

THE THINGS JESUS SAID THE CHURCH MUST CONTINUE TO DO

Part one - Sunday, May 3rd, 2026, 10:00 a.m.

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WILL THE CHURCH BE MORE UNITED IF WE IGNORE DOCTRINAL TRUTH?

Matthew 3:1-17 - "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, {2} "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." {3} For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'" {4} Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. {5} Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; {6} and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. {7} But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? {8} "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; {9} and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. {10} "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. {11} "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. {12} "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." {13} Then Jesus arrived[^] from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. {14} But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" {15} But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted[^] Him."

{16} “After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, {17} and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”"

One of the problems in dealing with this series is ours is a day that finds it hard to think of **any** doctrines as being important. We like to fill our bellies with **practical** truth. Give us stuff on marriage, parenting, financial management, coping with our hurts and pains, and receiving divine guidance. **These** are the things that make our worlds go around.

In fact there is an even more **sinister** mind-set that has swept through the church, especially in the last twenty-five years or so. We have actually come to think it is a badge of spirituality that we don't get too **troubled** over doctrine. We have come to think that doctrine is what **divides** the church. People squabble over doctrine. We will be more spiritual if we just keep our doctrines to ourselves and love each other. Once you emphasize doctrine you highlight what makes you **different** from others, and we should emphasize what **unites** us, not what **divides** us.

So doctrine has come to be viewed as, at best, **impractical**, and, at worst, **divisive** for the body of Christ. Really spiritual people - **humble** people - don't get dogmatic over doctrine. Dogmatic people are viewed as narrow minded people. A kind of spiritual bigotry is attached to doctrinal conviction. But this was not always the case for the life of the church. Let me illustrate:

On March 20th, 1531, in the Netherlands, a Baptist named Sicke Snyder was beheaded for being baptized in water as a believer. In the Criminal Sentence Book of the Court of Friesland, it reads: ***“Sicke Snyder, on this 20th day of March, 1531, is condemned by the Court to be executed with the sword; his body shall be laid on the wheel, and his head set upon a stake, because he has been rebaptized, and perseveres in that baptism.”***

John Piper quotes that, ***“Twenty years later, across the English Channel, from 1555 to 1558 (during the reign of bloody Queen Mary) 288 Protestant Reformers were burned at the stake. Of these, 1 was an archbishop, 4 were bishops, 21 were clergymen, 55 were women, and 4 were children. They included John Rogers, John Hooper, Rowland Taylor, Robert Ferrar, Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, John Philpot, and Thomas Cramner. Why were they all burned by the Roman Catholic Queen? There was only one issue: the meaning of the Lord’s Supper.”***

I site these examples, not to endorse brutality in the life of the church, but to sharpen our focus on one fact only. It's not the violence of those **executioners** that I'm highlighting. It's those who were **executed**.

Consider this. There was a day when people were willing to **die** - and die slow, bloody, agonizing deaths - and watch their **families** suffer the very same fate - rather than simply modify their views on baptism and the Lord's supper.

I'm wondering why was that? Why did people think so deeply about things we think of as matters of personal preference? If these people were narrow-minded and pig-headed, is it also just possible that we have become shallow and fluffy and anemic when it comes to the doctrines of our own faith?

IPAD TEXT - Jude 1:1-3 - "Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: {2} May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. {3} Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you *contend* earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints."

Underscore that word **“contend.”** Remember, it’s a **Biblical** word. Jude uses it under the direct verbal inspiration of the Holy Spirit - the third member of the Trinity. My dictionary says it means to **“strive in rivalry,”** to **“argue and debate,”** or **“to struggle to the point of strain.”**

Seriously? Imagine that! Remember, Jude is **not** talking about what it will take to preserve **their** faith. He talking about what it will take to preserve **the** faith. He’s talking about preserving the **truth content** of the Christian religion. Jude says, **“I’m leaving this body of truth in your hands. This is what it is going to take to preserve it. Any fool can let it go to pot. Any fool can do group hugs and compromise absolute doctrinal truth. But don’t do that! You will have to struggle and fight, strive and strain, and contend .”**

“Don’s get confused. Never fight for your own rights. Never fight out of personal vengeance or hurt feelings. On those occasions you turn the other cheek and walk in the meekness of Christ. But strive to the death for doctrinal truth! Resist relativism with all your might! Truth matters more in religion than in science or math, not less. The gospel itself is at stake!”

This is the first of several teachings just on the subject of believer’s baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We will cover a lot of ground in the following weeks, but let me just introduce the subject this morning with the following points as we move into our opening text in Matthew chapter 3:

We'll start with believer's baptism as commanded by Jesus.

1) **THE EXPERIENCE OF BELIEVER'S BAPTISM IS CENTRAL TO THE CONVERSION DECISION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

This is made so clear it is unavoidable in the gospel records:

- a) First of all, ***John the Baptist*** came on the scene with the specific purpose of proclaiming and practicing a "***baptism of repentance***" - **Matthew 3:11** - "**As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance....**" - **IPAD TEXT**

As we're going to study in future weeks, it's crucially important to remember that John is in ***Judea***. He is preaching his baptism of repentance to ***Jews***. These Jews already saw themselves as members of the covenant of God through circumcision. But they had never ***personally*** repented.

