpose in the life of the community of faith.

1 – HS given at baptism and is connected with the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38)

- This wasn't just about key leaders
- This was about the HS being the marker of all of God's people from least to the greatest

2 – The HS has a role in the life of the individual believer

- Guides us in all truth – John 16:13
- Regenerates us – Titus 3:5
- Glorifies and testified to Christ – John 15:26, 16:14
- Leads us – Rom 8:14, Gal 5:18
- Sanctifies us – 2 Thess 2:13, 1 Pet 1:2, Rom 5:16

- Empowers us – Rom 15:19, Acts 1:8
- Fills us – Eph 5:18, Acts 2:4
- Teaches us to pray – Rom 8:26-27
- Bears witness we are God’s children – Rom 8:16
- Produces fruit in us – Gal 5:22
- Gives spiritual gifts – 1 Cor 12:4, 8-10
- Washes and renews us – Titus 3:5
- Deposit and guarantee – 2 Cor 1:22 & 5:5
- Seals us – Rom 8:2
- Dwells in us – Rom 8:9
- Transforms us into the image of Christ – 2 Cor 3:18
- Could give dozens more

3 – The HS has a role in the communal life of the church

- Brings unity to Christians – Eph 4:3
- Gifts the church for service and worship – 1 Cor 12:4ff & 1 Cor 14

Moving temples

We are the Holy Spirit community until we see God face to face

- God dwelt in Eden (Gen 1-3)
- God dwells in heaven to new heavens and new earth (Rev 21)
- God dwelt in the cloud/pillar of fire (Exo 13:20-22)
- God dwelt in the tabernacle (Exo 40:34)
- God dwelt in the temple (1 Kings 8)
- God dwelt in Jesus – John 1
- God dwells in us – 1 Cor 6:19

Miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit

Romans 12:6-8

1. Serving
2. Teaching
3. Encouraging
4. Giving/generosity
5. Leadership

1 Cor 12:4-11

1. Speaking in tongues – always an actual language either human (see Pentecost) or angelic (see 1 Cor 13)
2. Interpretation of tongues – 1 Cor 12:10
3. Prophecy – this isn’t just future telling, this is speaking inspired words from God (1 Cor 12:10).
4. Healing – miraculous powers to heal the sick and raise the dead (all through Acts & 1 Cor 12:9)
5. Message of Wisdom/knowledge – 1 Cor 12:8

1 Cor 12:28

Miraculous gifts today:

- The Holy Spirit still does many things in the life of the Christian
- The Holy Spirit doesn't seem to work in all of the miraculous ways the HS worked in the first century church
- Some believe the HS fulfilled his role in supporting the message of Christ in the first believers and then made a shift.
- Why this is the case is hard to understand
- I am open to miracles and the working of the HS. However, I am cautious about it – I don't think people today have the ability to command things as they did, in the name of Jesus.

Lesson 5: The Church as an Extension or Fulfillment of Israel

The Jews were used to worshipping in 3 places:

- Synagogue
- Temple
- Home

We are going to discuss each of those and then talk about parallels in the NT and the birth of the church.

Synagogue

Synagogue: The church didn't spring out of the blue. It came from some where in particular. Those who started the first churches were Jewish and were participants in the synagogue.

Word means "place of assembly" or "house of worship"

Orientation: Synagogues were typically built pointing toward Jerusalem and often near a source of water (See Acts 16 and the "place of prayer"). If there wasn't a source of water nearby they would make a cistern for storing water on site.

Furniture: The main piece of furniture was the ark/chest that held the scrolls/scriptures. These were put up against the wall that faced Jerusalem.

A platform was often present for the reading of the Torah. Benches were also common as was the "chief seat" for the one presiding over the assembly (See Matt 23:2).

Menorah's were also often in synagogues.

Synagogue and church

The synagogue provided a place for theological discussion and it was often the setting for Jesus' and Paul's teaching. It was the center of the community being the school, place of prayer and basically serving a legal/disciplinary function.

