

The First Baptist Churches

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[0:00] So, we are continuing our study of Baptist history, looking at it from a 30,000 foot view.! We left off last time with Thomas Helwes breaking away from John Smith and his group in Amsterdam.

! You may remember that John Smith was a separatist in England who fled to Holland to avoid persecution. And while he was there, he became convinced that the Bible teaches believers' baptism.

While everyone else, both the Catholics and the Protestants, practiced infant baptism according to a kind of parish model, he could not find that model in Scripture.

When he looked at the New Testament, he saw the church baptizing only professing believers. So, having nowhere else to turn for what he deemed a legitimate biblical baptism, he baptized himself.

Then he baptized the congregation who was with him of about 50 or so people. Of course, Smith was criticized for this. While you won't find infant baptism in the Bible, his critics pointed out that you won't find self-baptism in the Bible.

[1:12] But their arguments against him actually run a little bit deeper than that. And we should take a moment to consider this because it comes up several times throughout early Baptist history.

Helwes would have to deal with it once he returned to England. The particular Baptists would have to deal with it, and we'll talk about who they are in a moment. So, we should put ourselves in their historical context to understand why this was such an issue for so many people, including the Puritans and the Separatists.

So, it really begins with the Catholic Church. For many years, the Catholic Church believed and taught the necessity of unbroken church succession.

So, think about what Jesus said to his apostles in Matthew 16. Peter makes his great confession, saying, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus responds, I tell you, Peter, tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. Then he says, this is key, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

[2:26] And whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. So, the Catholic Church eventually understood this to mean that Peter himself was given the keys to the kingdom.

And he would then pass those keys on to subsequent generations. Those keys would be passed on through the church, namely the church's leadership from generation to generation.

So, the church would always hold the keys, and there could never be a true church anywhere unless the current holder of the keys gave them those keys.

So, a group might pop up somewhere and say, Hey, we're a church, but if the Catholic Church had not authorized it, they deemed it a false church.

Well, as paradoxical as it seems, that continued to be the mindset of now Protestant, Anglican, the Church of England.

[3 : 32] They themselves had broken succession through the Reformation, and yet they would not tolerate a separatist movement because the separatists were forming churches apart from the Church of England's authority.

In fact, as we talked about last time, these congregations were illegal. But John Smith's argument, and this would become the argument of Helwic and others, was that the Bible doesn't require unbroken church succession for there to be a true church.

The keys to the kingdom, they argued, aren't passed through the authority of the church necessarily, and it isn't quite so linear throughout history.

Rather, the keys are given to any and all genuine believers. Anyone who genuinely shares Peter's confession regarding Christ possesses the keys to the kingdom.

In other words, the right to be a true church doesn't come necessarily from another church. It comes from the authority of Christ himself and what Scripture says.

[4 : 43] That's what the Reformers stood on, and that's what the Baptists would stand on. Even so, Baptists have sometimes developed a strange habit of reverting back to the Catholic understanding of church succession.

I mentioned the landmark Baptists last time. That was their most defining belief. The primitive Baptists eventually came to share that view.

Really, it's an idea that became somewhat popular throughout American Baptists in the 20th century. J.M. Carroll published a book called The Trail of Blood, wherein he claimed Baptists were the true church and that while Protestants and Catholics were over here fighting, the Baptists were always completely separate.

They were always out there somewhere perpetuating... Thank you. Perpet... Yes.

Continuing the true unbroken succession of the church from the time of the apostles. The problem with that theory is just that.

[6 : 00] It's purely theory. There's no historical evidence to back it up, and really the evidence is all to the contrary. And biblically, the entire concept of church succession is completely unnecessary.

I mean, it's nice to think, I suppose, that I know my church is the true church because we can trace this unbroken lineage all the way back to the apostles, but no one actually has that kind of evidence.

In fact, all of the evidence is to the contrary. I shared with some of you last time that the most helpful lesson I've ever learned about any kind of history, including church history, is that history is not black and white.

And by that I mean, we're talking about the history of sinners, of imperfect people. It's not always that we have good guys and bad guys.

It's not always that we can look at an issue of the past and clearly define it as right or wrong. I mean, just look at the history recorded in the Bible. Take Abraham, for example.

[7 : 14] With Abraham, we have this incredibly important figure whom God chose to be the father of a great nation, and what does he do? Rather than wait on the Lord to begin the fulfillment of that promise by giving him a son, he sleeps with his wife's servant so they can have a child.

