The Beginning of Baptists in America

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[0:00] So, we've spent three weeks looking at the Baptist story in England throughout the 17th century,! and today we'll jump back and look at what was happening among the Baptists in America during the same time frame.

In fact, my hope again is to take us all the way through both the 17th and 18th centuries of American Baptist history. Now, when we think about the early history of religion in America, many of us probably think first of the pilgrims.

Of course, we learned about them in school. They were part of the separatist movement in England and they migrated over in the 1620s in hopes of finding a measure of religious freedom. And maybe we think about them sitting down with some of the Native Americans for a meal who were, you know, of course already here.

So, perhaps we picture this beautiful scene of liberty and peace. But as it happened, religion in early America was really pretty far from that, especially for the Baptists.

And maybe it would have worked out nice and peaceful-like, except the pilgrims were soon followed by as many as 20,000 Puritans over the next two decades, most of them settling in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

[1:23] Now, these Puritans were not separatists. They held reformed convictions, they were Calvinists, but they were not separatists. So, while they pushed for additional reforms within the Anglican Church of England, they remained loyal to the Church of England.

They did not want to completely separate from the church as the separatists and the Baptists had done. And yet, they were also congregationalists.

So, they had a different ecclesiology, they had a different church structure than the Anglican Church. And in England, the Congregationalists were separatists, almost out of necessity.

Men like Jono and left the Church of England. But in America, these Puritan Congregationalists, they remained loyal to the Church of England. And if that sounds strange to you, well, the Baptist story in America is full of odd little ironies like this.

Here you have Puritans who leave England, in part, to practice Congregationalism. In other words, they came here for a measure of religious freedom. And yet, they remain loyal to the Church of England, which is currently persecuting the English Congregationalists.

[2:47] And if that weren't hypocritical enough, they themselves would become the primary persecutors of all separatists and nonconformists in America.

But we have to understand that they are building a new society here in America. And when those early Baptists in England were proposing complete religious freedom for everyone, their ideas were purely theoretical.

No one had ever put them into practice. So, the prevailing assumption at the time was that you can't have complete religious freedom without society collapsing into chaos, essentially.

So, unsurprisingly, these American Congregationalists believe this new world they are building must be uniform. Can there really be any other way? Nonconformity can't be tolerated without cracking the very foundation of society.

Of course, that doesn't excuse their persecution of anyone, but it helps us understand why they were motivated to do it. And the irony of their persecution against the Baptists is only further magnified when you realize how much they actually had in common with the Baptists.

[4:02] They were both Orthodox. They were both Evangelical. They both practiced a congregational polity. In fact, the early Baptists in America shared their Calvinist convictions.

While things would change over the centuries, nearly all Baptists throughout the 17th and 18th centuries were Calvinists. But there were two big differences between them.

And the Congregationalists saw this as enough to potentially undermine all of society. And that, of course, was Believer's Baptism and the separation of church and state. And with that context in mind, the Baptist story in America really begins with the arrival of a man by the name of Roger Williams in 1631.

Now, Williams is a smart man. He's a Cambridge-educated Puritan minister in his early 30s. He has an intimate knowledge of the inner workings of Parliament.

Because years before, he had developed a system of shorthand writing that allowed him to dictate speech in real time, word for word.

[5:14] So he was then invited to transcribe all of the parliamentary meetings. This gave him a lot of insight into English politics, which, it's hard to say, may be part of the reason that led him to be such a strong advocate for the separation of church and state.

Well, he arrives in Boston in 1631. And almost immediately, he's invited to become a teacher in the church there. And this is a very prestigious offer because Boston is really the center of power at this time.

This is the heart of Puritan-controlled Massachusetts. But Williams turns down the offer. Why? He says the church in Boston isn't separated enough from the Church of England.

He calls them an unseparated people, meaning they still hold too many Roman Catholic superstitions. Excuse me. They aren't reformed enough.

