

Title: Protecting the gospel
Text: Matthew 28.18-20/1 Corinthians 11.23-26
Theme: How the ordinances of the church protect the church
Series: Reset, Refocus and Renew
Prop Stmtnt: There are two interconnected marks of a true church.

When Nicholas II was Czar in Russia, he reportedly was strolling one day through the vast palace gardens when he came upon a lone sentry in a secluded part of the gardens and asked him why he was there. The poor guard told him that he didn't know expect that he was commanded by his captain to guard this post. Inquiries were made as to why this was the case, and no one really knew why, other than this was part of the orders. Finally, it was discovered that over 100 years before, Catherine the Great had a rosebush planted there and she didn't want anything to happen to it, so she had a guard posted there. The rosebush had long since died, but the guards kept watch over the dirt. Any organization, like a church can fall into the same trap of doing things but not understanding why. There are some things that churches do that are just traditions and do not need to be protected. There are some things that churches have to do, but unless that is understood, they will not have the significance they should, and are subject to neglect and abuse. This series on the church (reset, refocus and renew) is designed to help us clarify from Scripture, what is the church, what makes her a true church, how is she designed to function, and why all of this is so very important? Last week we looked at the first mark of a true church and that is: the right preaching of God's Word. The right preaching of God's Word means the right and faithful preaching of the gospel. God uses faithful gospel preaching to cause people to become Christians and Christians form churches, but how? How do Christians form churches? How do we know who is actually part of the church or not? There has to be a way of identifying who is in and who isn't. That is why Christ gave two ordinances to the church. These ordinances are the God-given means to mark his people. That is why the second mark of a true church is the practice of the ordinance of baptism and the Lord's Table.

Read Texts:

The DIA is one of the crown jewels of Detroit and is the home of at least 5 paintings that are each estimated to be worth \$50 million or more. The entire collection is thought be worth somewhere between 3 and 5 billion dollars. If you are going to have things that are that valuable, you had better have a good way of protecting them. Cathi and I were looking at one of the paintings and she was pointing something out and apparently got a little too close because we heard this voice from a speaker in the ceiling say, "Please step back from the painting." The next time she did it, the voice over the speaker said it again and we received a stern visit from a guard. I told her that we were going to get thrown out of there. But, I am glad to report to you that the paintings in the DIA appear to be safe. The DIA is full of impressive things that people have done. The church has been entrusted with something that is way more valuable than any of that, because the church has been entrusted with the gospel, which is what Christ has done. That is why the preaching of God's Word which means the preaching of the gospel is going to be one of the marks of a true church. And Christ has given to the church two practices, that is, two ordinances, two specific activities that the church is to do that help protect the gospel by making a clear distinction between those who believe it and those who don't.

1. The ordinance of baptism (28.19)

A. It was commanded by Christ

Baptism is commanded by Christ. That is obvious from this text in Matthew 28. Therefore, baptism was taught by the apostles and practiced by the early church. Baptism was designed by Christ to be the means by which a professing believer identified himself (or herself) as a follower of Christ. From our text in Matthew 28, along with the marching orders for the disciples in Acts 1.8 and the practice of the disciples, the pattern was very clear and still is: 1) Preach the gospel. 2) Whoever responds by faith to the gospel, baptize them. Identify them, mark them as a follower of Christ and now a member of the new community of believers so that 3) You can disciple them by teaching them to observe everything Jesus commanded. That is what happened.

B. It was practiced by the church.

The book of Acts shows this exact process over and over. When Paul wrote the book of Romans, he had not yet visited the church there, but he assumed (Romans 6) that every one of them had been baptized because that is what followers of Jesus do. A genuine believer does not keep his faith private, he goes public with it. In fact, one of the benefits of obeying Jesus and getting baptized is how that is strengthening and encouraging to your faith. Baptism was never considered to be optional or something that I'll get around to one day. The NT does not have a category for someone who professes faith in Christ and does not then get baptized.

