

*The Spreading Flame***Garth M. Rosell, Ph.D.**Professor of Church History and Director  
Emeritus of the Ockenga Institute at  
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary  
in South Hamilton, Massachusetts

Greetings once again to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me, as we begin our time together today, ask you to join me in prayer. Let us pray. *Good and gracious Lord, we ask that You would open to us Your Word. Teach us by Your Spirit that we might have new eyes to see what You want us to see, new minds to understand, new wills to obey, and new hearts to love You and our neighbor as we ought. May all that we say and think together today bring honor to Your great name, for it's in that Name that we pray. Amen.*

As you will recall during our first two lectures, we focused our attention upon the beginnings of the Christian church, exploring the marvelous Pentecostal experience described for us in Acts 2. We gave special attention also to the Jewish and Roman contexts within which Christianity began to grow and develop and prosper. We saw together how Christianity, which started in Jerusalem by the grace of God, began to burst out of those bounds and penetrate the whole world with the good news of Jesus Christ and the word of the gospel. And I want us to focus once again upon that great event of the spread of the faith. Those of you who are reading along with us in our text will want to fill in some of these gaps and round out your understanding of this area through the reading of Kenneth Scott Latourette. We're reading his *A History of Christianity* together, Volume I, Beginnings to 1,500. And we're using the revised edition, the one with the new foreword and supplemental bibliographies by Ralph Winter. And those of you who had joined with us in the first two lectures will probably already have read pages 3-62 in which Dr. Latourette covers the setting of Christianity in history, its background in Judaism and the Greco-Roman world, as well as Jesus and His work as a foundation for Christianity.

Dr. Latourette's text, along with Williston Walker's *A History of the Christian Church*, are probably the two most frequently used textbooks in church history courses. I particularly like Latourette's work, since he has a great missionary spirit. He's interested in the development of the church around the world. And I think you'll

capture that flavor as you read along with us in the Latourette text.

Our work today will cover the areas in Latourette of pages 65-111, and you'll want to read along with us in that regard. We want to look at the spreading flame, the movement of the church out from Jerusalem into the rest of the world, where God has chosen Israel, that through them all of the nations of the earth are to be blessed. And we saw how that began to happen in the ministry of Philip and of Peter. And we ended in our last lecture with the great apostle Paul, and who better than Paul exemplifies the movement outward of the gospel, the sharing of the good news around the world.

Paul, of course, had been born in Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, one of the Roman provinces. His family, descendants of the tribe of Benjamin, were Pharisees by persuasion. And so he was trained in the faith, not only in Tarsus, which was a major cultural and educational center itself, but because of his enormous abilities. Paul was sent down to Jerusalem to live with his sister and to study there under one of the great rabbinic teachers of the day. It's while he was there in Jerusalem that he first came in contact with the Christians and, in fact, those early contacts were not happy ones. For he and his fellow rabbinic students had heard of what Stephen and the others were saying, and they considered it to be nothing short of blasphemy against the faith. So it was easy to understand that Paul himself would be easily enlisted in the task of tracking down those Christians and bringing them in for punishment. In fact, it was his enlistment in a crusade to track down Christians in Damascus that led him on that expedition on the road where Christ found him and where his life was permanently changed.

You remember, as he headed up that some 100-mile stretch from Jerusalem along the old caravan route to Damascus, the voice came to him: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). And his response: "Who are You, Lord?" (Acts 9:5). And the voice came: "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). What a dramatic moment. And his response: "What shall I do, Lord?" And he was told: "Go to Damascus, and there you will be told" (Acts 9:6).

Meanwhile, in Damascus, Ananias was told in a vision to go see Saul, which he did. Saul's sight, which had been lost, was restored. He was baptized. And his tremendous energy, and ability, and zeal was redirected now in the direction of promoting the Christian faith, rather than persecuting it. What a marvelous conversion,

one of the great conversions of all of Christian history.

Paul was likely about 25 years old when he was converted. This happened in the mid-30s of the first century. Then about 13 years were to pass before the start of his first missionary journey, the one about which we know. These are often called the hidden years. They were years of preparation, a period in which Paul rethought his whole theological orientation and understanding of the faith. Undoubtedly, Paul, like many of us, would have been frustrated at times in those years of preparation, those years of solitude. We don't know exactly what he did during this time. Some have suggested that he possibly spent the first three years in northern Arabia in a desert living as a kind of hermit. Others have suggested that the last 10 years were spent as an independent missionary in Cilicia and northern Syria. We do know that he traveled to Jerusalem during this time to spend about two weeks meeting with Peter and James and the others in the Jerusalem church.