Synagogue worship service

Length: Service would be several hours long

Two main activities:

- Prayer
- Study of Scripture
- Services were on the Sabbath but also held throughout the week.

Order of worship (See Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament By Scott):

- Blessings

- Profession of faith via Reciting the Shema (Deut 6) – chanted by the congregation in unison
- Praise
- Prayer – 18th benedictions
 - 3 blessings/praises – praise God’s power, grace and how he gives Israel hope
 - 12 petitions/requests – knowledge, repentance, deliverance, health, etc.
 - 3 thanksgivings – God’s goodness and ask for a blessing
 - Give examples
 - These were to be recited daily as was the Shema
 - And we complain about singing the same songs over and over!
 - Each prayer ended with all saying “Amen” (truly)
- Priestly blessing given with their hands raised
- Readings:
 - One from the Torah
 - One from the Prophets
 - Eventually developed a lectionary – 3 year cycle that covered Gen-Deut
 - All read in Hebrew
- Sermon/Scribe or expert in the Law – IF someone was there and ready/qualified they could give a sermon on the texts that were read that made application (Midrash).

Synagogue organization:

Needed 10 men to start one. Positions included:

- Head/presider over the synagogue – this was a man who was a well respected leader in the community.
- Servant – kept things organized, tended the scrolls, etc (this one was paid)
- This is similar to elder and deacon today.

Value systems in play

Valued community. Things were public and people knew what was going on. This was about a body of or community of believers who were there to support each other. If a poor girl had no dowry or someone had no food, the synagogue was a source for benevolent work where the community could pool resources to use in these situations.

Values dependence over independence – In the synagogue when a book of Moses was completed the assembly would shout together, “Be strong, Be Strong, and let us strengthen one another!” (Wilson, 190).

Participation – there were priests present but they were not required to be. People from the community could pronounce blessings, etc.

Temple

Temple in the NT

The temple was seen as the connecting point between heaven and earth. God was believed to be present in the holy of holies. The priests and Levites had special temple duties regarding the running of the temple, worship, sacrifices, festival duties, etc.

Baptism – before Jews could enter the temple they had to immerse in “living water” (water from a stream). Gentile conversion to Judaism required immersion because they viewed the Gentiles to be unclean and dead due to their idolatry. To be cleansed and a convert they had to be washed.

All Jews were required to come to Jerusalem for the main feasts but most probably didn’t make it for all of them every time. This was the place God chose to make his name dwell.

The temple was LARGE: Court of the Gentiles was 35 acres and fenced in. Inside of that was the court of women and even further in the Court of Israel and last the Court of the priests.

Home

Home:

Home was seen in Judaism as a small version of the temple:

- In the temple were two loaves of bread...in the home on Sabbath they baked two loaves of bread to remind them that God was present in their home.
- Shema was recited daily by observant Jews and in the synagogue as well.
- Daily times of prayer – Acts 3:1
- Meals were seen as religious moments where God was to be thanked and things purified for consumption (washings, etc – see **Matt 23:25-26**)
 - Dinner table was seen as the altar in the temple.
 - Eating was a spiritual/religious service just as the had fellowship offerings (eating with God) in the temple
 - Just like the altar in the temple, the table in the home was consecrated...it was set apart for “one does not live by bread alone” – Deut 8:3, Matt 4:4
 - Singing – this was done around the table just as songs were sung in the temple – See **Matthew 26:30**
- 18 Benedictions also recited in the home – **notice Acts 2:42 “the prayers”**
- Believed the home was more important than the synagogue. The home was the center of religious life, not the synagogue.
- One rabbi said that if every synagogue were to close around the world Judaism would not be destroyed (much of this is from Wilson, 216)
- Faith was passed on in the home by the parents. Laypeople (including these same people) ran the synagogue...not professionals. So the synagogue was a natural outgrowth of the home. Faith was present and practiced in both.

Christianity in light of all of this

Christian assembly – met in homes: Acts 2:46, 5:42, 8:3, Rom 16:5, 10, 11

Also did the traditional acts of worship found in Judaism.