And their ties to the Church of England are still too strong. So, from here, he bounces around from Boston to Salem to Plymouth and back to Salem.

[6:30] And everywhere he goes, he keeps confronting people with some very uncomfortable ideas. Williams proves to be quite a radical. For that time and place.

And by 1635, the general court in Massachusetts says, enough's enough. And they bring up formal charges against him. And it all begins with Williams' attack on the legitimacy of the colony itself.

You see, the King of England granted them a royal charter that allowed them to forcibly take land from the Native Americans to establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

And this charter was built on the idea that Christians are superior to all other people groups. So, it wasn't just that England was a more powerful nation.

No, it was believed that a Christian nation like England had divine rights over a heathen people like the Native Americans. So, the English had a God-given authority to take that land.

[7:40] And Williams objected to this. Which was to say the colony was both illegal and immoral as far as he was concerned. I mean, this was really progressive, radical thinking for the time.

Now, there were several charges leveled against him. But perhaps the biggest one was his objection to forced religion.

He did not believe the magistrates had authority over what he called soul matters. Much like the Baptists in England, you remember John Merton writing from prison on little scraps of paper with milk.

Williams believed the government should enforce the second table of the Ten Commandments, but not the first, those that relate to our duty to God.

The sword of steel, as he called it, that is the power of the state to enforce laws and to punish lawbreakers, can't change a person's heart.

[8:47] And true Christianity requires a changed heart. Furthermore, he saw no basis in Scripture for the church to wield the sword of steel. The church's weapon, he said, is the sword of the spirit.

And he lays out a very compelling case for this in his book, The Bloody Tenant of Persecution, arguing from both history and, more importantly, the Bible, that the government should not force religion on anyone.

It's really worthless because you can't change their hearts by forcing them to do something. So, in 1635, the gavel comes down and Williams is convicted of spreading diverse, new, and dangerous opinions.

And the plan is to send him back to England, where he will be imprisoned. But before the authorities can do that, Williams, he takes off.

He knows what's coming, so he kisses his wife and two young children goodbye, and he escapes into the wilderness. Now, this is January, 1636, and it's a typical New England winter.

[9:58] It's cold, the snow is deep, it's below freezing, and for the next 14 weeks, Williams essentially wanders the wilderness.

He later writes that he knew not what bread or bed did mean for this entire season. And he probably would have died, if not for his good relationship he had fostered with some of the Native Americans.

Not only had he defended their claim to the land in Massachusetts, but he had even learned their language. So, and here's another bit of irony in the story, the Native Americans ended up showing him more charity than his fellow Christians in Boston.

Sadly enough, they took him in, and they ensured his survival throughout the winter. Then when spring came, Williams, he purchased a plot of land from these Native Americans to build a settlement.

He insisted on paying for it, of course, and he named the settlement Providence, believing God had provided throughout his distress. And the rules for this new Rhode Island settlement were simple.

[11:11] It didn't matter who you were. Puritan, Quaker, Jew, Catholic, Atheist, you had full religious liberty as long as you obeyed the civil laws.

Your soul and your relationship to God, that would be your own business. And this would be the first place in modern history, anyway, where citizenship would not be tied to a particular church or religion.

Now, as you might expect, Providence begins attracting all kinds of nonconformists, those who don't fit the mold, who don't fit the state religion, and this is where the first Baptist church in America is planted.

In roughly 1638, Williams comes under Baptist convictions, convinced that only believers should be baptized. Remember that Christianity, according to him, requires a changed heart.

It requires faith. And he realizes an infant can't really express faith. If an infant is baptized, it's not because he or she has expressed his or her faith.

[12:17] No, it's because baptism has been forced upon that child. So, Williams concludes, baptism must be a voluntary act of believers only.

And that's precisely what he then sees in Scripture. So, he baptizes a man by the name of Ezekiel Holloman, who then baptizes Williams, and together they baptize about 12 others, and now you have your first Baptist church in America.