I've always been fascinated with the fact that in Scripture, so often people who have enormously important ministries are set aside for a time of preparation. Usually, it's a fairly long time. We look at the life of Moses, or of our Lord Himself, certainly of Paul.

I couldn't help but be reminded, as I've thought of this, of a wonderful little story which is told by William Barton, a congregational pastor, before his death, who ministered in the areas around Chicago. He wrote in a series of parables, one that I think is particularly relevant for this subject today. You have to recall that he wrote under the pen name of Safed and his wife, Keturah:

Now I entered the kitchen and would have passed through. But Keturah was there; so I waited: and she cast diverse things into a great bowl, and did stir them with a great spoon. And I asked her, saying, "What has thou in the bowl?" And she said, "Sugar and spice and all that's nice." And I said, "That's what God used when He made thee." And she took the dough out of the bowl, and when she had stirred it, she rolled it with a rolling pin; and she cut it into round cakes. And in the midst of every several cake there was a hole. And a great cauldron hung above the fire, and there was fat therein and it boiled furiously. And Keturah took the round cakes of dough, and cast them into the cauldron; and she poked them with a fork, and turned them, and when they came forth, behold I knew what they were. And the smell of them was inviting, and the appearance of

them was exceeding good. And Keturah gave me one of the doughnuts, and believe me, they were some doughnuts. And I said, "To what purpose is the hole? If the doughnut be good with the part punched out, how much better would it be if the hole were left in?" And Keturah answered and said, "Thou speakest as a fool who is never content with the goodness that is, but always complaineth against God for the lack of the goodness which he thinketh is not. If there were no hole in the doughnut, then were it like unto Ephraim, a cake not turned. For, though the cake were fried until the edges thereof were burned as hard as thy philosopher's stone, yet there would be uncooked dough in the middle. Yea, thou should then break thy teeth on the outer rim of every several doughnut and the middle part thereof would be raw dough. And I meditated much on what Keturah had told me. And I considered the empty spaces in human life; and the desolation of its vacancies and how hearts break over its blank interstices. And I pondered in my soul whether God does not know, that save for these, our lives would be like unto Ephraim. And I spake of these things to Keturah, and she said, "I know not the secret of these mysteries. Yea, my own heart acheth over some of its empty places. But say unto those who are able to hear, that the person who useth not the good things which he has, but complaineth against God for those he lacketh, is like unto one who rejecteth a doughnut because he knoweth not the mystery of the hole."

The mystery of the hole—it's a lesson which Paul and Moses and Jesus and so many others have had to learn across the years. A time of preparation, sometimes of separation, so that one's ministry can be full and fruitful. I find that a great encouragement to me as I think back over my life and the times of preparation, which I was so anxious to get through but which were so important for me in my later ministry. This was certainly true for the apostle Paul, who had worked through much of his own understanding. And his ministry, subsequently, as we have it described in Acts, is a clear reflection of what he had learned.

Along with Paul, of course, was that great Christian soul Barnabas, a Jew from Cyprus who sold some of his property and delivered the proceeds to the apostles in Jerusalem. He worked evidently in the Jerusalem church for some time before going north to Antioch, the capital of Syria. [It was in Antioch where] Christianity was growing rapidly with its mix of Jews and Gentiles

in great numbers, and where the church had first come to be called Christians rather than simply “followers of the Way” or “followers of Jesus” (Acts 11:19-26). Barnabas, you remember, has met and, in fact, had introduced Saul in Jerusalem. And now he went to Tarsus to bring him to Antioch some 80 miles away, so that they could work together there.

After about a year, somewhere around AD 47, Paul and Barnabas were set apart by that church, that great Christian community in Antioch, for a special ministry, for the first known organized missionary expedition. That expedition left three of them for Seleucia—Paul, Barnabas, and Barnabas’ cousin John Mark. They stopped first in Cyprus, which was Barnabas’ home area. They landed at the eastern part of Salamis, and then traversed the island until they reached the capital of Paphos. Cyprus was a senatorial province. And you remember in the last lecture, I talked about the two categories of provinces, about 10 of them, that were directly under the senate in Rome. The rest of them were directly under the emperor, overseen by a proconsul, Sergius Paulus. He met the three of them and asked about their mission; as a result, was converted and became a Christian. And as a result of this, some have suggested that Saul changed his name to Paul in honor of this first important convert. This is probably not true, though it has some wonderful symbolism to it. But from here on we know that Luke calls him “Paul” exclusively. Perhaps more appropriately because Paul would have been a better known name or easily understood to Romans and Greeks.

