

WHO CAME BETWEEN JESUS AND OUR GRANDMOTHERS AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Group:

- Come up with a definition of church history. What is it?
- List as many reasons as possible for studying church history
- From Capitol Hill:
 - God commands us to be students of the past.
 - God's people are reminded to remember his faithfulness to them in the past: his special covenant with them, his bringing them from Egypt, defeating their enemies time and again. We see the pattern as persistent: The Israelites did best when they remembered; they flailed and faltered when they forgot. This is also why God commanded them to build monuments and practice yearly ceremonies: He wanted them to remember what he did for them. We do not build monuments anymore, but some of our local church practices (baptism and the Lord's Supper) remind us of God's faithfulness and grace. So we should make a habit of remembering the past.
 - By the Gospel, we've been adopted into a family that spans races, cultures, borders, and even time.
 - Can benefit from knowing our family tree and history.
 - In Ecclesiastes we are reminded "there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9).
 - As we will undoubtedly see in this course many of the same disagreements and heresy will be repeated. They may be at different times and in different ways, but a student of history is better equipped to address these problems and provide clear responses.
 - History should humble us and encourage us and equip us for evangelism
 - I pray this course serve as a source of humility for us as we remind ourselves that we do not exist in a bubble of our current circumstance, but can learn great things from the remembering the past. And I pray that we are encouraged by the boldness and sacrifice of our brothers and sisters now passed. May their examples serve as reminders of the Gospel.

Individually:

- Why are you taking this course?
- What do you hope to learn?

Group Pop Quiz:

- See handout.

Course Overview:

- August 17 – Landon out on this night
- August 24 – Who's Your Daddy? The Church Fathers and the Development of Scripture, Worship, and Leadership in the Early Church
- August 31 – C3PO: Constantine, Controversy, & Councils
- September 7 – Who turned out the lights? The Dark Ages
- September 14 – The Wild Boar: Luther and the Dawn of the Reformation
- September 21 – More than Cheese and Clocks: Calvin and Reformation
- September 28 – Puritans and Great Awakenings
- October 7 – Making Potlucks Great Again: A History of Baptists

Helpful Resources:

- *The Unquenchable Flame* – Reeves
- *The Story of Christianity* – Gonzalez

- *Seven Summits in Church History* – Duesing
- *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity, 3rd Edition* - Noll

Tonight's 1st lesson since I will be out next week

- The early church
 - Where did the church come from?
 - What were some difficulties faced by the early church?
 - For a time, Christianity existed in relative peace under Rome because of the official protection that was afforded to Judaism, since the new religion looked like a small sect within the older faith. However, as we see in the book of Acts, "Followers of Jesus", as they were called ran into significant opposition with the Jewish establishment. And as historian Mark Noll says, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD is the first major turning point in church history, because it is then that the church is forced out from the protective umbrella of Judaism.
 - Pax Romana
 - How did it spread?
 - Acts 1:8 – how the rest of Acts unfolds this
 - God's plan for the advance of the gospel is His church
 - God's provision for the advance of the gospel is His Spirit
 - Acts 1:8 – 2 (Pentecost) – 4:8 – 4:31 – 5:42 – 6:10
 - What drew people to Christianity?
 - First, Christian charity held great appeal. Christians became known and admired for their kindness, hospitality, and generosity to those in need. Second, in contrast to the rigid social hierarchy of the Roman Empire, Christians valued all persons equally, and modeled a community that broke down social barriers. Third, Christians valued all persons individually. Whereas Rome placed a premium on civic unity, making the individual person subordinate to the imperial cult, Christianity affirmed the dignity and worth of each human being. Fourth, Christianity promised the power of good over evil. Many Romans believed in evil spirits, and this new faith seemed to offer protection against the demonic. Related to this, a fifth reason for Christianity's appeal was its promise of deliverance from death, and eternal life. Finally, as persecution of Christians intensified, the bold and faithful witness of many believers facing torture and death could not be ignored. Something about this faith must be real, people reasoned; why else would these Christians die for it?
 - Persecution:
 - Cited Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Ecclesiastical History by Eusebius
 - Paul was imprisoned under Nero, then beheaded in Rome
 - James the brother of John was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12:2)
 - Thomas went as far as India where he was "slain with a dart" (arrow?)
 - Simon Peter was crucified (according to Jerome) upside down in Rome under Nero
 - Simon the Zealot preached throughout Africa, was also crucified
 - Mark founded the church in Egypt and was burned alive
 - Bartholomew preached in Armenia and "after divers persecutions, he was beaten down with staves, then crucified; and after being excoriated, was beheaded."
 - Andrew evangelized in Ethiopia, was crucified
 - Matthew preached in Egypt and Ethiopia, until the king had him "run through with a spear"
 - Philip ministered in Greece, was "crucified and stoned to death"
 - James the brother of Jesus was beaten to death by Pharisees and Sadducees
 - John the apostle was exiled on the isle of Patmos, and later died of natural causes