However, much like John Smith, you remember him, Williams doesn't remain with the church. I don't know why this is the pattern, but it takes him all of about three or four months to decide that his baptism is probably not legitimate.

But he takes things a bit further than Smith because he determines not only that his baptism is invalid, but that the entire church has been illegitimate since at least the 4th century.

Why the 4th century? That's when Emperor Constantine, who converted to Christianity, essentially married church and state. And Williams, he comes to see this as apostasy.

[13:29] It was the utter corruption of the church. The church had basically been a false church ever since. So, how do you suppose one fixes this problem?

If you believe you need the authority of true church succession to legitimize a new church, but the church hasn't been a true church for many, many centuries, how do you start a true church?

Well, according to Roger Williams, you need God to send some new apostles. You need an apostolic authority to restart the church. I mentioned the seekers, I believe it was last time.

Well, Williams becomes a seeker. He left the Baptist church, and while he continues to hold Baptist convictions throughout his life, he continues to preach, in fact, to anyone who will listen.

He chooses to worship God essentially on his own as he waits for God to send more apostles. Meanwhile, there's another man in Rhode Island who is often overshadowed by Williams in the history books, but he's actually, I would say, more important for the Baptist cause, and his name is Dr. John Clark.

[14:46] That's Clark with an E on the end. He's a physician, he's a theologian, who founds the second Baptist church in America in Newport, Rhode Island.

Now, some would say he was the planter of the first Baptist church because this is the first Baptist church in America to practice baptism by immersion.

But it wouldn't take long for the Providence Church to follow suit, and pretty much every Baptist church thereafter would baptize by immersion as well. So this is in the 1640s.

Clark is a bit of a statesman. He very much believes in liberty of conscience, and he spends about 12 years traveling back and forth between America and England, navigating the politics of the English Civil War and trying to secure a legal charter for the Rhode Island colony before Massachusetts has a chance to swallow up their territory and then, of course, force their state religion on the people.

Well, in 1663, he actually pulls it off. And this is amazing for two reasons. First, he demanded that the charter guarantee religious freedom for all.

[16:05] It explicitly said that no person could be, quote, molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question for any religious belief. Clark wanted to procure what he called permissive freedom in respect of the worship of God as opposed, of course, to the forced religion of God, which he argued is not worship at all.

Now, if that were radical enough, the guy who granted this charter was none other than King Charles II. So this is the same man we've talked about who is currently persecuting the Baptist in England.

And now he's granting legal freedom to all religions in Rhode Island at the request of a Baptist minister. We can only speculate why.

Some have suspected that King Charles was a Catholic sympathizer, so by granting this charter, he was basically creating a safe haven for Catholics.

I don't know. I don't know that anyone does, but clearly God is once again drawing straight lines with crooked sticks. But let's back up just a few years because I want to give you a sense of just how bad the persecution was against the Baptists.

[17:31] So you can better appreciate what this charter really meant for the future of not only the Baptist church, but for all of America. This was truly momentous, and it was truly hard fought.

So the Baptists did not grow in America nearly as quickly as they did in England. But there were people with Baptist convictions scattered around New England, including Massachusetts Bay.

And in 1651, there was a blind elderly Baptist in Massachusetts who couldn't travel all the way to Clark's church in Newport, so Clark went to him.

Clark, along with John Crandall and Obadiah Holmes, they walked about 80 miles to share the Lord's Supper with this man, to worship privately in his home.

But as they're meeting, the authorities, who have discovered they're there, burst through the door and arrest them. However, they don't take Clark and the other two to jail.

[18:39] They don't throw them in a cell somewhere. Instead, they take them to a congregationalist church and force them to sit through a worship service there. And who knows, that might have been the end of it, but these Baptists, who oppose forced religion, they refuse to remove their hats during the service in protest.

