

Scripture Reading:

Acts 16:11 “Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Sam-o-thrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. 14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us. 16 Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." 18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. 19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. 20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.”

"Joy & Trouble in Philippi"

Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, Silas from the Church in Jerusalem, the young man Timothy, who are now joined by the beloved physician Luke, have followed the Spirit’s leading by traveling quickly to Philippi.

- We considered last week the humble beginning for the conversion of Europe with the seller of purple, Lydia, coming to Jesus by a river bank outside of town.

As we celebrated Resurrection Sunday we considered at length the significance of the resurrection for us as believers:

- How Jesus has saved us from both the penalty and the power of sin and death!

As Luke moves on in his orderly account with the events that happened in Philippi we are reminded that the Christian life is lived in the warp and woof of real life:

- The stuff of the material world, the stuff of God’s Creation!

If we step back and consider the big picture of what happened at Philippi with Lydia, the possessed slave girl and next week the Philippian jailer... We see references to the Sacraments, where water, bread and wine are the signs and seals of great eternal truths.

We see reference to hospitality and community: Just like the Church at Jerusalem, the new Saints in Europe would also enjoy great fellowship, and meet each other’s needs, presenting a good witness to those around them. And finally we continue to see real opposition in the real world:

- From both demonic forces and civil authorities!

Down through church history there have been many who have tried to avoid such things because, quite honestly, they are messy!

- Today we often try to avoid confrontation, content to let Satan be the god of this world while we wait for Jesus to return.
- Today we often fear to enjoy real fellowship around great food and drink because we are watching our weight or worry that disputes might break out if we have certain people trying to enjoy each other's company in our homes
- And yes we have taken the simple sacraments that Jesus has given us and managed to battle over their meaning and practice for a couple of thousand years!

This could all be very discouraging IF we did not have the promise of God that His Spirit was going to fill the earth with the Kingdom of God and that He would do so using the Church, the Bride of Jesus in real history as we considered at length last week.

- Now I can look back over the past two thousand years and give you a pretty good idea of how so many things go so messed up: SIN!
- What is more difficult is to see how God is going to put all of the things we have broken back together.

This is why we must focus on the small areas of obedience, trusting that God will take care of the BIG picture. Our missionaries could have sat around Philippi trying to lay out plans for the Gospel's conquest of Europe and quickly become overwhelmed. Instead, they went out and faithfully presented the Gospel to Lydia, baptized her household, and joined her for some rich fellowship.

- What follows is the joy & trouble we often see in the Christian life!

As always, Satan does not like to see God's Kingdom advance and so we see a young women who is possessed by a demon troubling the Disciples. Just as they did during the earthly ministry of Jesus, demons cannot lie about who Jesus is or the power of His Gospel: And Paul, just as Jesus did, prevented the demon from continuing to mock this truth, though he did so when God told him the time was right. *[When we get to the 19th chapter of Acts we will consider all of this in much more detail.]*

And we will see just how much trouble Paul and Silas get into next week and how God uses even these trials and tribulations to advance the Kingdom. The joy that is presented is having both Lydia, and the jailer next week, responding to the gift of salvation by immediately living out that faith with their submission to baptism and the opening up their homes to the disciples.

This morning our focus will be on the first part of their obedience: Baptism

As I mentioned, we have managed to battle over the meaning, the mode and the timing of baptism for thousands of years: But one of the blessings, and challenges of exegetical preaching is that you have to preach on the verses that you come to: NO skipping allowed

- Now my hope and prayer is that what I share this morning will not contribute to further divisions in God's Church but perhaps can move us in a better direction.

It is also important, as we saw with the simple question 'What is the Gospel' last week, to remember that we must be diligent in teaching our covenant children the great truths of the Bible. We have a responsibility to teach our covenant children here at Church of the King about the Sacraments, but it is also critical that we help them to understand why there are many faithful Christians who do not agree with all that we believe and practice regarding water baptism and the Lord's Table.

Pastor Briggs at Immanuel Baptist Church in Sacramento has been bringing together a growing group of area pastors who are reformed for fellowship and a time of study once a month. A few months ago we had a spirited discussion about church unity and how we can strive to be more ecumenical without compromising our faith or the truth of the Scriptures.

Our bottom line came from what Paul commanded in Ephesians four... That we must speak the truth in love.

Now obviously with a table full of Presbyterian and Reformed Baptist pastors the 800 pound gorilla in the room was the question of whether the children of believers are to be baptized as infants! The point was made that to be honest we had to first be willing to admit that there would be significant differences in our answers...

- And one wise man added that we must also realize that one of our positions is wrong!

So as I summarize what we believe here at Church of the King I trust that I can speak the truth in love...