Was Moses perfect? Was David perfect? Was Israel perfect? No, yet God used these very people to accomplish his purposes throughout history.

And that's what's truly amazing about God's providence. It's amazing that he can accomplish what he does despite this messy, broken world that he's working with.

But getting back to Smith, he fell into that same kind of temptation, thinking that maybe his baptism wasn't legitimate, not only because he baptized himself, but because it was administered, it wasn't administered, I should say, by a true church.

He was never given the keys to the kingdom, if you will, by a true church. Now, he originally argued that that wasn't an option for him.

[8 : 30] He had no choice. There was no church for him to go to for baptism. But then he got connected to the Waterlander Mennonites. And as we discussed last time, since moving to Amsterdam, he had grown closely aligned with them in his soteriology, what he believed about salvation.

plus they practiced believer's baptism. So he thought it was best for him and for his group to simply join them and get rebaptized.

But again, one man in the group, Thomas Helwes, disagreed. As I said before, the Mennonites shared some very unorthodox views regarding Christ.

They held some very unorthodox views. And they also leaned anti-Augustinian in their theology. And by that, I mean there's evidence that they may have denied that Adam's sinful nature passed on to all of us.

So we're all essentially born neutral rather than sinful. And there were other issues, but what Helwes called the succession in holy things seems to have been the crux of the matter for him.

[9 : 45] In Helwes' mind, Smith was conceding to the idea that the church's authority must be received through an unbroken line, some unbroken succession from prior churches.

And he denounced this as a human tradition that had no biblical basis. In fact, he called it the Antichrist's chief hold, meaning it was a Jewish and then it was a Roman Catholic idea that kept God's people in bondage under their control.

It was no different than the Jews claiming that Gentiles must first become Jewish before they can become Christians. And it was no different than the Catholics suggesting that in order to be a genuine Christian or to be a genuine true church, you must become Catholic.

Instead, Helwes argued that the Bible itself gives people the authority to church themselves through a profession of Christ and obedience to Scripture.

A true church, he said, is founded directly by the Word and the Spirit, not by any institution. Helwes, even when as far as, maybe this was done out of pure spite, I have no idea.

[11 : 09] But he wrote a letter to this Mennonite group and he warned them not to accept Smith and his group into their membership because they were under church discipline.

They had been excluded by the Church of England. Perhaps a more optimistic interpretation was that he was trying to get Smith to rejoin him.

Regardless, it didn't work. The Mennonites accepted Smith's group, though Smith himself would actually die before he was able to be rebaptized. Well, that left Thomas Helwes and a group of about 12 people and they decided not to stay in Amsterdam.

They wanted to return to England. Helwes was very missionary-minded in this way and he held a deep conviction that the gospel witness should never be hidden.

Christians should not hide their candle under a basket, as he put it. It was their absolute duty to bear witness to their own countrymen. So, in 1611, possibly 1612, they travel back to England.

[12 : 18] Now, keep in mind that King James I is still on the throne. He is still actively persecuting separatists or anyone who is broken away from the Church of England.

And if you want another example of God's amazing providence and the messiness of history, look no further than King James. Here you have a man who is persecuting separatists, including Baptists, as we'll see, simultaneously authorizing and publishing the very English translation of the Bible that will have more influence worldwide, even among Baptists, for the next 400 years than any other translation, not to mention any other book.

God can certainly draw straight lines with crooked sticks. Well, by 1612, Helwes and his group officially established the First Baptist Church on English soil.

They gathered in Spitalfields just outside of London. This was a house church, by the way. They didn't have a public church building because, if for no other reason, it was illegal to have this church.

But more than the first Baptist church in England, they were the first general Baptist church. Now, this can get a little confusing, especially once we reach American Baptist history because Baptists eventually form multiple streams.

[13:54] I wouldn't call them denominations, they don't operate like denominations. They're more like category of Baptists. So, in England, we'll see two streams, the general Baptist and the particular Baptist.

Once we get to America, the streams become general Baptists, regular Baptists, and separate Baptists, not to be confused with the Separatists of England.

So, while none of these categories have really been established yet in church history at the point of Helwes and these men, let me briefly summarize each of them so you'll have an idea of where things are moving.