And this was a very clear and obvious signal to everyone. So as soon as it's over, they're given a mock trial where the judge tells Clark, you go up and down and secretly drop your seed like a serpent.

And I call it a mock trial because it really wasn't a trial. They were sentenced immediately. To the judge, Clark and the Baptists were really no different than those radical Anabaptists in Europe.

Troublemakers. They're corrupting society. So he holds them until they can pay some pretty hefty fines. Clark was required to pay 30 pounds, which was the equivalent of what a skilled tradesman would make all year long.

And Crandall and Holmes had to pay five pounds each, but they all refused. None of them were willing to pay it. To them, the fine was basically admitting guilt, but they didn't believe they had done anything to warrant the magistrate's punishment, so they refused to pay.

[20:04] Well, Clark had friends on the outside, and they decided to pay his fine without his consent, so he was released. Crandall then, he changed his mind, and he decided, well, I'll just go ahead and pay my fine, and he was released.

But Obadiah Holmes, he wouldn't budge. He basically said, you can do whatever you want to me, but I won't consent to anything, because whatever you do to me will be a testimony against the injustice of a state-controlled church.

So on September 5th, 1651, they drag Holmes to the public square in Boston. They strip him to the waist, they tie him to a post, and they whip him 30 times with a three-corded whip.

So if you've done the math, that's about 90 stripes across his back. It would be weeks before he could sleep lying down. He would have to sleep on his knees and his elbows.

And after they untie him, Holmes turns to the magistrates, and he says, you have struck me as with roses.

[21:24] Later, he would write to John Spilsbury, who was the pastor of the first particular Baptist church in England, and describe how he felt the spiritual manifestation of God's presence in that moment.

So much so that the outward pain, he said, was removed. I didn't even feel it. Now, you would think this would destroy the Baptist movement in America.

You would think everyone who is seeing this would just, you know, return to their congregationalist churches where it's safe. But this brought the entire church-state debate out of the merely theoretical, and in the minds of most people, it became a very visible human rights issue.

I mean, it made the Puritans at that time in that place look like monsters, and it made the Baptists look like martyrs. One of the witnesses would later say this whipping of Obadiah Holmes was the seed of the Baptist church.

In other words, you can't torture people into agreement and expect to walk away looking like the good guys. So instead of killing the Baptist movement in America, the whipping of Obadiah Holmes actually put fuel in the fire and caused it to grow.

[22:47] For example, Henry Dunster, who was the first president of Harvard College, was so impacted at this moment that he actually changes his position on infant baptism.

When it comes time for his own son to be baptized, he says, no, it's not going to happen. Of course, this causes him to lose his job. And he was just one of many. By 1665, there was actually a Baptist church in Boston, despite the state's best efforts to stop it.

Well, after this, the Baptist story begins to move south into the middle colonies, namely Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Pennsylvania in particular was established in the 1680s by the Quakers on the principles of religious freedom, much like Rhode Island. And it was a man from John Clark's church, Thomas Dungan, who planted the first Baptist church there.

Sadly, though, he would only live about four years after planting the church, and really the church didn't survive much past that. However, just before his death, Dungan would baptize a man who would go on to evangelize and plant churches all over Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware.

[24:07] And this man's name was Elias Keech. And he provides us with one of my favorite stories in Baptist history. So Elias Keech, he's the son of the well-known, well-respected, highly influential, particular Baptist pastor, Benjamin Keech, in England.

Benjamin, by the way, is one of the big reasons we have him singing in our church. He was a strong advocate for that when most of the other Baptists said, no, that's not appropriate.

You can't have man-written songs in worship. But anyway, at the age of 19, Elias, he's not a Christian. In fact, he thinks Christians are a bunch of naive fools.

Well, he takes his cues from the prodigal son in Luke 15 and he sets out for the far country of Pennsylvania. He's leaving his father, his home. And I don't know whether this was his original plan, but before leaving home, he steals some of his dad's sermon manuscripts and some of his ministerial garb and he decides he's going to prove just how naive Christians are by gathering some crowds, dressing like a minister, and preaching some of his dad's sermons.