- Singing – Eph 5:19
- Praying – 1 Cor 11
- Prophesying – 1 Cor 11, 14
- Studying the scriptures – Acts 2, 2 Tim 3:16, 2 Peter 3:16
- Lord's Supper derived out of Passover
- Baptism came out of Gentile proselyte conversion

Lesson 6 & 7: God on a Mission – In & Out

1 Cor 14 shows us that some activities of the church are done with insiders in mind and some with outsiders in mind.

- 14:12 – gifts that build up the church come first
- 14:22-25 – some gifts are for outsiders/non-believers

We also see this in **Galatians 6:10**

Exercise for class – go through the entire book of Acts, chapter by chapter and identify which things they did and whether they were doing something that was: inward focused, outward focused or both. This took us two weeks giving each person a chapter, giving them time to read and then tell us what they found.

Here are a few things that I found as I took notes to be able to engage the class and prompt them with some things that I found in case anyone was having a hard time. Make sure, as the teacher, you read the whole book and take notes so you are prepared to discuss with each person on each chapter.

Acts 1

7-8 – be witnesses throughout the world

13-14 – together, in prayer

23-26 – replacing Judas

Acts 2

1-13 – speaking to the nations via the Holy Spirit

14-41 – Peter's sermon at Pentecost

42-47 – the fellowship of believers (don't miss God adding to their number)

Acts 3

1-10 – healing a lame beggar (hone in on 3:9)

Acts 4

1-22 – Peter and John speaking to the Jewish authorities (see 4:4)

23-31 – the believers gather and pray together

32-37 – the believers share things together

Acts 5

1-11 – Ananias and Sapphira (see vs 11)

12-16 – apostles heal many, more believe and believers were together near the temple.

17-42 – persecuted by the Jewish authorities (emboldened – 42)

Acts 6

1-7 – choosing of Stephen and more believers reached
8-15 – Stephen defending his faith

Acts 7
Stephen's speech and his death

Acts 8
1-8 – Persecution and scattering
25 – proclaiming the word to more people
26-40 – Ethiopian

Acts 9
1-32 – Saul's conversion
32-43 – Dorcas resurrected

Acts 10
Cornelius

Acts 11
1-18 – Peter explains his actions
19-30 – Antioch (24, 26)

Acts 12
1-19 Escape from prison and reuniting with the praying believers

Acts 13
1-3 – worshiping and sending
4-52 – mission work (see also 52)

Acts 14
Mission work

Acts 15
Jerusalem council

Acts 16
Mission work

Acts 17
Mission work

Acts 18
Mission work

Acts 19
Mission work

Acts 20
7-12 – Eutychus
13-38 – Ephesian elders encouragement and goodbye

Acts 21
1-16 – on the way to Jerusalem and the connection with many brothers along the way
17-26 – Paul in Jerusalem with the Christians there
27-40 – speaks to the crowd

Acts 22
Speaks to the crowd & Sanhedrin

Acts 23
Sanhedrin, plot and moving Paul for safety

Acts 24
Trial before Felix

Acts 25
Trial before Festus and Agrippa

Acts 26
Trial before Agrippa continued

Acts 27
Sailing for Rome & shipwreck

Acts 28
1-10 – Malta
11-31 – Paul under house arrest in Rome where he preaches and teaches under guard (and writes some pretty good letters too!)

Acts 29 [this is us]

Lesson 8: What is Worship?

Over the last few months we have been talking about what it means to be the church. Tonight we are going to talk about Christian worship from a New Testament perspective.