They then sailed for Perga, on the coast of Asia Minor, and there young John Mark abandoned the mission and returned to Jerusalem. We don’t know exactly why, though we do know that Paul was rather upset by it. They headed to Antioch and the Roman province of Galatia, some 100 miles to the north across the rugged mountains. Antioch was a very mixed population—native Galatians, Phrygians, Greeks, Jews, Romans, and a good many retired army veterans.

Paul and Barnabas first, as was their custom, went to the synagogue to minister to the Jews. After the reading there of the Law and the Prophets, they were invited as visitors to speak. And Paul preached a sermon, which linked Jesus’ scriptural prophecy. I can’t help but think that probably his training over those hidden years gave him all of the grist for the mill that was needed to preach a powerful sermon, tying together what he had learned as a Jewish rabbinic student with what he now knew to be a reality in the coming of the great Messiah, Jesus Christ. His sermon caused

an immediate sensation. And he was invited back; and almost the whole city, we hear, came to hear him. Paul responded in his message to them:

It is necessary that the Word of God should be spoken first to you as Jews. Since you thrust it from you, however, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we now turn to the Gentiles, for the Lord has commanded us saying, "I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 13:46-47).

Evidently, in fact, the Christian church in Antioch, which had sent them out, was made up largely of Gentile converts who had heard the message of Jesus gladly. The synagogue Jews, however, finally caused the expulsion of Paul and Barnabas. But not until they had seen many new converts filled with joy and indeed filled with the Holy Spirit, as we read in Acts 13.

Paul and Barnabas then headed eastward to Iconium, a city in the middle of the fertile fruit and grain-growing plain. And the same results occurred there as had in Antioch. Then they went to Lystra, some 25 miles to the southwest of Iconium. That community also had many retired army veterans. It was rural, somewhat less sophisticated than the areas they had first visited. And there, following Paul's healing of a cripple, the simple folk of that region came to think Paul and Barnabas to be gods. In fact, Barnabas was thought to be Zeus, and Paul, Hermes (Acts 14). According to the old Greek myths, Zeus and Hermes had once wandered about in the likeness of people, and many thought that they had now returned. When Paul and Barnabas demurred, the crowd got angry and Paul was dragged outside of the city and stoned. Missionary work, you see, can be dangerous. And we are going to see many times in the subsequent history of the church just how dangerous it can be.

The next day they left for Derbe, the last town on their itinerary. They preached there without incident, made many converts—in fact, it was the first place in Galatia where they didn't meet the stiff opposition from the orthodox Jews and Judaizers.

They then went back to encourage the new churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They appointed elders to guide them. They helped them organize themselves. (We'll talk more about that in one of the upcoming lectures as we look at the development of the organizational structure of the life of these first Christian

communities.) Then they headed by ship back to Antioch to report to the church that had sent them out that “a new door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles,” as we read in Acts 14.

What a glorious outcome to this first of what would be several missionary journeys! But, we are told in Acts, some came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you can’t be saved.” “Paul and Barnabas,” it concludes, “had no small dissention and debate with them,” as we read in Acts 15. The result of all of this was the formation of the first council of the church—what is often called the Jerusalem Council, which occurred right about mid-century.

The Jerusalem church, as you will recall, had swung toward the right after Peter and the apostles had left their leadership positions there about AD 44. James had become the leader of the town; and there was a strong circumcision party, folk who are also called “Judaizers.” These were Jewish Christians who believed deeply that, in order to be a Christian, one must first become a full-blown Jew—to go through all of the practices of circumcision, to follow all of the commands of the Old Testament law. And then they could add to that their understanding of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. They were encouraging the people to become Christians, but first they must go through the process of becoming Jews. That was a very large and influential party, particularly within Jerusalem, as we can understand from our earlier lecture. They had, of course, been forced to swallow hard when Peter returned from Cornelius’ home and reported that the Spirit had come upon those folk, those Gentile Christians, just as the Spirit had come upon the Christians waiting in the upper room in Jerusalem.