Of course, the joke in his mind is that they'll ignorantly listen to anyone, even an unbeliever. Well, he gathers a crowd in a place called Penipak outside of Philadelphia and he starts preaching one of his dad's sermons.

[25:47] And the people, they're hanging on every word. I mean, he's really good at this. When he suddenly stops mid-sentence, witnesses later said he looked astonished as though he'd been seized with a sudden disorder.

Tears are streaming down his face and then he finally confesses to the crowd, I look like a minister, but I am a lost soul.

I know nothing of the grace of God. I am an imposter. And he tears off his dad's garb and he rushes to find the first Baptist minister he can find who happens to be Thomas Dungan.

Well, Dungan is utterly convinced that Elias is a born-again man and baptizes him. And the church basically says, well, we know he can preach and now that he's actually a Christian, let's let him keep on preaching.

And he does and he goes on to plant Baptist churches all over the middle colonies. His story makes me think of the Apostle Paul. What Paul said about those ministers who preached the gospel with less than godly motives?

[27:06] He said, they proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

I don't know whether Paul had anticipated a man converting himself through insincere preaching, but that's what seems to have happened in the case of Elias Keech.

Well, among the churches that Keech plants, five of them formed the first Baptist Association in America in 1707.

This was called the Philadelphia Baptist Association and it's significant for a few reasons. First of all, it's the first time Baptists in America are able to organize before this time.

They're all in survival mode, right? It was just enough to stay alive and to keep the church doors open, but now they've organized this association for mutual help and support.

[28:08] And to be clear, the churches all remained autonomous, but the association allowed them to be more effective, strengthened by helping one another in this cause.

Second, this is significant because it reveals the unity among Baptist churches at the time. And by unity, I primarily mean doctrinal unity.

The Philadelphia Baptists formally adopt the 1689 Second London Confession of Faith as their official confession, which it would appear most of the churches were already using, but they make it official.

And while five churches may sound like a small number, like they only represent a handful of Baptists in America, this would very quickly spread. This would be the heartbeat of Baptist doctrine throughout all of the colonies.

You know, it gave Baptist theological clarity and stability. Even the relatively few Arminian or general Baptist churches at the time would soon convert to Calvinism, to the confession itself, and adopt the 1689 Confession.

[29:23] It's quite remarkable. And third, the formation of the Philadelphia Association gave the Baptists a confessional identity. It said to themselves, it said to the world around them, we know what we believe, we're not some unorganized group jumping from whim to whim, we have a clearly defined theological foundation, and here it is in our confession.

And this would prove very helpful as the Baptists enter into a new phase of Baptist life in America. So, in the 1740s, America experiences what's been called the First Great Awakening.

Revival sweeps through the colony with George Whitefield being the primary catalyst for this. He was a British evangelist who could preach to thousands upon thousands of people outdoors without a microphone, mind you, and hold the entire audience captive.

He was a very powerful preacher. And his message was really simple. You must be born again. He preached that true Christianity is not merely attending a church, it's not being the member of a church as part of your civic responsibility.

You must have a personal, experiential encounter with God. You must know Him personally, really. Well, this might not sound all that radical to us, but it splits the congregationalists right down the middle.

[31:04] The so-called old lights, they hated this. They thought it was too emotional, too chaotic, and the so-called new lights, they embraced it, but now they have a problem.

If a Christian must be born again, what about all of these people that were brought into the church as infants? In other words, they realized that a lot of their members, their membership being pretty much everyone born into their towns, were probably not born again.

So the logic of the revival led many people to Baptist convictions of a regenerate church membership and, of course, consequently, believers' baptism.

And here's more of that irony in the story. These new light congregationalists who once rejected and even persecuted the Baptists, they form a new stream of Baptists known as the separate Baptists.