Worship defined:

- We have a few words in English
- Worship – literally from “worth+ship” = ascribe worth to someone/something
 - Adoration vs Veneration
- Worship = 83 times in the English NT
- Greek had several words that we translate worship with various shades of meaning (ranked by frequency):
 - Verbs:
 - προσκυνεω – worship (fall flat on your face) (49/83)
 - λατρευω – serve (14/83) = “worship service” – redundant but that is where that came from.
 - σεβω – show reverence (6/83)
 - Nouns:
 - Λατρεία & λειτουργεω – service, serve, worship

Examples of these:

Proskuneo

Matthew 4:9 – if you will fall down and proskuneo me

Matthew 4:10 – worship (proskuneo) the Lord your God and serve (latreuo) him only

Matthew 28:9 – took hold of his feet and proskuneo

Acts 10:25 – falling at his feet, worshiped him

Rev 5:14 – fell down and worshipped

This literally means to fall down and worship – over time just a general word for worship. IN the general sense:

John 4:21-23

Latreuo

Luke 2:37 – worshipped there...she was serving in the temple.

Heb 9:14 – dead works to worship the living God – one type of service/works is dead...but another type is worship.

Rev 22:3 – his servants will worship him (servants do service).

Noun form – Rom 12:1-2 – spiritual act of worship/service

What you will notice here is that there are different locations and dimensions for worship:

- Sometimes (Luke 2:37) the worship is “in the temple” proper
- But mostly the worship described isn’t confined to a set of “to do’s” rather is a way of living life and doing things that bring honor to God.
 - John 4:21 – neither here nor in Jerusalem but in Spirit and truth

- Rom 12:1-2 – offer yourselves as a living sacrifice as your spiritual service/worship.

Before we talk about what and where...let's talk about who & why

Why worship?

We believe there is one God who made the entire universe. He made the planets and he made the plants, animals and us. We believe that this God who made all things isn't just loving in His actions...We believe his very essence is love (**1 John 4:8**).

God is worthy to be worshipped just because of WHO he is.

Not only is God worthy to be worshipped just because of who he is but also because of what He has done...

Exodus 20:1 – I am the Lord who brought of you out of Egypt, therefore...

Psalm 136 – God is to be worshipped because of His past acts of righteousness and faithfulness.

God has a history with mankind...he is to be praised for what He *has* done.

Not just that but also because of what God *will do*.

God is to be praised because God is beyond our *ability* and our *understanding* – **Job 38:1-42:6**

We spend a lot more time on how to worship than on why we worship. We worship because God is real and because God has done so much for us on our behalf.

What and where of worship:

What

When we say "worship" what comes to mind?

- Singing
- Lord's supper
- Public prayers
- Sermon
- Scripture reading

The words they used that were immersed in the sense of worship was to *serve* God...this is not passive but active. This was done on a particular day (Sabbath in the synagogue and the festivals) AND in every day life.

There isn't so much a distinction between public and private worship as there is between community worship/assembly and individual/family devotion and acts of service.

Where - Judaism

That means worship is all the time AND it is especially done in a particular time and place. For the Jews and even early Christians that was the synagogue and the temple.

For the Jews it was the synagogue and the temple...but one that was most important was the home. The home was seen as a mini-temple of sorts.

Where – Christianity

Corporate worship assembly vs the individual/family worship gathering.

There are times we gather as a community of faith for particular reasons.

- When we packed meals for the hungry – that was worship as in service to God and others.
- When we gather to sing, learn, pray and partake of the Supper – that is worship

Worship is not confined to that but those are certainly special and powerful times that should be focused on:

- Vertical
- Horizontal

Lesson 9: Seven Churches Part 1

The word ekklesia/church is used 19 times in Revelation

- 18 times in 1-3
- 1 time in 22

Let's start with 22:16 – this letter has been Christ's testimony to the churches.

Revelation starts with some church discipline

- 2 sides of discipline: reward and punishment/warning
- The letters to the 7 churches are church discipline – both reward and punishment.

A look at the 7 churches and what we can learn from them today

Purpose statement – 1:4-8

- Rev 1:5 – Jesus as the witness (Greek word = martyr)
- His faithfulness and his blood also point to the price he paid, dying for us “Freed us from our sins” by his blood.
- 1:6 – who he, then, has made us to be – kingdom of priests to serve/serving (supplied word) God
- 1:7 - Promise of his return

Description of Christ

- Emphasizes his priestly role by his garments
- Authority – holds the keys
- His presence – among the lampstands

This is the foundation for anything that needs to be said to the churches, even to us, is who Jesus is.