So, in England, we eventually see the general Baptists and the particular Baptists. The general Baptists are Arminian in their soteriology. They believe Christ made a general, you might even say universal atonement for all people and it's available to all.

The particular Baptists, on the other hand, hold a Calvinist understanding of salvation. They believe in a particular or definite atonement, meaning Christ died for precisely those who would be saved.

[15:13] We could go much deeper into that, but again, this is 30,000 foot view. We gotta keep moving. Now, in 18th century America, we have three groups, the general, regular, and separate Baptists.

The general Baptists descend from the English general Baptists. Their doctrine is Arminian. The regular Baptists are heirs of the particular Baptists.

They're Calvinists. And like the English particular Baptists, they're also confessional. They hold to a formal written confession which will actually prove to be an important distinction as time goes on.

And then the separate Baptists emerge from the First Great Awakening. They're kind of a revivalist sort of Baptist. They too were Calvinist, though they tended to be less confessional.

And if all of that isn't confusing enough, it doesn't take very long before the regulars and the separates just merge together, especially in the South, and you can't hardly distinguish them as time goes on.

[16:19] As I said, these distinct groups haven't formed just yet, but if you decide to read some Baptist history on your own, you might find it helpful because these names are going to get thrown around and they're not always defined for you, so it'll be helpful to know who they are.

Well, at this point, getting back to the church in Spitalfields, they don't yet consider themselves a general Baptist church. As far as they're concerned, they're just a, they're a group of believers trying to follow the New Testament ecclesiology as closely as possible.

They practice believers' baptism. This was still done by pouring or effusion at this point. Baptism by immersion wouldn't be recovered by the Baptists until the 1640.

and we're going to come to that. They also cultivated a very simple style of worship, kind of in retaliation of the Church of England, the Anglican Church.

Their worship consisted of little more than the Lord's Supper, singing, praying, and preaching. Not a lot of liturgical readings or anything like that.

[17 : 30] Sadly, within a year, Thomas Helwes was arrested and he was thrown into the infamous Newgate Prison in London.

And if that name sounds familiar, it would be the same prison that would hold John Bunyan for 12 years while he was writing multiple works, including *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Unlike Bunyan, however, Helwes would never get out. at the age of 40, he would die in prison about four years later. And for that reason, Helwes is generally recorded as the first Baptist martyr.

But let's back up just a little because Helwes didn't exactly keep his unlawful church a secret. Soon after returning to England, he wrote a little book called *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*.

And this is where Helwes explicitly demands universal religious freedom. Now, to be clear, he's not arguing exclusively for Baptist freedom.

[18 : 44] He's arguing for everyone's freedom. He writes, men's religion to God is betwixt God and themselves. And he goes as far as to say, listen to this, let them be heretics, Turks, or Muslims, Jews, or whatsoever.

It appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure. This is Europe in 1612, not 21st century America.

This is extremely radical, controversial stuff. No one, no one was arguing for this kind of freedom. Freedom for heretics, freedom for Muslims, be it Catholics or Protestants, the debate was never over religious freedom.

The only debate was which church or which religious system would be enforced. But it's not as though Helwes wanted to see false religions or heresies become prevalent.

I don't think that was it. He argued that forcing people to worship against their conscience quote, stinks in the nostrils of God.

[20 : 03] And he quotes Jesus who says true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. of course, the Lord also warned against worshiping Him in body only and not with the heart.

This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me. So, true worship, he concluded, must be voluntary. You can't force someone to be a genuine Christian.

So, why would the state or the government legally require people to be a part of any church or engage in any form of worship?

According to Helwes, the state has a responsibility before God to enforce the second table of the Ten Commandments but not the first. That would exceed the state's God-given authority, not to mention contradict the teachings of Christ.

And on the flip side of that, Helwes accused the state of uprooting good wheat in its efforts to pull up the tares. You know the parable of Jesus.

[21 : 13] He says the enemy comes along and he plants tares or weeds in with the good wheat and the farmer then tells his servants to leave the tares alone because in the process of ripping up those tares they might actually rip up good wheat in the process.

Well, Helwes argues that persecution was doing precisely that. Good people, genuine Christians were being destroyed in an effort to eliminate what the state deemed to be heresy.

And I'll tell you that Helwes pulled no punches. Drawing from the book of Revelation he calls the Roman Catholic Church the first beast. He then refers to the Church of England as the second beast of Revelation.