C. It is an act of the church.

Imagine that you and some friends are playing in a pool and one of your friends comes up from behind you and dunks you and says, "you've been baptized." Have you actually been baptized? Well, you've been immersed into water, and baptism means to immerse, but that clearly doesn't turn water polo (or Marco Polo) into a religious activity. When is dunking someone in water baptism? The answer is, when it is done in accordance with Scripture. In Matthew 18, Jesus gives the church authority. The language of binding and loosing has to do with opening and closing. When the church is functioning in this capacity, she is exercising the authority that Jesus has given her, which is underscored by Jesus saying that where 2 or 3 of you are gathered (referring to the gathering of the church) that he is there. The church has the responsibility to say what Jesus has said, and when the church does that, the church is acting on her God-given authority. This is essentially repeated in our text in Matthew 28. In verse 18, Jesus says that all authority has been given to him and he is sharing that authority with the disciples.

So, let's say that in the past few weeks, the gospel has finally made sense to you. You agree that you are a sinner and that your sin has offended God and this grieves you. But, you also recognize that Christ died on the cross for you and that when you trust in Him, that is trusting in what he has done in your place, your sins are forgiven. So, you are sitting here this morning and you realize, "I believe this. I trust in Christ." What do you do? You tell someone! Tell me. Tell one of the elders (have the elders stand). Tell one of the Adult Class teachers (have them stand). Tell us. And we will excitedly talk with you to help you clarify anything that you may need. Assuming that this indeed is the case as far as we can tell, then we are going to recommend that

you consider getting baptized so that the rest of the church knows that you are a believer like us. You are one of us. Baptism does not wash your sins away. Jesus does that.

Now, let's say that you go on a trip to Israel and you are part of a tour and that stops at the Jordan River and the guide says to everyone on the bus, "If you would like you can go and get baptized in the Jordan River like Jesus did." Would that be great? No, because it would not be legitimate. Who is authorizing the baptism? The tour guide. Does the tour guide have that authority? No, not from Christ. So, if someone said to me that they were baptized like that in the Jordan River, I would kindly tell them that they got wet in the same river where Jesus was baptized but what they did was not NT baptism. Baptism is an act of the church because the church has been given the enormous responsibility to say whose profession of faith is legitimate and who's isn't. But, what if my pastor was there? Could he do it? He shouldn't, because the church isn't there. But, what if the whole church was there? That would be legit.

D. It is a display of the gospel

What is the gospel? The gospel is good news that even though we are sinners who deserve the just and righteous wrath of God for our sins, that God sent his own Son, Christ to come to the earth and do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Jesus lived the life we could not live and then he died on the cross as the full and final payment for the sins of everyone who would ever believe in him. But Jesus did not stay dead. He rose again because his payment for sin was accepted and his resurrection was the evidence that the penalty was paid in full. When you trust in Christ alone as your Savior, you are forgiven of your sins, and placed into union with Christ where you have a new family and are part of a new kingdom.

I remember when my daughter was sworn in as a soldier in the U.S. Army. Then she was issued a uniform so that the other soldiers don't shoot her, right? Baptism is the issuing of the uniform of team Jesus so that you know who is on His side. Since the gospel is the means by which we become believers, baptism is a visible display or re-enactment of the gospel. Jesus died, was buried and rose again. I mentioned that when you trust in Christ, you are placed into union with Christ. You get credit for everything that he did. He died – you died to sin. He rose again – you have a new life now and will get a new incorruptible body in the great resurrection day. Immersion is not just the plain meaning of the word baptism, it is a re-enactment of the gospel. It signifies cleansing, union with Christ and your future resurrection. We don't baptize this way because we are Baptists. We baptize this way because it is the plain teaching and practice of the Bible. There is no such thing in the Bible as infant baptism.

Summary and benefits of a proper view and practice:

Baptism is the act of the church that identifies people who have believed the gospel as followers of Christ by obeying his command to be immersed into water in order to signify their union with Christ, separation from the world and membership in the church.

It marks us as the people of God. It encourages us. It encourages the person who gets baptized because this is a clear and definite step of obedience to Christ and serves as a good reminder, like

an anchor of sorts. Remember your baptism. That is, remember, how you publicly professed faith in Christ. That is good.

We need to esteem baptism for what it is. If we treat baptism as optional, we will treat membership as optional, commitment as optional and eventually the gospel as optional. Baptism helps protect the distinction that the gospel makes between those who believe and those who don't. One of the many reasons for being faithful to the Sunday gathering is because this is when we baptize and you are witnesses of that and as such you have a voice in that person's life. That's huge! We need to esteem it, by not rushing our children to do it.

2. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11.23-26)

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper, like the Passover meal from which it came, is one of the ways in which we retell the story of how we were saved from certain death and made into the people of God where we enjoy a fellowship that points us to an even greater reality. On Sundays such as this we are enjoying a meal together. Oh, it may not fill you up like ribs and corn on the cob could, but rightfully understood will fill you like no other meal can. The Lord's Supper is one of the two ordinances of the church that marks a church and it is also designed to help protect the gospel.

A. It was commanded by Christ.

"Do this in remembrance of me."

B. It was practiced by the early church.

That is obvious from this text.

C. It is an act of the church.

The Lord's Table is an ordinance that the church is entrusted with. This is also clear from this text because this text was written to the church and we are given these same instructions.

D. It is a display of the gospel.

The Lord's Supper (or Table or Communion) is rooted in one of the most history-changing events in history. God told the Israelites, the slaves of Egypt to prepare a meal from a lamb, but not just any lamb. They had to pick a lamb that had no blemish on it and it had to be a male lamb. They were to kill that lamb and take the blood of it and wipe it on the doorposts and lintel of their homes and then they were to stay inside that home because on that night God himself said that he was going to pass through the land of Egypt and would cause the death of the firstborn son in every home that did not have that blood applied on their doors like that. And he did. That event became known as the Passover, because all of those who were covered by the blood of the innocent lamb were passed over and were safe.

What made the difference? It was not that the children of Israel were better than the Egyptians. The difference was based on who was covered by the blood of an innocent lamb and who wasn't. Did they understand the significance of that then? No, but now we know. That pointed to Christ.

For hundreds of years the Israelites observed the Passover and Jesus did also. It was during the Passover meal with his disciples that he shared bread with them and said, take this and eat it because it was his body and they were to eat it in remembrance of him. He then took a cup of wine and said that this cup was the new covenant, in my blood that was shed for the forgiveness of sins and that they were drink this in remembrance of him. The next day, when the Passover lamb was being slain in the Temple, Jesus, the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sins of the world was being offered up on a cross. The eternal Lamb, without blemish was offered up in our place. His death, his blood covers those who believe him and by being means of faith alone in Christ alone, the blood of Christ is applied to them and they are safe forever. When death comes for the believer, it comes without a sting and it comes without victory. The sting of death is sin and the power of the sin is the law, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have this victory because Christ literally came to this earth and was robed in flesh as one of us so that he might live in our place and as one of us, be able to suffer in our place. The bread symbolizes the body of Christ that was once and for all offered up in our place. We take this and eat it, not as a re-crucifixion. Oh no. He died once and for all. We do this as a memorial. We do not forget what he has done. We celebrate what he has done and we acknowledge the enormous price he paid because the cup symbolizes the blood of Christ that was poured out. In other words, Jesus died a violent death. The payment he made was the greatest sacrifice in the history of the world. As the greatest sacrifice and the greatest payment he purchased the greatest gift, which is the greatest pardon. If you have trusted in Christ, you are forgiven! You are forgiven! Your sin is not held against you. And you eat this bread and drink this cup because the life and death of Christ has been applied to your account and you are in Christ and Christ is in you. You are united with Christ and we do this together because you are united to every single believer who is also united to Christ.

We must esteem the Lord's Table because it reminds us of what brings us together, what holds us together and what will keep us together, forever. We must esteem the Lord's table by protecting it from being viewed as something that it is not. This is not an act by which our sins are forgiven. At the same time, it is a time for introspection. Should I take this if I am living in unrepentant sin? No. I need to repent. Should I take this if I refuse to reconcile a broken relationship and I could? No. I need to repent. And I need to anticipate this observance by addressing those issues.

Baptism is like the passport that identifies your citizenship and gains you entrance into the church. It is the act of the church that identifies people who have believed the gospel as followers of Christ by obeying his command to be immersed into water in order to signify their union with Christ, separation from the world and membership in the church. ***The Lord's Table is the act of the church that illustrates our union with Christ, our remembering of Christ's death, and a renewal of our commitment to Christ and to one another.*** In Baptism we're saying, "We're in." In the Lord's Table we are saying, "We're still in."

The Word of God is designed to change your mind, your affections and your actions. At the end of a sermon you and I should respond that way, but we often get distracted by other things. When the bread and cup are in your hand, it is different. Here is the symbol of the gospel. Here is a reminder of Christ. Are you in?