Significance of 7 Churches: These letters are written to them but there are things for every single Christian and every single church to learn.

Structure of the Letters (Ben Witherington III, 91):

- Address to the angel of the church
- “thus sayeth” = directly from the Lord
- Description of the one sending the message (all from chapter 1)
- Commendation
- Formula – “But I have one thing against you” – description of this fault
- Judgment if they don't listen or follow the teaching
- “he who has ears...”
- Promise of victory

1. Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7)

Population: 250,000 (3rd largest city in the Roman Empire)

Pagan worship in Ephesus:

Temple of Artemis - one of the seven wonders of the ancient world

Emperor worship was big in Ephesus and was a hub for it – 27 ft tall statue of Domitian, the emperor at the time Revelation was written.

Description of Christ (2:1) – From Revelation 1:20

Praise – Hard work, endurance, perseverance, intolerant of wicked, false apostles (2:2-3)

Judgment - Forsaking their first love (2:4)

What does this mean?

Probably refers to the way they were treating each other. 1 John links our treatment with others as a reflection of our relationship with God. Ephesians 5 links Christ and his church very tightly. **Nicolaitans** (2:6) – no reference to this group outside of Revelation so we don't know what their error was. The word itself means "Victory people". This is in contrast to the Christians who are then told to "overcome" (2:7)

2. Smyrna (2:8-11)

Would you say this congregation is rich or poor? Why?

More on this in a bit...

Distance: 35 miles from Ephesus

Population: 75,000 (14th largest city in the Roman empire)

Geography - The next city on the circular route of the letters in Revelation 2-3.

Poverty & Pagan worship in Smyrna –

John mentions their poverty. This might have been due to the prevalence of guilds in Smyrna where one was expected to worship the patron god of the guild in order to have employment in a particular field of business.

Temple to Roma, goddess of Rome dating back to 195 BC. A very loyal city to Rome.

This is one of two churches to receive only praise with no criticisms. The other is Philadelphia.

Very large Jewish population in Smyrna which is reflected in Christ's statement to them in 2:9

Description of Christ – From 1:5, 17

Praise – You appear poor but are rich

- contrast this with Laodicea in 3:17 who claim to be rich but are poor
- Prosperous city – poor Christians. Could this have something to do with their abstaining from guilds and civic/cultic worship?
- Rich in the eyes of God – *What makes someone rich in God's eyes?*

Jesus knows...(2:9)

How does it help us get through difficulty if we know Christ knows about it?

Jews and the synagogue of Satan (2:9):

These were Jews...large Jewish population in Smyrna

Synagogue means to gather – assembly

Who you serve is who you are ultimately assembled with – God or Satan

Judaism was recognized as a religion and were at times exempt from emperor worship

Jews cast Christians out of the synagogues thus removing them from being exempt from emperor worship putting them at risk of further persecution.

Prediction of future suffering (2:10):

Possibility of death, assurance of eternal life

Title of Christ in 2:8 has something to say to them – Christ died and is now alive. If they die they too will live.

3. Pergamum (2:12-17)

Distance: 45 miles from Smyrna

Population: 120,000 (6th largest city in the Roman empire)

Description of Christ – 2 edged sword was a slap against the city officials. Since this was a capital city they were one of few cities that had the right to execute. The proconsul had the power to choose life or death. Christ is speaking against that, calling it a lie. He is the one who holds authority over life and death.

Pagan worship in Pergamum:

Emperor cult was big in Pergamum – 1st city allowed to build a temple to a living ruler (Mounce, 96)

Temple to Zeus was in Pergamum who they called “savior”

Temples to Athena, Dionysos, and Asclepius (god of healing, represented by a serpent)

Satan’s Throne - Any one of these could be what is referenced to as the “throne of Satan” in 2:13

Praise:

They have kept the faith even to the point of death (Antipas).