And this movement would be spearheaded in many respects by a man named Shubal Stearns. I've heard it said that if Roger Williams was the intellectual and John Clark was the statesman, Stearns is the flamethrower.

[32:21] People of the time described him as having piercing eyes and a musical voice. In short, he was very charismatic, very dynamic.

well, Stearns and many others, they feel a call to leave New England and they move south and they settle in Sandy Creek, North Carolina in 1755.

Now, the separate Baptists, as you might expect, are considerably different than the particular Baptists who are slowly becoming better known as the regular Baptists here in America.

The preaching among the separates was very emotional, it was very urgent. Stearns in particular was very passionate, very captivating. One man said that he went to hear Stearns preach and Stearns fixed his eyes on him.

He's actually trying to leave the service, but as soon as he catches Stearns' eyes, he just freezes. He said he felt like a bird staring into the eyes of a rattlesnake.

[33:23] He couldn't look away. The preaching among the separates was not systematic, it was not nearly as polished as the regular's preaching. It was described as a holy whining, it had a musical cadence to it.

People would be visibly shaken by it, they would cry out, they would fall to the floor, it was very noisy and chaotic, pretty much the opposite of anything you think about when you think of a Baptist service, right?

But it was also very effective in a sense. The group at Sandy Creek grew from 16 members to 42 churches with 125 ministers.

It grew very quickly. Of course, the culture of the separates, while it became very popular, this also created a clash with the regulars.

The regulars, for the most part, they're very ordered, they're very educated, they're confessional. The separates, they're wild, they're emotional, and frankly, they're suspicious of the regulars, especially with their subdued, seemingly lifeless way of worship.

[34:33] The regulars, of course, thought the separates were disorderly and possibly heretical. The separates thought the regulars were cold, dead, too much like the congregationless churches they had separated from.

So, there begins to be this tension between them. More than anything, the separates were very suspicious of the regulars' confessionalism.

They feared that a church confession like the 1689 would basically replace the Bible. And in response, they said, we have no creed but the Bible. Well, this division between them, believe it or not, doesn't last terribly long.

By the end of the 18th century, they begin to better understand one another and they actually grow together. You see, the regulars, they realize that the separates, despite not having a formal confession after they get to know them and talk to them, well, these guys are thoroughly orthodox.

They're even Calvinists. Plus, they're very effective evangelists. And the separates realize that the church cannot survive on emotion alone. That's not going to work.

[35:42] They need stability. They need structure, which the regulars clearly have. So by the 1780s, the various Baptist associations began bringing both sides together until nearly half of all the separates have become regulars.

They've joined together. So now you have a force to be reckoned with. You have the fire of the separates and you have the clarity and stability of the regulars brought together within this Baptist movement.

And this turns the movement into one of both doctrinal conservatism, which is good, and evangelistic fervor, which is also good. And the Baptists multiply.

Their influence grows. And this becomes really important because of what is now happening with the American Revolution. So when the colonies begin to find the King of England, the Baptists, particularly in New England, they find themselves in a kind of a strange position.

Of course, they're not fans of the monarch, no more than anyone else, but they're also not interested in trading one form of tyranny for another. Since the Act of Toleration in 1689, Baptists were mostly free to worship in places like Massachusetts, but they still had to pay taxes to support the Congregationalist Church.

[37:08] And if they didn't pay those taxes, the authorities could seize their property, they could throw them into jail. So Baptists really find themselves both on the inside and the outside of this conflict with England.

Well, a Baptist preacher and historian by the name of Isaac Bacchus, he becomes somewhat of an outspoken voice in all of this, and he turns the primary argument against England against his fellow Americans.

They're all protesting because taxation without representation is unjust. And Bacchus says, that's precisely what you're doing to the Baptists.

Why is it unjust when it comes to silly things like tea, but not when it comes to religion? Well, in the spirit of the times, I suppose, Bacchus actually goes as far as urging Baptists to engage in civil disobedience.