But the reconciliation which had come was only temporary. And troubled by reports of irregular activity in Antioch, these Judaizers had dispatched representatives to press their case—that the law remained in full force despite Paul’s claims. These Jerusalem Judaizers called Paul and Barnabas’ whole mission into question since, you remember, Paul and Barnabas had not required that their Gentile converts go through that whole process of becoming Jews before they could be true Christians. The Christians in Antioch finally sent Paul, Barnabas and, along with them, Titus, to Jerusalem to consult with the leaders there. Titus, of course, was one of Paul’s Greek converts, probably from Antioch, and he had not been circumcised. So here you have an example of a good sound Christian who had not gone through the process for which the Judaizers were calling.

The resulting meeting was the first church council. Its importance for the subsequent mission of the church is crucial, and we have highlighted here that great struggle, that great crisis, in the church, which I detailed for you in our last lecture. We have two accounts of the council in the Scriptures. And I would encourage you to look at these, to read them side by side—Galatians 2 and Acts 15. The council had grown out of fierce dissension and controversy between the Judaizers and the folk who were the followers of Paul’s understanding. Out of that debate and discussion, sometimes very heated, a compromise was reached—we are told in the book of Acts—and adopted by the whole church. Paul and his colleagues were sent back to Antioch with a letter detailing the elements of that compromise—converts, they concluded, need not be circumcised, but they must observe the Mosaic Law in matters of diet and conduct. Now Luke suggests that the compromise was adopted unanimously and that, when read to the Christians in Antioch, caused great rejoicing. The council was the decision, we are told in Acts, of the Holy Spirit. No wonder it was adopted unanimously.

The Galatians passage spells this out even in greater detail. The missionary territory was divided up between those who were to focus primarily upon the Jewish mission—led by people like Peter, and those that were to focus their attention upon the Gentile mission—led primarily by folk like Paul. Paul was also instructed to gather some funds in support of the Jerusalem congregation. You remember they had heavy responsibilities because of all of the needy, the poor, and the hungry within Jerusalem that were dependent upon their bounty.

So Paul went about to do that and continued with new zeal and effort to reach out to the communities of Gentile believers, bringing them into new faith and establishing new churches. Councils, however, seldom are able to put arguments that are deeply felt completely to rest. And the Jerusalem Council is no exception. For even though they reached a tentative agreement, the old struggles between the Judaizers and the followers of Paul broke out again and again across the Mediterranean world.

We see that emerging in many places. But let me give you one example from our little collection of readings put together by Cyril Richardson: *The Library of Christian Classics*, volume I, *Early Christian Fathers*. If you look at page 96 and 97, if you follow along with me, you have one of the fascinating letters written by Ignatius. Now Ignatius was the head of the church in Antioch, about which we have just spoken. But he comes to Antioch later

in the story, so that he's writing these letters now in about AD 117, and he is being taken across Asia Minor to Rome to meet his death. And we'll talk more about that when we talk about the great martyr tradition in one of the later lectures. But as he is taken across Asia Minor, chained to Roman soldiers, he writes a series of seven fascinating letters. And this one is to the church at Magnesia. And in the eighth chapter of that letter he voices these words:

Do not be led astray by wrong views or outmoded tales that count for nothing. For if we still go on observing Judaism, we admit we never received grace. The divine prophets themselves lived Christ Jesus' way. That is why they were persecuted, for they were inspired by his grace to convince unbelievers that God is one, and that He has revealed Himself in His son Jesus Christ, who is His word issuing from the silence and who won the complete approval of Him who sent Him. Those, then who lived by the ancient practices arrived at a new hope. They ceased to keep the Sabbath and lived by the Lord's day, on which our life as well as theirs shown forth, thanks to Him and His death, though some deny this. Through this mystery we got our faith, and because of it we stand our ground so as to become disciples of Jesus Christ, our sole teacher.

Then on the top of page 97, chapter 10, verse 3, these remarkable powerful words: "It is monstrous to talk Jesus Christ and to live like a Jew. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity. People of every tongue have come to believe in it, and so have been united together in God."

Do you hear what he's saying here? Out of his experience in Antioch where this battle had first emerged, there are the ongoing struggles, now some years later in AD 117, reflected in this continuing discussion and debate between the Judaizers and the followers of Paul.