Yet, they are permissible on impermissible issues (Food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality)

Nicolaitans – Beasley Murray contended that these may have been wealthier members of the church who wanted to compromise with culture. BWIII cites him with the statement that their rationalization might have been, “Even the Romans don’t really believe the Emperor is a god, so why not just go along, and have a good living as a member of a guild?” (BWIII, 103)

Food sacrificed to idols (2:14, see also 2:20 with Thyatira) – it was a common practice in Roman cities to have many offerings to gods and to eat that offering was a part of being in a particular guild (employment) or just as part of a social gathering or part of pagan worship. To not eat this meat could mean losing employment opportunities and status in the city.

Sexual immorality/Balaam/Balak (2:14):

Numbers 22-24 – Balaam was hired by Balak to curse the Israelites but he blessed them instead

Numbers 25 – Israelites had sexual relations with foreigners and worshipped their gods

Numbers 31:16 – links Balaam with Numbers 25 as the reason for that sin.

- As Archer points out in Letters to the Lamb (p.90-91) it was Balaam who sought out a loophole where he could not curse the Israelites and check a box with God while still receiving the payout from Balak in bringing destruction on Israel. He did this by sending in foreign women to turn the hearts of the people against God
- Archer points out the problem here and now at Pergamum is **compromise**.
 - Mounce, 98 – “Balaam became a prototype of all corrupt teachers who betrayed believers into fatal compromise with worldly ideologies.”

This is what Christ is playing on here – Christians in Pergamum were in danger of syncretizing their religion:

- Eating meat sacrificed to idols
 - Sexual immorality
 - The two might be linked as well since both could be involved in pagan worship.
- Paul dealt with this in 1 Cor 8-10 and concluded that it was permissible for the mature who were wise enough to separate the worship to pagan gods with the food.

John did not think this was something they should be engaged in

Why the difference between Paul and John on the same issue?

- It could be the maturity level of their audience.
 - Paul – referring to meat in the market from the temple
 - John – referring to going to the temple to partake in the ritual worship meals
- Archer’s 5 areas we must not compromise in from this letter to the church at Pergamum
- Doctrine
 - Lifestyle
 - Danger of inclusivity
 - Worship
 - Greed – Balaam wanted the money and loopoled his way to the payout.

Hidden Mana & White stones (2:17)

Hidden mana – goes back to Balaam/Balak but also may point against the gods of the city Vander Laan talks about (Dionysius?) the food/grocery god.

- The ark contained a jar of mana – this was to be a memorial of God’s provision to future generations (Exo 16:32-34, Heb 9:4 - Mounce, 99)
- 2 Maccabees 2:4-7 has the tradition that Jeremiah took the ark at the destruction of the temple and hid it underground at Mt. Nebo. He would come back and return it to the new temple in the Messianic age

- Contrast the hidden mana with the food offered to idols above

White stones were used by a jury to show innocence/acquittal.

Vander Laan believes the white stone refers to the temple of Asclepius who had white stones outside people would inscribe with what they had been healed of.

Application:

How are Christians tempted to compromise today?

- What we watch on TV, movies, internet, music?

How does the hope of better and lasting promises help us remain pure?

Do some Christians today mix their faith with worldly or even pagan things?

- Superstition – a belief in impersonal forces/powers that can influence an outcome if something is not done just right
- Phrases we use – good luck, not in the cards, etc
- Spirituality – ala carte faith

4. Thyatira (2:18-28)

Distance: 40 miles from Pergamum

Population: The least “important” of all seven cities from a worldly point of view. They are faced with the same scenario as Pergamum, pagan practices that lead to spiritual adultery (food sacrificed to idols being a part of this)

Description of Christ:

eyes like blazing fire and feet like bronze (from Rev 1:14-15)

- See Daniel 10:6

Son of God – only time that is used in Revelation

- Why is this the only time it is used? Because it is relevant to Thyatira. Their patron God was Apollo Tyrimnos who was thought to be the son of Zeus (Mounce, 102)

Pagan worship: Many trade guilds as this was a manufacturing city.

Jezebel: Israelite queen who led many astray through compromising with the surrounding culture and idol worship. That is the parallel here.