- As to Nero, political rivals deposed him four years later, and the disgraced tyrant took his own life. Just two years after that, in **AD 70**, the Romans forces quelling yet another Jewish rebellion also destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem. Tragic though it was, as one Christian historian points out, this also marked a decisive “turning point” in church history. Christianity made its final break from Judaism, as it lost its last ties with the Temple and with Jerusalem, and emerged as its own distinctive faith.
- But persecution would return. In **AD 98**, the Emperor Trajan launched a campaign against the church that would last for almost two decades. In a revealing correspondence between Pliny the Younger, governor of the province of Bithynia, and Trajan, Pliny asked if the mere mention of the name “Christian” merited punishment, or only the activities associated with it. Trajan replied that Christians should be punished only if they refuse to recant their faith and “worship our gods.” If they do recant, they are to be set free. One of Pliny’s letters describes his practice:
 - *“This is the course that I have adopted. I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it I repeat the question a second and a third time, threatening capital punishment. If they persist I sentence them to death, for their inflexible obstinacy should certainly be punished. Christians who are Roman citizens I reserved to be sent to Rome. I discharged those who were willing to curse Christ, a thing which, it is said, genuine Christians cannot be persuaded to do.”*
- Some professing Christians actually did renounce Christ, and the church would suffer for centuries over questions regarding how to treat apostates (or the “lapsed” who requested readmission into the fellowship. [Note: this is one of the lasting effects of these early persecutions]
- Another period of relative tranquility and growth came from about **AD 125** until the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), who triggered a new campaign of persecution. Many Christians were martyred during these years, including eminent church leaders such as Polycarp. Eusebius records that when the proconsul ordered Polycarp to curse Christ, the response came back:
 - *“‘For eighty-six years,’ replied Polycarp, ‘I have been his servant, and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?’”*
 - *‘I have wild beasts,’ said the proconsul. ‘I shall throw you to them, if you don’t change your attitude.’*
 - *‘Call them,’ replied the old man.*
 - *‘If you make light of the beasts,’ retorted the governor, ‘I’ll have you destroyed by fire, unless you change your attitude.’*
 - *Polycarp answered: ‘The fire you threaten burns for a time and is soon extinguished. There is a fire you know nothing about – the fire of the judgment to come and of eternal punishment, the fire reserved for the ungodly. But why do you hesitate? Do what you want.’...*
 - *The proconsul was amazed, and sent the crier to stand in the middle of the arena and announce three times: ‘Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian.’... Then a shout went up from every throat that Polycarp must be burnt alive...*

- *The rest followed in less time than it takes to describe. The crowds rushed to collect logs...When the pyre was ready...Polycarp prayed: ‘O Father of thy beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ, I bless thee for counting me worthy of this day and hour, that in the number of the martyrs I may partake of Christ’s cup, to the resurrection of eternal life of both soul and body...’*
- *When he had offered up the Amen and completed his prayer, the men in charge lit the fire, and a great flame shot up.”* [Eusebius Ecclesiastical History]
- Following this season of trial, Christians enjoyed another two decades of relative peace, as the faith continued to grow throughout the empire. From 197-212, more persecution broke out. From lynching in Alexandria, to mob attacks in Rome, to judicial executions in Carthage, believers found their faith tested severely.
- The persecution abated until 235, and then it began to grow again. Conditions became very severe in 250, as the new emperor Decius (r.249-251) assumed the throne desiring to restore Rome to its earlier glory. To promote civic unity, he mandated that all citizens engage in public sacrifices to Roman gods. Those who complied were granted *libelli*, or certificates, proving that they had performed the required rites. [found certificates in Egypt in 20th century] Those who refused were considered treasonous, and punished severely. Some Christians avoided the sacrifices and still acquired the certificates from greedy, corrupt officials. Many apostatized and denied their faith. Others fled into exile. Some believers resisted and were executed. But the Church had grown complacent, and was ill-prepared to handle such persecution. Many of those who still professed faith divided and turned against each other in disputes over whose faith was genuine and whose was compromised. By 251, one historian writes that “all over the Mediterranean Christianity lay seemingly in ruins.” This should caution us against “romanticizing” persecution, or thinking that it always only strengthens and grows the church. Under Decius, persecution almost succeeded in destroying the church.
- Before he could carry his extermination against the church any further, Decius died in battle, and the persecution abated for a few short years. But in 257, the emperor Valerian initiated a new attempt to stamp out the church. He gave detailed instructions that bishops, presbyters, and deacons were to be punished immediately by death, while Roman senators and military officers who were Christians were to lose their dignity and property. And civil servants who were Christians were to be made slaves and sent in chains to labor on imperial estates. Some believe this persecution was longer lasting and resulted in more deaths than any previous persecution.
- Valerian was taken prisoner by the Persians in 260, and his successor son permitted relative religious freedom, which the church enjoyed for the next 40 years. During this time the church grew and grew, pervading all levels of Roman society and spreading throughout North Africa, Egypt, Syria, and Armenia. Christianity had attained such prominence by the year 300 that Frend writes “*the question had become on what terms Church and Empire could cooperate, and whether a settlement would come peacefully, or after one final, bloody encounter.*” [Martyrdom and Persecution in the early church, p 325] On February 23, 303, the emperor Diocletian gave his awful answer. Hoping to impose a uniform order on the empire of customs, military, currency, and religion, on that day he issued an edict designed to end the Christian menace to imperial unity. Initially

Christians were not put to death, but rather just imprisoned or enslaved, and churches were destroyed, and Scriptures burned. But the next year Diocletian fell ill and Galerius took over, and ordered all incomplicant Christians to be executed. Blood flowed freely as many Christians suffered martyrdom during this time, known as the “Great Persecution.”

- The Lord preserved His church, however, and in 311 Galerius recanted. He admitted failure to extinguish Christianity because too many Christians refused to obey him and remained faithful. He issued an edict saying “let the Christians once more exist and rebuild their churches” and “pray to their God for our well-being, for that of the state and for themselves”. More importantly, Christians, by their persistence, their good works and love, and their sheer numbers, had increasingly grown to be tolerated by the masses throughout the Roman Empire.
- The next two years brought sporadic outbreaks of persecution, until Constantine took power in 313, and declared an empire-wide policy of tolerance for Christianity. For its first three centuries, the Church had survived some of the most severe opposition imaginable. Could it now survive acceptance?