

BAPTIST S. S. ASSOCIATION SERMON.

BY REV. J. W. BANCROFT. (Published by request of Association.)

"The church which was in Jerusalem." Acts 11.

The central thought of Old Testament teaching was the coming of the Messiah. Around this central thought all the grand thoughts of inspiration cluster and crystallize.

The hopes of God's ancient people centre in Him. He is to be their Redeemer, and with longing eyes they look for His appearance.

God's plan for rescuing man from the consequences of sin made known, and His purposes were fulfilled. He came to establish a kingdom on earth, which was to be spiritual in its nature, and heavenly in its aims.

The same message was delivered by the Messiah as He began to preach the glad news of salvation. The setting up of His kingdom was to be the introduction of a new order of things, fully in harmony with the gospel message.

The text brings to our minds the fact, that there was an organization in Jerusalem called the church. It suggests to us the inquiry, "What was a New Testament church?"

Since the apostles were inspired men, we should expect that their teachings would always be in harmony. The closest examination of the New Testament will prove that they are.

Another noticeable fact is that as soon as faith was possessed, baptism followed without delay. Paul, as soon as the scales fell from his eyes, he was baptized.

During the forty days, between His resurrection and ascension, He was seen by His disciples, but we know very little of what He said or did. How much we would like to know that His utterances were, during the last days He spent on earth!

Jesus had commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, until they had received the baptism of the Spirit. The time intervening between the ascension and Pentecost, was spent by the apostles and disciples in earnest prayer to God, for the promised blessing.

The question, "What is a New Testament Church?" was answered by giving Dr. Ripley's definition of a Christian church. He says, "A Christian church is an association of believers in Christ, who have been baptized on a profession of their faith in Him, and by their voluntary consent, yet in subjection to the will of Christ, whose authority each

member acknowledges, have united for the observance and maintenance of the Christian religion, their mutual spiritual benefit, and the extension of the gospel as a converting and saving power."

What was the nature of a New Testament church? It was a local organization, complete in itself, owing its origin to Christ, receiving its authority from Christ, recognizing Him as its head, and owing allegiance only to Him.

The second ordinance enjoined upon His church was the observance of the Lord's Supper. The act of baptism was expressive of the entrance of the individual upon a new life.

Let us notice some of the characteristics of the churches mentioned by the apostles in their epistles. Paul in writing to the church at Rome, speaks of them as "the called of Jesus Christ."

Elders or bishops, who were simply Christian pastors and deacons, were the only officers in the churches as constituted by the apostles. That the authority of the church was vested not in officers, but in the whole membership, the church is evident from the fact that important matters were referred by the apostles to the churches for their decision.

The requirements for membership in New Testament churches were few, but essential to their very existence. The first demanded made by Peter was repentance. Repentance included the two-fold idea of sorrow for sin and a turning away from sin.

Another noticeable fact is that as soon as faith was possessed, baptism followed without delay. Paul, as soon as the scales fell from his eyes, he was baptized. The question arises, "What was the act of baptism? Was it a definite act, always to be performed in the same way, or could it be administered in several ways, and be equally valid?"

Let us note some of the descriptions given of baptism. According to Matthew, John baptized "in Jordan," and according to Mark, "in the river of Jordan."

The question arises, "What relation did New Testament churches sustain to each other?" While independent of each other, so far as organization and authority is concerned, there was a strong bond of union existing between them.

The members of churches whose doctrines were identical, they were one brotherhood, all claiming Jesus Christ as their elder brother.

righteousness. The immersion of the believer in water, presents to the mind a beautiful symbolic picture of the meaning of the act of baptism.

God entered into a solemn covenant with God and with each other, to love God and live to His glory, to aid each other to imitate each other in the divine life.

Church membership was intended to stimulate activity in the Christian life, to cultivate all the graces which belong to the Christian character, and to promote growth "in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The mission of a New Testament church is indescribably grand. To be one with Christ, united to Christ, receiving life from Him, living members of His body, animated by His spirit, enlightened by His truth, inspired by His love, under His leadership honored with His presence, kept by His power, sanctified through His truth, saved by His grace, and called with a holy calling to labor for Christ, is the position which the members of such a church claim to occupy.

The church is to be useful to the world. She is to be useful to all the means which God has ordained for the promotion of a true, vigorous, spiritual life among her members.

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churches; that an earnest effort should be put forth to make them see and feel as never before, the nature of their obligation to God and to the world.

The day is approaching when this grand commission will be fulfilled. The command will be obeyed, for the Lord himself has said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and they shall be baptized."

The ultimate triumph of the truth is assured. God has said, "I will send My Spirit, and He shall testify with My mouth; it shall return unto Me, and it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

If the work laid upon His churches is great, the promises He has given are grand and inspiring, giving the strongest assurance of the ultimate triumph of the kingdom of Christ.

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result in an abundant increase of funds for all departments of Christian work.

Let us believe that God has given us an important mission in the evangelization of the world. A mission which no other body can accomplish for us. Let us be loyal to our principles, follow closely the methods recognized and approved by Christ and His apostles, and our labors will be crowned with abundant success.

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