And he even rebukes the Puritans and the Separatists accusing them of working for the Antichrist because they administered infant baptisms which he considered the mark of the beast.

He even took a shot at the pilgrim pastor John Robinson calling him a malicious adversary of God's truth. But he didn't stop there.

[22 : 23] If that weren't enough to get him into trouble and it most certainly was, he also addressed King James personally who, by law, was considered supreme head of the Church of England.

Let's just say he puts the governing authorities in their proper place. Yes, they have a divine obligation before God, but that duty does not include running the church or persecuting Christians.

So he addresses this in his book. And he doesn't stop there. He actually takes a copy of his book, personally inscribes it, and sends it to King James.

And here's what he writes in the book. The king is a mortal man and not God. Therefore hath no power over the immortal souls of his subjects to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual lords over them.

You can almost imagine him signing it, Love, Thomas, help. Well, how do you suppose King James reacted to that? Well, as I said, he was in prison where he died four years later.

[23 : 37] And I don't know that he had too many sympathizers in the broader Protestant world either. Now, I do want to be clear that despite Hellis' strong rhetoric, he did try to thread the needle between anarchy and tyranny.

He wasn't advocating for sedition. He was not trying to overthrow the government or suggest that people rebel against the governing authorities. He simply felt strongly, mind you, that the government should not force religion on people or stand in the way of people's religion.

that was outside of their jurisdiction. And this very much becomes a Baptist distinctive. The rhetoric would get toned down just a little bit, but this would become an argument of the particular Baptists.

Roger Williams, who was heavily influenced by Helwes and his predecessor John Merton, would carry these very ideas to America and found the Rhode Island colony on this principle of religious freedom.

And Williams would also plant the first Baptist church in America. Now, a part of me would like to spend some time on the soteriology of Helwes and the General Baptists.

[25 : 00] Maybe some of you have no idea what I mean when I refer to their understanding of salvation as Arminian. But I'll just summarize it this way and leave you to study it further on your own or come to me later with questions.

Here's one summary I found. Early General Baptist theology was a complete Arminian system, general atonement, conditional election, resistible grace, and the possibility of apostasy, that is, among genuine believers.

Thomas Helwes and his congregation were some of the earliest English champions of these views which set them apart from the more Calvinistic Puritans around them.

Well, moving on in the Baptist story, after Helwes was thrown into prison, a man by the name of John Merton took his place as pastor of the church in Spitalfields.

He had gone with Helwes and Smith to Amsterdam and, of course, returned with Helwes, but his tenure was short-lived. He was also imprisoned about a year after Helwes.

[26 : 08] But similar to John Bunyan, Merton didn't waste time in prison. He wrote books. Primarily, he wrote books on the subject of religious freedom, which were then smuggled out of the prison and became very influential.

And in them, he basically expands the arguments made by Helwes and makes for a very compelling case for religious liberty. And it's fascinating how he was able to smuggle these books out without the guards noticing.

So, someone would bring him a supply of small bits of paper hidden in the corks of milk bottles. And then he would use a stick to write on those little scraps of paper with milk.

So he can't see what he's writing on the paper. It's basically invisible ink as far as he's concerned. But then he would put those papers back in the cork. The bottles would leave the prison and his friends on the outside would pull the paper out of the cork and they would hold it up to a fire and the milk would brown just enough so they could see what he had written.

And his friends were then responsible for transcribing his words and putting them, all of these relatively short notes all together into these books. and you should look up his writing sometimes.

[27 : 33] They're all available online. They are surprisingly coherent and well-written given the process. Well, despite all of the persecution against them, the General Baptists actually grew.

By 1626, their small church of 12 people had grown into 150 members across five churches. some of that may have been helped by King Charles I, the son of King James who took the throne in 1620s and was preoccupied with some other issues so this small Baptist movement had a little bit of room to grow and expand.

But we're going to leave the General Baptist story right here for now because there was another Baptist movement beginning to take shape that would soon eclipse the General Baptist in both size and influence and that was the rise of the particular Baptists.

So going back to London in 1616 while Helwes is in Newgate Prison there was a former Anglican minister by the name of Henry Jacob who had joined the separatist movement.

Perhaps we should call him a semi-separatist because unlike Smith and Helwes he still believed the Church of England though corrupt was still a true church.