I urge all of us to do the same when we encounter those who hold a different view and I hope we can honestly pray that one day soon God would restore unity in these matters for the only Bride that His Son has chosen to have!

- We certainly cannot consider ourselves to be good post-millennialists if we cannot pray such prayers!

In the broader Church, we have had agreement down through the ages that Baptism is to be Trinitarian and must use water! We are commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: That part we have managed to keep pretty straight!

We are commanded to use water and though we debate over how much water, we all use water nonetheless. I would argue that the Bible does not give us a direct command about how much water is to be used, so we need to be very charitable in this area: There are Biblical examples and arguments for immersion where we relate to the death of Jesus as we go down into the water and His resurrection as we are raised back up; good arguments for pouring of the water to represent how the Holy Spirit is poured out in our lives and for our use of sprinkling which relates to all the Old Testament cleansings that foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus.

Where we must be less charitable is when we confront those who teach baptismal regeneration, where it is argued that we must have water baptism to be saved or in some cases where we must be baptized in a particular church to be saved. We must also strongly contend with those who would argue that baptism somehow removes only our original sin or that baptism is not important.

- But even in these cases, we must still speak the truth in love!

However, where we stand in contrast or conflict with many of our evangelical, charismatic and Baptist brothers and sisters here in America is over the question of whether the infant children of believers should be administered the sacrament of baptism. We had the blessing of baptizing little Elizabeth a few weeks ago and Lord willing we will baptize the newest Smith next month.

- We do so out of a strong conviction that this is the Lord's will!

We need to be sure that it is not a shock to our young people when they discover that many churches in our nation do not practice infant baptism and even how many will argue strongly that we are wrong to do so. So I want to briefly explain why we believe we are being Biblical when we baptize our covenant children and how we are to respond to those who believe that we are wrong to do so.

This is not one of those areas where we may just be seeing things from a different perspective: As that wise pastor said, one of us has to be wrong.

As I discuss the issue of infant baptism with people I try to point out the major question that must be answered:

- Who is testifying when someone is baptized?
- If we believe the focus is rightly on God's testimony, then we should baptize both confessing adults and covenant infants based on God's promises.

As Theron or I speak to a baby who has just been baptized, they cannot testify, nor even understand what we are saying, but we argue that this actually demonstrates the Gospel where the Bible says that we love God because He first loved us.

On the other hand, the Baptists will argue the Bible teaches that it is the believer who is testifying by their repentance and acceptance of Jesus as their Savior: Thus the recipient must be old enough to give a testimony. It may not surprise you that BOTH sides of this debate look to Peter's great response to those in Jerusalem who had been convicted at Pentecost to support their position...

They cried out 'brothers, what must we do' and Peter said, "Repent and be baptized everyone one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself." The Baptist is quick to point out that Peter said "repent and be baptized" and we are quick to point out that Peter said the promise was to us and our children, moving quickly over to the examples of Lydia and the jailer having their households baptized.

➤ So who is right?

A major point I want to make this morning is that IF we look only to the New Testament for our understanding of baptism, then BOTH sides are arguing from silence! *[let me repeat that]*

If the Baptists are right they should point to examples of where the children of believers come before the church to give their testimony or at least to some instructions about having them do so.

➤ No such example or instruction can be found in the New Testament.

If we are right, then there should be clear examples of infants being baptized or instructions for doing so.

➤ Again, there is no such instruction or clear example in the New Testament!

The Baptist will look to Pentecost, the Ethiopian eunuch and the Philippian jailer as examples of repentance to prove they are right, But the New Testament is silent when it comes to the baptism of the children of believers.

Now I will be honest and tell you that I suspect, and perhaps it is very likely, that there would have been children in the households of Lydia or the jailer.

➤ BUT if that is going to be the foundation of my argument for infant baptism, it is pretty thin.

I can point to Peter's promise for the children, but my Baptist brother will be quick to point out this simply means they grow up under the blessings of the Church and that the promise is there for them to claim as their own.

So if we stay in the New Testament we will continue to have long and involved arguments over what baptism means, how the promise made to our children is manifested, & even what "household" means here in Acts 16 and more with both sides claiming to be right.

➤ So is there a way to settle this great debate, or must it continue until Jesus returns?

➤ I contend that there is, but it requires that we speak the truth in love AND look to all of the Scriptures!

For example, the Apostle Paul goes to great length in Romans to explain the relationship of circumcision, baptism and believing faith, but to understand what he is arguing we must know our Old Testament.

[chapters 4-8 can be your homework!]

Circumcision was a physical sign in the Old Testament which indicated that someone was a member of God's covenant people: Both he and his household including the women and children.