Compromise – rationale might be something similar to what BWIII mentioned in regard to Pergamum...since these gods aren't real anyway we might as well participate in some of the things that would allow them entrance into employment through the trade guilds.

Her punishment (2:22): Reddish points out the irony of the punishment...you like sexual immorality, fine...I will put you on a sick bed and make you suffer great pain. Notice too, those who commit adultery with her will also suffer (Reddish, 65)

Praise (2:19) – love, faith, service, and perseverance

Fornication/sexual immorality (2:20): Idol worship and compromise are adultery against God.

Morning star (2:28) – A symbol of victory or sovereignty

Compromise:

What dangers do Christians face at compromising today?

How can the world be seductive to Christians today?

What promises does the world make that are empty?

What makes Christ's promises greater?

Lesson 10: Seven Churches Part 2

5. Sardis (3:1-6)

Distance: 30 miles from Thyatira

Population: 100,000 (7th largest city in the Roman empire). Had a large Jewish population. Destroyed by an earthquake in AD 17 and was rebuilt by John's day. The quake also damaged Philadelphia 28 miles away

Sardis had a garment making industry (BWIII, 106)

This sheds light on Christ's "white garment" analogy for purity and holiness among them

Soiled garments were a disqualification for entering worship in some religions (BWIII)

Mounce believes this was the disqualification of their witness due to contamination by the world.

Sardis had only twice been defeated, both times because of lack of vigilance (BWIII, 106) – Wake up!

Description of Christ (3:1) – Holds 7 spirits and 7 stars (from Revelation 1:4,20)

Pagan worship in Sardis:

See Vander Laan video – was it cultural compromise or boldness of a newly repented church? No one knows.

"God wants us to build at the heart of our culture...but we have to be careful that we don't compromise. You are the salt of the earth" – Vander Laan

Judgment toward the church (3:1) – They seem to be alive but are dead

How is it possible for a church to appear alive but underneath it all are dead?

Cure for a dying church - Five Commands (3:2-3):

Wake up/be alert

Strengthen

Remember

Obey

Repent

What might it look like for a church to seem alive but actually be dead?

What are the marks of being alive?

- The Spirit
 - Ezek 37 – the bodies are dead and you can tell because they aren't breathing
 - Ezek 37 – enter the Spirit to resurrect them back to life again
 - Go back to Adam and God breathing the breath of life...the Ruach entered Adam and he became alive
 - We must be full of the Spirit if we are to be alive
- Fruit
 - The Spirit will produce in us fruit according to its kind (Gal 5:22ff)

- You can tell a tree is dead when it stops producing fruit, leaves, etc.

Application:

Which of these commands do you think churches today need to hear the most?

Which of these commands do you think you need to hear the most?

6. Philadelphia (3:7-13)

Distance: 28 miles from Sardis

Pagan worship in Philadelphia:

Main god was Bacchus, the god of wine. Philadelphia had a lot of vineyards.

Called “little Athens” (Mounce, 116) due to its plethora of temples

This all points back to Isaiah 22:22

- Keys to the house of David may refer to Isa 22:22. Mounce says, “The language of Isaiah is used to present Christ as the Davidic Messiah with absolute power to control entrance to the heavenly kingdom.”
- He also says it refers to Christ’s authority to include or exclude people from the New Jerusalem. (Mounce, 116)
- Door no one can shut – Also goes back to Isaiah 22:22. Again, Christ has the authority to allow or deny entrance into the kingdom of God.

Judgment: None

Praise:

This is one of two churches to receive only praise with no criticisms. The other is Smyrna Synagogue of Satan

- Christians being kicked out of the synagogue for their belief in Christ is held in contrast to Christ allowing them entrance into the New Jerusalem by holding the Key of David.