If we turn over to page 110 and 111 of the Richardson collection, we have another interesting reflection of this. Many of those who were arguing the case for the Judaizers, or the circumcision party, were suggesting that the Scriptures do not focus upon this new faith which Paul is teaching; and, in fact, it isn't found in the Old Testament. And we find there in Chapter 8, verse 2, these interesting words: "When I heard some people saying, 'If I don't find it in the original documents, I don't believe it is in the Gospel.'" What are the original documents? Clearly they're the

### Old Testament Scriptures.

“I answered them (this is again Ignatius, the leader of the church in Antioch speaking), ‘But it is written there.’ And they retorted, ‘That’s just the question.’” Then he went on to explain, “To my mind, it is Jesus Christ, who is himself the original documents.” Isn’t that a great phrase? “The inviolable archives are His cross and death and resurrection and the faith that came by Him. But there is something special about the gospel,” moving over to the top of page 111. “I mean the coming of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, His passion and resurrection. The beloved prophets announced His coming, but the gospel is the crowning achievement forever.” Here he is providing a new framework, not only for understanding the Old Testament, but for moving forward in the new freedom which the gospel brings.

The process, of course, was not completed either at the Jerusalem Council or for many years thereafter. But the tracings are clearly on the wall. Christianity, whose roots were deep in Jewish soil, and whose traditions grew out of the Hebrew faith—and we rightly treasure and value those linkages with the great work of God in the Old Testament—that faith has become increasingly available to all. Philip’s experience pointed the way to inclusion of the Samaritan (Acts 8). Philip’s experience also with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) opened the way for other races, for other tribes, for even the handicapped and maimed to come into full membership in the family of faith. Peter’s experience with the sheet had led to the conversion of the Italian centurion (Acts 10:9-19), and the awareness that Christianity was not only for the clean animals, but also the teaching that in Christ all are made clean. Remember that vivid experience of Peter on the rooftop. Paul and Barnabas’ mission had authenticated that direction, as had the experience of the church in Antioch—proclaiming that the new faith was not limited to the house of Israel, but was for all of the Gentiles also. And, of course, the Jerusalem Council had at least pointed to the essential correctness of the inclusiveness of Christianity.

The church was to be composed, you see, not only of Jews, but of uncircumcised Gentiles, of the poor, of the maimed, of black, of despised, of refined, of needy, of lame, indeed of all types and conditions of folk. And we dare not today limit our preaching to any one group, to any kind of exclusivism. For in Jesus Christ the faith has been made available to all. God chose His people Israel, that through them, and through the coming of Christ in that tradition, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. And

what a great blessing it is for us to recognize that enormously important principle—that we are called by God to reach out into every corner of the earth. And, in fact, this rests as the foundation for the Great Commission which God gave the church to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all my commandments” (Matthew 28). And then that great promise: “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

The great missionary story, which we’ll talk about over the coming weeks, is a story founded upon this principle, which was championed by Paul and others. A principle of inclusiveness that the faith is for all. It is to be preached everywhere throughout the world, to all peoples, all nations, all tongues.

The church, of course, expanded with an almost explosive force as a result of these new breakthroughs and insights. We see that in Acts itself—from Jerusalem, which we see primarily in Acts 1:1–6:7; spreading to Palestine and Samaria (Acts 6:8–9:31); and then to Antioch (Acts 9:32–12:24); and then to Asia Minor (Acts 12:25–16:5); and then to Europe (Acts 16:6–19:20); and finally, to Rome itself (Acts 19:21–28:31). One historian has called this shift, “From the circle.” That is, the confines around Jerusalem to the ellipse, which runs around Jerusalem and Rome and, in fact, well beyond.

Having visited India just recently, I was reminded that the apostle, the disciple of Christ, Thomas, is believed to have gone to India to spread the faith of the gospel. And, in fact, the Indian Christians of South India believe that Thomas was martyred for his faith on a little knoll outside of Madras. And though, historically, these facts cannot be verified with any absolute certainty, I like to believe that that was actually the case. For Thomas, who was known to us historically as the “great doubter,” actually, when he came to faith, became not only the great believer, but carried the faith perhaps farther than any of the other disciples, perhaps even to the very tip of India.

It’s impossible to know exactly how many people were touched by the good news during these early centuries. But we can make some estimates. Justin Martyr, writing at the mid-second century (about AD 140) commented:

There is no people, Greek, or barbarian, nor of any other race, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell in tents or wander about in covered wagons, among

whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all things.

By the end of the second century, Tertullian, the great lawyer/theologian of North Africa, would comment, “You are but of yesterday,” in speaking of the non-Christians of the area, “and yet we already fill your cities, your islands, your camps and your palaces, your senate and your forum; we have left you only your temples.”

In short, I think it can be fairly stated that by the end of the third century the name of Christ was known, revered, or persecuted, in virtually every province, in every city of the empire and beyond. As Maximian in one of his edicts phrased it: “Almost all have abandoned the worship of their ancestors for the new Christian sect.”

How many people are we talking about? Well, we don’t know any final figures. But there are a number of estimates. Philip Schaff, the great nineteenth-century church historian, estimated that, by AD 300, nearly 10 percent of all of the Roman subjects were converted, perhaps as many as 10 million people. Edward Gibbon estimated that the number of Christians in AD 306 was about five million or one-twentieth of the population. Robertson estimated the number to be 20 million at that time or one-fifth of the population. The great preacher, Chrysostom, in AD 380 estimated the number of Christians in Antioch alone to be 100,000 or some 50 percent of the population.

Why did Christianity spread so rapidly? The historian, Gibbon, in his now famous fifteenth chapter of his study on the Roman Empire, attributed it to five factors: (1) The zeal of the early Christians, (2) their belief in future rewards and punishments, (3) the power of miracles, (4) the moral lifestyle of Christians, and (5) the compact church organization which they developed. Renan attributed success to one primary factor: The new discipline of life exhibited by Christians.

What both omit, however, is the central element itself—namely the very power of God’s grace. Why did Christianity grow? Answer: Because it had the divine truth of God’s own Word. As Leakey phrased it in *The History of Europe*, “No other religion has ever combined so many distinct elements of power and attraction. Unlike the Jewish religion, it was adapted for every nation and class. Unlike Stoicism, it offered the charm of sympathetic

worship. Unlike the Egyptian religions, it taught a pure and noble system of ethics. To the slave, it was religion of the oppressed. To a world tired of cold passionless grandeur, it was a faith of compassion and love. To a people tired of human philosophy, it presented divine truth authenticated, not only by reason, but by faith.”

It’s a remarkable fact that after the days of the apostles, no names of great missionaries are mentioned until the opening of the Middle Ages with Saint Patrick of Ireland, Saint Columba in Scotland, Saint Augustine in England, Saint Boniface in Germany, Saint Ansgar in Scandinavia, Saint Cyril and Methodius (among the Slavic peoples). In these early centuries, there were no missionary societies, there were no missionary institutions. There were only a few organized missionary efforts. And yet, between AD 30 and AD 300, the whole Roman world was literally transformed. Christianity grew naturally from within. It attracted people by its very presence. In fact, every congregation became a kind of missionary society.

The example had been set in Jerusalem where, after Stephen’s death, the brethren were scattered abroad and went about preaching the word. Justin Martyr was converted by a venerable old man he met one day while walking by the sea. Every Christian seemed to tell their neighbor, the laborer their fellow laborer, the slave their fellow slave, the servant their master. This marvelous outreach of evangelism within the early church is told for us in the most powerful form in a wonderful book that I commend to your reading, written by Michael Green, who was for many years, the rector at Saint Aldates in Oxford, but has more recently joined the faculty at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. His little book, published by William Eerdmans, titled *Evangelism in the Early Church*, describes much of this evangelistic activity of the church in those early years. He describes the pathways and obstacles for evangelism. He talks about evangelizing the Jews and then evangelizing the Gentiles. He speaks of various evangelistic methods and motives, evangelistic strategy. The early Christian community was a community on mission in the world. They believed in reaching out with the gospel to all of the peoples of the world. And you have that beautifully described for you in Michael Green’s little book.

The message was not to be limited to the Jews only. In fact, it was not to be limited to any specific class or race or condition. It was to be, in fact, good news for all. And as Christianity moved from Jerusalem throughout the whole of the inhabited world, Christians

had the joy of sharing what they had found with others, and the joy of bringing them into that caring community in which they and their families found acceptance and faith.

In short, the crisis of the first century, this crisis of how inclusive should the faith be, was eventually resolved by God's grace and through the power of the Spirit, in the direction to which Paul had pointed. That what God had promised through His chosen people Israel, this great promise of blessing to all nations, was actually fulfilled in the work of the early Christian communities. Many of them unknown names, unknown missionaries, but who carried the faith from its core in Jerusalem out into every part of the inhabited world.

We are, many of us, the great beneficiaries of that happy resolution which started in those early years and which was fought for diligently by many of our brothers and sisters in Christ of those early centuries. And it was ultimately won, so that the faith could become a faith for all of us and for all times.