- **However, there were those who were faithful to that covenant and those who were not.**
- **Paul affirms the Old Testament teaching that the sign is of NO use to a covenant breaker and we know the same is true of baptism.**

Baptism is the physical sign that we are members of God's covenant people: A Baptist will argue that the difficulty with baptizing infants is that we cannot know that they have saving faith...

- **The reality is that we have the same problem with baptized adults: Only God can know the heart!**

The circumcised Pharisees & Sadducees had LOTS of Bible knowledge and made various vows to God but Jesus calls them hypocrites, blind guides, and whitewashed tombs.

As church officers we are to baptize those who make a profession of faith and children born to covenant parents. Now if someone asks about baptism, here is some of what I would encourage them to consider:

First, those who do not baptize infants struggle to be consistent with their practice: If a family loses a child in pregnancy or the early years of life what do they tell the parents? All that I have known assure them that the child is with our Savior in heaven, as they should.

- **We give that assurance because we believe the promise that salvation is for us and our children...**
- **While the Baptist must argue that the child has not reached an age of accountability, something that is nowhere found in the Scriptures.**

The same tension is seen in the fact that most churches who do not baptize children, still have some form of child dedication service because they do sense that the Children of believers are not the same as children in the world.

- **And finally, I would encourage them to expand their study of how we should treat our covenant children to all of the Scriptures.**

Only then can we better understand how God views households and why children are to be included.

Throughout the Old Testament God includes the children of believers in the promises that He makes and commands parents to raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord teaching them to trust His promises, just as we do with a new adult convert to the faith.

As Pastor Rich Lusk and others have rightly pointed out, we as covenant parents are called on to disciple our children not to evangelize them. We do take the individual salvation of each child seriously, but we do so by claiming the promises of God and keeping them under the Gospel through the Word and Sacraments, again just as we do with adult converts.

- **The promises of God apply to those who repent and to those who are born to Christian parents!**

This is the pattern that we see throughout the entire Old Testament and there should have been extensive explanations of why it was changed in the New Testament IF that same pattern did not continue.

For example, think about all the examples and instructions regarding the fact that circumcision was no longer required or that women were now full members of the covenant who were to be baptized. And certainly the taking of the Gospel to the Gentiles was a BIG change.

Now all of these were quietly revealed in the Old Testament, to those with eyes to see, but they are fully explained in the New Testament because they could be seen as radical changes.

- **Not including children in baptism and the promises of God would have been an even more radical change and yet there is not a word said about such a change.**

These are just some of the things that I would ask those who hold to Baptist convictions to consider and I do so not out of a desire to win a debate!

- My desire is to speak the truth in love and also to have a humble spirit that is willing to be taught where I am wrong as well.
- We will see this shortly with the Bereans who took even what the Apostle Paul taught back to the Scriptures to see if what he said was true

It is also the Old Testament concept of iron sharpening iron where we all grow in our wisdom and knowledge of God. My hope and prayer is that we be those who take seriously the instructions and promises that the Apostle Paul gave us in Ephesians chapter four regarding the Church:

4:1: “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

- As Pastor Doug Wilson has said, “this is the unity that is given and we are NOT to mess it up.”

Paul then goes on to talk about the unity of the Church that is promised:

7 “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift... 11 “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head-- Christ-- 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

We must always remember that the Spirit of God, as He fills the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus, does so while He prepares the Church to be the Bride of Christ!

As Paul said, “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

Trying to figure out how the Church gets from where it is today to where Paul promises the Spirit will take it, can easily be overwhelming, but just as our missionary team obeyed the Spirit's leading we must do the same.

As I pointed out, IF we are post-millennial in our thinking then we must believe that these promises of a glorified Church are true.

- So with much prayer and much study, let us continue to seek the mind of God in this matter.

And let us remember that it begins with us: Let us work on Biblical unity here at Church of the King as a demonstration to others of how to speak the truth in love.

I covet your prayers as I participate in various pastor meetings and luncheon that we might learn to be an example of how the Body of Christ should function as a body.

And we must remember that the early steps and efforts will not look the way we hope things will be in the end.

Just as the civil rule of Constantine was very rough in certain areas, so our efforts at church unity will be rocky as well.

We will have to work with many who we agree to disagree with for a time, knowing and believing that God will bring us to the maturity of one mind at some point in the future.

May those of us who claim the promises of God for our children by giving them the covenant sign of baptism not only be faithful in raising them in the fear and admonition of the Lord, but also be very careful to speak the truth in love as we work to persuade others as well.

Communion Meditation: Luke 22:13-20

“13 So they went and found it just as [Jesus] had said to them, and they prepared the Passover. 14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. 15 Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."