He encourages them to stop paying their taxes altogether. Unsurprisingly, this leads to the Baptists having their property seized. Many are thrown in jail.

[38:19] This is happening all throughout New England. It's happening in Virginia as well where the Anglican church now reigns. And when the Baptists are in jail, they attempt to continue their defiance by preaching from the windows of the cells.

So the authorities retort by burning brimstone right outside the windows to choke them out. They hire people to beat drums so loudly that no one can hear their preaching. But all this really does is draw more attention to the Baptist cause.

People are walking by going, what is this all about? And more importantly, people are growing very sympathetic to their plight. And there are two very important figures who take notice of this.

They are James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. just to name a couple. Now, neither of these men is an Orthodox Christian.

They're Enlightenment thinkers. One had a background in religion, but they're strong advocates for liberty. They are savvy politicians. And yet, religion isn't really their primary concern.

[39:32] At the same time, they realize that if the Baptists don't have liberty, one, they haven't really accomplished what they set out to accomplish, but they also realize that Baptists have become a pretty big voter block.

So maybe it's in their best interest to protect the Baptists. Having said that, we do have one Baptist preacher in particular to thank for much of this. His name is John Leland.

Don't have time to go into a lot of his story, but regarding Madison, he essentially threatened to pull Baptist support from him during his run for Congress unless he agreed to pursue a constitutional amendment that would grant religious freedom for all.

Of course, Madison would go on to write the First Amendment. And regarding Jefferson, I don't know that Leland had any specific influence over him.

They seem to have become friends to some degree, but Leland did rally support behind him. We might call it an odd sort of friendship because they were working toward the same goal of religious freedom despite having very different motivations.

[40:46] Jefferson's reasons were purely secular, but Leland helped him nonetheless. In fact, Leland would go on to send him a 1,200-pound block of cheese as a gift once he was elected, and Jefferson would turn around and invite him to preach before Congress.

And as they say, the rest is history. After nearly 200 years, the Baptists finally have freedom. Now, to wrap up this lesson very briefly, I just want to make two points.

First, I believe it's important to note that the Baptist's ultimate goal was never really political. yes, there were political objectives necessary to accomplish the mission of the church, but the mission of the church is not to create an ideal political system or government.

For these early Baptists, they simply desired to worship God as he commands and to make disciples as he commands, baptizing believers in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

But as they understood from the very beginning in light of this long-standing parish model system where everyone is baptized as an infant, the practice of believers' baptism and ultimately regenerate church membership would require liberty of conscience.

[42:18] you've got to give people some freedom. They understood what Peter said, we must obey God rather than men. They would have to break the law and they would have to suffer persecution in some cases to do what God commands.

If it had not been illegal to obey God in these ways, I don't know if the Baptists would have felt the need to ever become as instrumental in politics as they became. That's speculation on my part but their motivation was primarily obeying God.

And the second point I'll make is more of an observation. In addition to all of the Baptist history I've been reading, I also started a book called The History of Religious Liberty and it's really highlighted for me how amazing God's providence has been throughout history.

In many respects, you could say the Baptists are here today because King Henry VIII wanted to divorce his wife and the Catholic Church wouldn't let him. And you can follow a whole string of crazy events throughout history to see how we got here but it's also made me very thankful.

You and I are the beneficiaries of a lot of suffering and turmoil. A lot of blood and a lot of tears have been shed to make our freedom possible and I just pray that we never take that for granted.

[43:48] Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you for your wise and sovereign providence by which you have preserved your truth in your church through a great deal of suffering and sacrifice.

We thank you for the freedom we now enjoy that has been purchased at a great cost by many who have trusted you and obeyed your word. Lord, I pray that we would never take our liberty lightly but I pray that we would use it humbly and faithfully for your glory not to mention the making of disciples and we ask this in the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen.