

POST N.T. CHURCH

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Take a minute to pray for God to guide you as you study...

In our last study, we saw that God built His church upon the truth that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised Savior of the world. The apostles took this good news and radically proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah. It was through their preaching that the church expanded rapidly and **“the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”** (NASB; Acts 2:47).

Take some time right now to reflect and discuss what would have been the **most amazing** and the **most challenging** aspect of preaching Christ to a New Testament society.

God was using His church to spread the good news of a Savior to the world. The church was acting as *“the pillar and support of the truth.”* What was this truth that the church was the pillar of? In our last lesson, we learned that it was Jesus of Nazareth Who was indeed the promised Messiah and that through His death He conquered sin and the power of death! And it was because of this message that the disciples were preaching their hearts out.

The apostle Paul gives us a glimpse of his preaching in a letter he writes to the church of Corinth. He says,

1 Corinthians 15:1-4: “Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the _____, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the _____...”

The truth was built upon WHAT?

The truth was built on the scriptures! And the scriptures are words that testify about God. This group of believers always were urging people to know the God that the scriptures talk about. Those same scriptures, or what we call the Old Testament in our Bibles, not only predicted the coming of Jesus and His crucifixion, but it also prophesied the history of the New Testament Church and also the Post-New Testament Church.

The apostle Paul says this in his letter to the church of Thessalonica,

2 Thessalonians 2:1-10: “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the _____ occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be _____. Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.”

Man of lawlessness? Rebellion? This sounds pretty evil! The word here used for “rebellion” is **“apostasia”** which is where we get our word apostasy. This word means **“to abandon the truth.”** Paul, hearing many false ideas that were coming into the church concerning when Jesus would return, seeks to comfort the church at Thessalonica by telling them that an *“apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself,”* It is after this that Jesus will come to judge. Paul even says that this man of lawlessness is, *“the one whose coming is in accord with Satan”* and that *man will perish “because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10)

So who could this man of lawlessness be? The one whose coming is in accord with Satan? Who is that? Thankfully the Bible gives us a description that will help us understand the history of the church and allow us to have an opportunity to side with those who love the truth!

In the book of Daniel there is a vision of four beasts recorded. Read Daniel 7:1-8 and write down the description of the four beasts.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

BASIC POINT

God **ALWAYS** has people that will point the world back to the truth found in the Bible.

Daniel tells us that this vision greatly disturbed him, so he sought its interpretation. Here the Bible does something that only God could do, and that is disclose the events of history before they take place. Read Daniel 7:17-25.

Daniel wrote during a time of war and turmoil. He previously told the king of Babylon’s dream was the succession of four great kingdoms. Here we see that same thing!

- Babylon symbolizing the Lion (Jeremiah 4:7; 50:17, 43-44, Deuteronomy 28:49)
- Media-Persia symbolizing the Bear (Daniel 8:20)
- Greece symbolizing the leopard (Daniel 8:21)
- Rome symbolizing the Dreadful Beast (Daniel 7:23-25).

It is this last empire that Paul is speaking of when he thinks of the man of lawlessness. Let us look at the description of this last beast a little more.

Daniel 7:23-35: “He gave me this explanation: ‘The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. **The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom.** After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and **try to change the set times and the laws.** The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time.”

Here Daniel sees what wouldn't take place until way off into the future. God showed him what was coming and how the world would change. He saw how humanity would drift away from the truth found in the Bible and try to change what God's church was founded on. Here's what happened:

The Roman Empire conquered Greece (the third kingdom) and eventually broke up into 10 kingdom. (the Visigoths (Spain); The Anglo-Saxons (England); the Franks (France); The Alemanni (Germany); the Burgundians (Swiss); the Lombards (Italy); Suevi (Portugal); Heruli; Ostrogoths; Vandals. But the Roman Empire didn't exactly fall, in fact it just adapted. The little horn that subdues three kings later on becomes what we know as the Roman Catholic Church or the papacy. This little horn has a mission and that is to “change times and law.” Sound familiar? What began as a powerful movement of Christ being proclaimed as a risen savior eventually becomes a period of dark biblical illiteracy.

The Roman Church acting as the mediator between God and sinful humanity. A church that prevented the Bible from being read by common people. This is the post-new testament church, a church that the Bible says is driven into the wilderness for a length of time, (“a time, times, and half a time” [Daniel 7:25, Revelation 12:6]).

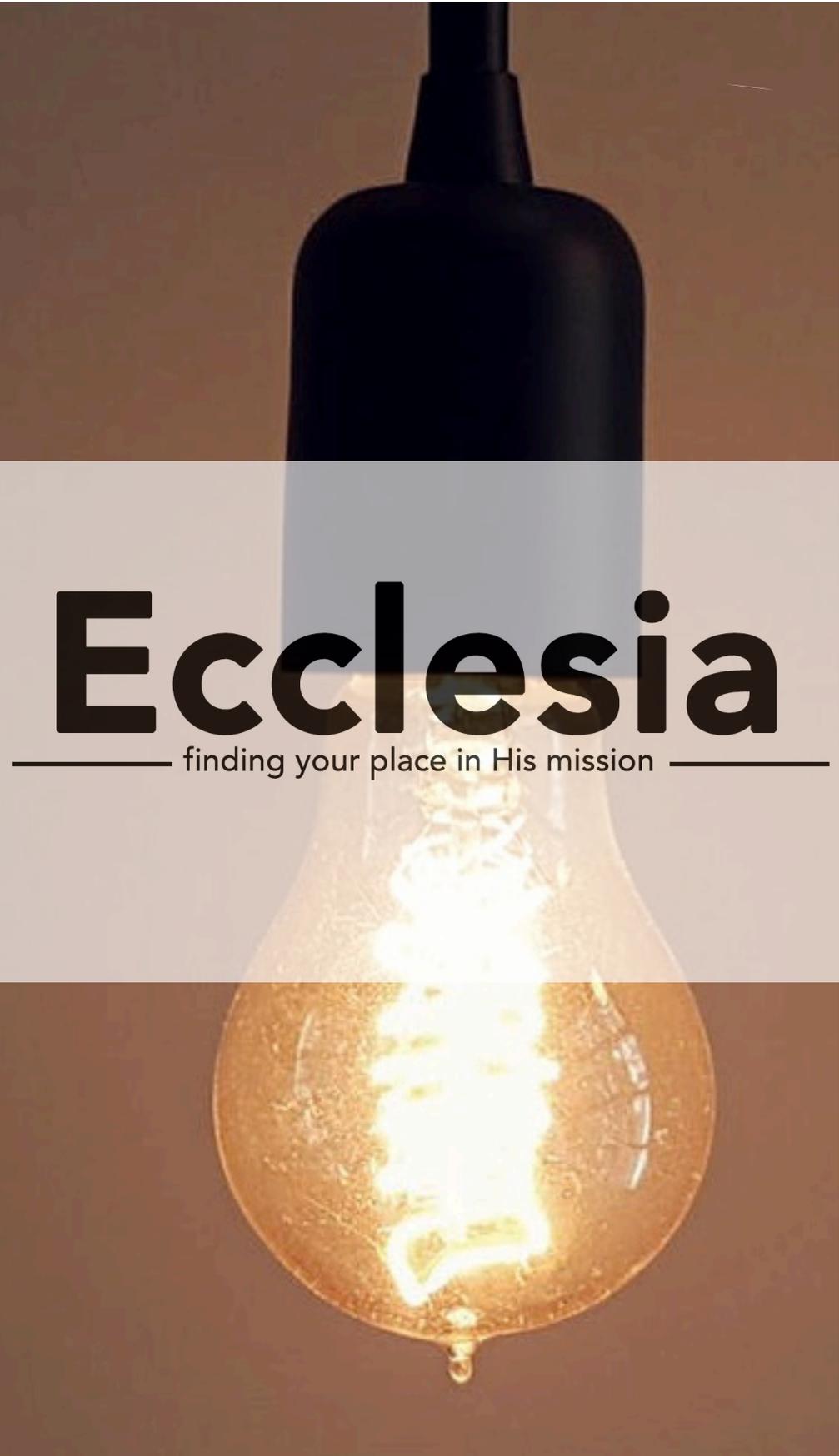
But God ALWAYS has people that will point back to the truth found in the Bible, and He used them during this dark time. He would send a man named Martin Luther. Luther, standing on saints shoulders who died to advance the truth about Jesus and His saving grace, began a reformation, calling for a revival in biblical literacy for the common people. He wanted everyone to have a chance to read the Bible and see for themselves the truths that pointed to the only way to be saved: through the Messiah, whose name is Jesus Christ.

While the dark ages were a significant point in our human history, it really is just another way to see how powerful the message of Jesus is. No one can hold back the message that God wants the entire world to hear! God used many people back then to carry the truth of the Bible, and He still uses people to keep truth safe and moving forward to the ends of the Earth.

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION

1. Reflect on what it would have been like to not know what the Bible actually says, to have lived in this period of time. What would you have done?
2. How will you continue to carry the message of Jesus this week?

LESSON 3: POST NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH



Ecclesia
— finding your place in His mission —