[29 : 05] I mean he never went as far as calling the Anglican Church the second beast or anything like that. Even so in 1616 he gathers several dozen people to form a separatist church in London and what was unique about this church was that it didn't insist that its members break all ties to the Church of England at least not immediately as long as they didn't participate in anything they deemed to be unbiblical.

Now unsurprisingly Jacob was heavily criticized by this from other separatists they called his church a half-separated church which was to be a term of derision.

They even accused him of idolatry of being too Anglican meanwhile the Anglican said he was too separatist so nobody really cared for him.

But Jacob believed in the autonomy of the church under Christ's headship so they continued on and they would frequently have to change their location because they had to avoid detection so nobody really knew where they met most of the time.

Now this church would eventually become known as the Jacob Lathrop Jesse Church or the JLJ Church named after its first three pastors.

[30 : 26] And this church which was orthodox evangelical and certainly Calvinist would soon become something of a mother church to the particular Baptist in England.

By 1644 at least four if not five of the first seven particular Baptist churches in London could trace their origins directly to the JLJ Church.

So Henry Jacob was their first pastor until 1622 when he actually left to settle in Virginia. He left for the New World. He had corresponded regularly with the pilgrim John Robinson of that pilgrim group that initially went over and ultimately decided he could do more good in the American colony.

So he left for the New World. After Jacob John Lathrop became their pastor. He had also been an Anglican minister at one time and it was during his tenure that one of their meetings was raided and he along with 42 others were arrested and imprisoned for about 18 months.

So you can see the kind of conditions they had back then. Now when he was released he was released upon the condition that he would leave England which he did.

[31 : 49] In 1634 he and a few others moved to Massachusetts where he would plant at least a couple of churches. So we can already see by the way how these Calvinistic Baptists are doing their part to shape the formation of America.

I guess I shouldn't call them Baptists but these Calvinist separatists are doing their part to shape American history. By the way the pastor Lathrop was ancestor to two American presidents George H.W.

Bush and George W. Bush. Well Lathrop's departure left the JLJ church without a pastor for about three years.

Then in 1637 they called Henry Jesse to be their new pastor and this guy was credentialed. He was Cambridge educated. He was a former Puritan minister.

He was fluent in both Hebrew and Greek and he was pretty well known as being a very smart man and a very gentle man. Now throughout the 1630s as I said the JLJ church was only semi separatist.

[33 : 04] Obviously they had broken away from the church of England for several reasons but they were not a Baptist church. They still baptized infants. But starting in 1630 the issue of baptism started to be somewhat contentious among them.

There were a lot more conversations about it. The biggest question at first was whether or not, was really not whether they should baptize infants but whether the baptism of infants by the church of England was valid.

Whether they should accept those baptisms. Since they believed the church of England was full of corruption they had to ask themselves can we accept their baptisms as legitimate? So in 1630 a member by the name of Mr.

Dupper we don't know his first name but Mr. Dupper urged the church to renounce baptisms by the church of England. Now clearly he was a bit more separatist than some of the others but at this point he's not really advocating for believers baptism.

He's simply arguing that anyone baptized in the church of England should be re-baptized. Now it would seem that he did eventually embrace believers baptism but not at first.

[34 : 21] Even so he leaves to start a new church. Then in 1633 so just a short time later we have another group who grows a little dissatisfied with the JLJ church within this church and this includes Samuel Eaton and William Kiffin.

And if you know your Baptist history these names are important and they'll come up again. Well in September 1633 this group requests permission to form a distinct congregation and the church gives them permission with its blessing.

This was a very peaceful split between them. In fact they would continue to meet together at times. Now much like Mr. Dupper's church the issue for them is not really infant baptism versus believers baptism.

They simply feel like the first group that England's baptisms aren't legitimate and anyone baptized in the church of England should be rebaptized. However about five years later 1638 that would change for them.

They would change their position on that and embrace believers baptism. And then there's a third group that leaves the JLJ church and this group includes Thomas Wilson and John Spillsbury two other important names in Baptist history.

[35 : 46] And unlike before these guys are actually convinced of believers baptism. In the church records often referred to as the Kiffin manuscript they left quote being convinced that baptism was not to be administered to infants but to such only as professed faith in Christ.

So if you're confused let me briefly summarize what's happening here. We have this separatist church the JLJ church and out of it has at this point poured out three different groups.