They entered the covenant through the experience of being born into a certain family. They were circumcised at the hands of their parents. ***But that was not what John's baptism was about at all.*** John's baptism was the accompanying sign of personal repentance and faith. I'll say a lot more about this in future weeks.

- b) Second, **Jesus** continued to make baptism a central part of His own ministry while on earth. **John 4:1 - "Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John"- IPAD TEXT**

In other words, there is nothing in Jesus' ministry that **undid** anything of John's. Jesus **continued** the emphasis of a baptism of repentance and faith. In fact, our text indicates that Jesus **exceeded** John in this push for believers to be baptized.

- c) Third, Jesus commanded - He **insisted** - that the **whole church** be commissioned to maintain His emphasis on the baptism of repentance and faith. **Matthew 28:19 - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," - IPAD TEXT**

Just perhaps the church needs to hear this absolute directive from the lips of Jesus with fresh ears. Jesus is telling us - **commanding** us - not to shrink from the call to baptize people **once they believe and are in the discipleship process.**

“Don’t you dare think you have the option of just calling people to make **decisions** for me. Don’t you dare think you can call people just to **believe** in me. I’m calling you to **baptize** disciples!”

Then He says we’re to do this all over the face of the earth - **“....making disciples of all the nations....baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”** We’re to take the pattern He and John laid down and we’re to replicate it among all the nations of the earth. In other words, this is not a **cultural** thing. It’s not a **denominational** thing. It’s not a **personal preference** thing. “Take what you’ve seen Me do and do it all over the globe. Don’t change it. Don’t alter it. Don’t soften it. Just do it.”

I can still remember when our church had to respond more obediently to our Lord’s command when we were still running the Alpha program in our church. One of the reasons we replaced the **Alpha** program with different ones had to do with the whole approach to baptism and communion.

You see, Alpha has its roots in **Brompton Holy Trinity Church** in London, England. I was at that fine, evangelical Anglican church in the heart of London, right near Harrod's department store.

But because Alpha is designed as a **non-denominational** program, or more specifically, because it is designed to be used by **all sorts** of denominations, it basically **avoids** any concentrated teaching on both baptism and the Lord's supper.

Our church **isn't** non-denominational about either believer's baptism or the Lord's supper. And, as I found over and over again, people who went through the Alpha program **as part of a denominational church's ministry** frequently came out of the program with the conclusion that, because they weren't exposed to one word about baptism or communion while they were **in** the church's Alpha program, those things couldn't be all that crucial now that they have **completed** the church's program.

“Well then, why don't you just teach more about baptism **after** the people have completed the Alpha course? Why is it so important that baptism be insisted upon right at the **beginning** of the convert's educational experience in Christ?”

Listen, it's **very** important that baptism be engaged in the convert's mind **right at the entry point of repentance and faith** because that's where **John the Baptist** and **Jesus** and the **early church** placed the event of baptism in the conversion process. The symbol of baptism will only **feel** like a declaration of repentance and faith if it is placed at the **entry point** of Christian experience.

This is not a small, technical issue. This is a huge, New Testament issue. It is truly a gospel issue. It is, in the words of Jude, **contending** for the faith.

I only say this lovingly. There are dozens of people listening to me right now for whom baptism was not the living, powerful experience it was meant to be simply because you never followed the Lord in the sequence of events the way He intended and commanded. Many of you were Christians for **years** before you finally obeyed Jesus and were baptized, and your baptism never did feel like the declaration of faith and transformation it was meant to be because, through your procrastination, you never let it function that way.

This is something we have to fix in the life of our church if we're serious about obeying Jesus and the Great Commission.

Baptism *isn't* something we can be silent about. Baptism *isn't* something to be left to the individual Christian's later research or timing. Baptism isn't something to be left to the preference of different denominations.

Baptism must be ***stressed*** and it must be stressed ***right away*** in the conversion experience. It must be proclaimed and maintained as ***central*** in our teaching and practice because Jesus, by practice and command, ***made*** it central for the New Testament church.

2) **WRAPPING UP THIS MESSAGE AND PRESSING THE URGENCY OF BAPTISM FOR THE BELIEVING DISCIPLE**

Let me close this introductory teaching as clearly as I know how. If you haven't experienced the baptism of repentance and faith, you ***must*** be baptized. Jesus' words leave no room for avoidance. As surely as you are called personally to ***repent***, and as surely as you are called personally to ***believe***, you are called personally to follow those decisions with ***baptism***.

IPAD TEXT - Acts 2:38-42 - "Peter said to them, *Repent, and each of you be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. {39} "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." {40} And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" {41} So then, *those who had received his word were baptized*; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. {42} They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Hear **verse 38** this morning - "***Each of you be baptized***"(2:38). Each and every one of you be baptized. Make it the first thing you do after you repent of your sins. Make it the first thing you do after you personally embrace the word of God's grace - "***....those who had received his word were baptized***"(41). The best time to be baptized is right after you first believe. The next best time it now.