Three rewards for faithfulness (Mounce):

Vindication (3:9)

Deliverance (3:10)

Security in the coming age (3:11)

Pillars in the temple of God (3:12)

Christians referred to as “pillars” in the temple of God. Pillars some times had names written on them in dedication. Having God’s name, name of his city and Christ’s name written on them. So they are being dedicated to God as a permanent fixture in his dwelling place. Quite an honor...that is, if they hold on (3:11)

- A mark of belonging/identity
- A mark of security

Application:

Importance of stressing faithfulness – this is not an academic exercise...it has real consequences with positive or negative results

What are the positive results of faithfulness we see through the church in Philadelphia?

- God will reward them three-fold...see above
- *What are the negative results we have seen in churches like Ephesus and Pergamum?*
- God will come and remove them or even fight against them

7. Laodicea (3:14-22)

Distance: 45 miles from Thyatira. 10 miles from Colossae

Prosperity of Laodicea:

Destroyed by an earthquake in 60.

They rebuilt the city with their own money, refusing help from Rome.

Laodicea was known for three things:

- Textiles – lots of sheep/wool...made special black garments (contrast that with the white ones Christ wants to give them)
- Banking – wealthy through agriculture and “commercial prosperity” (Mounce, 123)
- eye salve – had a medical school, most famous for its eye salve

Christ plays on these three things in Revelation 3:18) where he tells them they are not independent. They need Christ for things that will last.

The problem of self-sufficiency

- *Is this something Christians struggle with today?*
- *How do we see this in our contemporary culture?*
- *How do Christ’s words to this church speak to us today?*

Hot/cold: Christ also plays off the water supply of the city that was supplied by a hot spring but turned cool on its way toward the city making it lukewarm and good for little.

Problem here is, why would Christ rather them be cold.

Mounce agrees with Vander Laan that it is a contrast between the hot waters of Hierapolis and the cold waters of Colossae. Both good for different things. They were neither = ineffectual Christianity

- Hot water of Hierapolis (95 degrees) from a hot spring
 - Useful for cleaning things, bleaching things, etc
 - Steaming mineral baths
- Cold water of Colossae – refreshing and fresh to drink
- *What effect are we, as Christians, to have on this world?*
- *How can you tell if we are accomplishing this?*

Still hope:

Despite all their problems and weaknesses, there is still hope

Pagan worship in Philadelphia:

Primary god worshipped in Laodicea was Zeus

The rest of Revelation in light of the context of these seven churches

The best way to understand the bulk of Revelation is to understand the situation of those who are being written to...they were supposed to understand most of what this meant (Rev 1:3 – read and take to heart)

So let's look back at what we can gather from these churches from the seven letters and see if any themes jump out:

Ephesus – you have endured hardships but forsaken your first love (2:3-4)

Smyrna – don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer...be faithful to the point of death (2:10)

Pergamum – you remain true to my name (2:13)

Thyatira – perseverance (2:19), hold on until I have come! (2:25), overcome (2:26)

Sardis – He who overcomes (3:5)

Philadelphia – kept my word and endured patiently (3:8,10)

Laodicea – called to repent from their accommodation and then told, “to him who overcomes...” (3:21)

Two things you hear – some were faithfully undergoing persecution and others were culturally accommodated.

You typically hear Revelation was written to tell Christians “We win!” and that is true but that message hits two different audiences two different ways:

If you have been faithful, keep going!

If you have accommodated, wake up!

“It is not that Christians are undergoing persecution but that they have become so much like the world around them that they are not worth persecuting.” – Randy Harris, Spiritual Growth Workshop 08 (Tape 1, 5:27)

This is true depending on which church you are talking about

He contends that Revelation is about getting Christians to “adopt a lifestyle that is almost certainly going to bring them into conflict with the culture of which they are a part. And probably bring with it opposition and persecution.”

John's purpose, then, in Revelation is to present an alternative worldview to the worldview of the pagan world around us. It is a call back to holiness and righteousness and a call to remind us why we are different than the world.

So this is a call to persevere and to be different

- to be who they were called to be that might lead them into persecution in some instances
- to be called to stand firm for those who have not accommodated and are currently undergoing persecution.

This makes the book far more relevant – calling an accommodated church to reclaim their original identity and mission and to those who have been serious about their mission to keep on keeping on and persevere.