The first two were not Baptist initially but they would become Baptist churches. The third group led by John Spillsbury was distinctly Baptist from the start.

In fact it was the first particular Baptist church meaning it was the first Calvinist Baptist church and there would be others.

At least one other particular Baptist church would come out of the JLJ church later that same year in fact and even the JLJ church would begin moving toward Baptist convictions slowly but surely.

[37 : 02] However none of them practiced baptism by immersion yet. They were still practicing effusion or pouring but in 1640 a member of the JLJ church not John Spillsbury church not the first particular Baptist church but the JLJ church a man by the name of Richard Blunt becomes convinced that not only is infant baptism unbiblical but that effusion isn't the biblical model for baptism.

And there are basically three things that led him to this conclusion. First the New Testament teaches that baptism symbolizes the death and resurrection of Christ. And of course that's far better illustrated through immersion when somebody goes down into the water and comes back up out of the water than pouring does.

Second the word baptism itself literally means to immerse. And third whenever we see someone baptized in scripture they go to a body of water they go down into the water they come back up out of the water which would certainly suggest immersion.

Well with this new conviction Blunt wants to investigate further. baptism but where does it go? There's no one in England practicing baptism by immersion.

I mean hardly anyone practices believer's baptism right? Let alone baptism by immersion but he's heard about this Mennonite group in Holland known as the Renspers and they practice baptism by immersion.

[38 : 44] like the Waterlander Mennonites they're not Orthodox. This is not a group that Blunt wants to join up with or anything like that.

He just wants to go see how they do baptisms. So he goes to Holland. Now some historians suspect that Blunt was actually baptized by this group when he was in Holland.

And a large part of that suspicion comes from the fact that later church records are almost oddly vague about his baptism.

In the so-called Kiffin manuscript I mentioned earlier we're told that Blunt he returns to England and he baptizes a man by the name of Samuel Blacklock. Then it says Mr.

Blacklock that was a teacher amongst them and Mr. Blunt being baptized he and Mr. Blacklock baptized the rest of their friends that were so minded.

[39 : 47] So evidently one of two things happened. Either Blacklock and Blunt baptized each other and then baptized the rest of the congregation or Blunt was actually baptized in Holland by this unorthodox Mennonite group but no one really wanted to admit that in the official records.

Now whether Blunt was baptized in Holland or not it does seem that he was concerned about continuity. Remember that it's been ingrained in people that the church should have this unbroken continuity or succession and I say that Blunt seems concerned about this because even though the group in Holland was unorthodox In fact they didn't even practice immersion exclusively.

They gave people a choice. You can get baptized however you want. he brings back a letter from one of their leaders to presumably lend credence to the practice of immersion.

But when he returns to England no one cares about this letter and if he was baptized by the Mennonites they make it a point to leave it out of the records because as Baptists they don't believe any kind of succession is necessary to prove.

They stand on the authority of scripture alone. So when Blunt returns he and Blacklock baptize 41 people by immersion. Now I'm not entirely certain who these people were or where they came from.

[41 : 20] Most of them were probably members of the JLJ church. Some of them may have been members of the particular Baptist churches that already split from the JLJ church. It's hard to say because these groups had continual fellowship with one another.

They consulted one another before and after Blunt's trip to Holland. They would all soon embrace baptism by immersion.

Regardless, this group of 43 including Blunt and Blacklock form two new particular Baptist churches. Blunt becomes the pastor of one of them and a man by the name of Thomas Kilkop pastors the other.

and within three years all of these particular Baptist churches would come together in unity to write the first London Baptist Confession of Faith.

And we're going to talk about that next time. Let's pray. Our faithful God, we thank you for your wise and gracious providence. It's through your providence you preserved your truth and your church through many seasons and through many trials.

[42 : 32] As we've seen again this morning, you walk with the church and you work through imperfect people in a broken world to accomplish your perfect purposes.

So we thank you for the courage of those who sought to follow your word with clear consciences, even at great personal cost. And I'd ask that you would help us to learn from their faithfulness without putting our trust in men or movements, but keep us anchored in the authority of scripture and keep us humble in our convictions.

May what we've studied deepen our love for your church and strengthen our resolve to always worship in spirit and in truth. Lord, prepare our hearts now for the hour of worship ahead.

Gather us together as your people. Shape us by the preaching of your word. And Lord, we pray that you will be glorified in all that we do. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.