



“Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord”

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

Follow Him: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Friday and Saturday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions:

Part 1:

How do we prepare to meet the Lord? Dr. Shon D. Hopkin examines the baptism of Jesus Christ, his relationship with John the Baptist, as well as the nature of repentance.

Part 2:

Dr. Shon Hopkin continues to explore the blessings of baptism and being part of the family of Jesus Christ.

Timecodes:

Part 1

- 00:00 Part 1–Dr. Shon Hopkin
- 00:52 Introduction of Dr. Shon Hopkin
- 03:29 Where today’s lesson will go
- 05:01 Jesus at age 12
- 10:25 John the Baptist and the JST
- 11:36 Young Jesus: A Thought Experiment
- 15:16 Rebelliousness vs. weakness
- 18:03 D&C 93 and Jesus’s growth
- 21:57 Perfection
- 25:31 The baptism of Jesus Christ
- 26:51 Josephus describes John the Baptist
- 30:43 John the Baptist in the Bible Dictionary
- 33:30 John receives a name
- 34:09 Mary and the importance of righteous women
- 38:30 Traditional baptismal sites and repentance
- 43:59 Pool of Bethesda and Isaiah
- 49:03 John the Baptist’s role
- 54:52 End of Part 1–Dr. Shon Hopkin

Part 2

- 00:00 Part II– Dr. Shon Hopkin
- 00:10 Forerunner and role of John the Baptist
- 03:40 Baptism of Jesus at the Jordan River
- 05:30 Pharisees and Sadducees come to Jesus’s baptism
- 10:10 Our genealogy
- 13:57 vipers vs. snakes
- 16:03 Chaff, repentance, and hope
- 21:00 Symbolism of baptism
- 24:20 Dr. Hopkin shares personal story about baptism
- 28:26 Additional symbolism and meaning of baptism
- 35:19 God and the Holy Ghost witness Jesus Christ’s baptism
- 39:02 God the Father as separate being in the scriptures
- 42:08 The dove
- 45:02 Holy Ghost as cleanser
- 47:54 Being submissive to the Father’s will
- 52:38 Dr. Shon Hopkin bears testimony of Jesus Christ and ordinances
- 54:41: End of Part II–Dr. Shon Hopkin

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Biographical Information:



Born in Denton, Texas, as the son of Lorraine Hopkin and Arden Hopkin, Shon Hopkin attended Southwest High School in Fort Worth, Texas and graduated from Orem High School. He received a bachelor's degree and master's degree from Brigham Young University in Near Eastern Studies with a focus on Hebrew Bible. He received a PhD from the University of Texas at Austin in Hebrew studies with a focus on medieval Hebrew, Arabic, and Spanish literature. Before coming to Brigham Young University, he taught in Seminaries and Institutes for four years at Timpview High School (1997–2001), four years at Provo High School (2001–5), and six years at the Austin Institute of Religion (2006–11). At BYU he has served as Chair of the Book of Mormon Academy and Chair of the BYU Religious Outreach Council. He is one of the principal organizers of the ongoing Jewish & Latter-day Saint Academic Interfaith Dialogue project. He has authored, co-authored, and edited numerous books and articles on Isaiah, the Hebrew Bible, Latter-day Saint beliefs, and medieval literature, including *Opening Isaiah: A Harmony* (with Ann Madsen); *Abinadi: He Came Among them in Disguise* (edited, Book of Mormon Academy); *Mormonism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (with Robert Millet, as part of Bloomberg Press' Guide for the Perplexed series); and the forthcoming *Understanding Your Neighbor: Judaism* (with Rabbi Mark Diamond, as part of the Widtsoe Foundation's series). He and his wife have four children and one grandchild.

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Hank Smith:	00:01	Welcome to followHIM, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their Come Follow Me study. I'm Hank Smith.
John Bytheway:	00:09	And I'm John Bytheway.
Hank Smith:	00:11	We love to learn.
John Bytheway:	00:11	We love to laugh.
Hank Smith:	00:13	We want to learn and laugh with you.
John Bytheway:	00:15	As together, we follow him.
Hank Smith:	00:20	Hello my friends, welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith and I'm your host and I'm here with my immersive co-host, John Bytheway.
John Bytheway:	00:29	That's a new one. Immersive.
Hank Smith:	00:31	You're immersive. I bet you can't guess what we're going to talk about today, yeah.
John Bytheway:	00:36	Let me think. There's got to be some sort of immersion experience coming up here.
Hank Smith:	00:40	Yes, yes. This is going to be an immersive experience as we talk today. We are back. Another lesson in the New Testament. This has been fantastic so far. We have another New Testament expert to join us.
John Bytheway:	00:52	Yes, we do. I think our guests will remember Shon Hopkin, who's been here before, and let me remind you about Shon. He was born in Denton, Texas, the son of Lorraine Hopkin and Arden Hopkin. He attended Southwest High School in Fort Worth, Texas, graduated from Orem High School, received bachelor's and master's degrees from BYU in Near Eastern Studies with a focus on the Hebrew Bible and a PhD from the

University of Texas at Austin in Hebrew studies with a focus on medieval Hebrew, Arabic and Spanish literature.

- 01:26 I just love the backgrounds of these people we bring on, Hank. Our audience talks about it too. People would come up to us, "Where do you find these people?" Before coming to BYU, he taught in the Seminaries and Institutes at Timpview High School and four years at Provo High School, six years at the Austin Institute of Religion. He serves as the chair of book Mormon Academy and chair of BYU Religious Outreach Council.
- 01:48 Right now you're the chair of ancient scripture. I get that right?
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 01:51 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 01:52 I have to get that right because you're my boss. I want to make sure this is updated. Do you have four children, one grandchild?
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 01:59 Thank you. Two grandchildren. Thanks for that catch. Bennett and Brielle. Now about four months old.
- John Bytheway: 02:06 Wonderful. I'm a new grandpa too, and I had no idea how much fun this would be. We're, "Just bring that kid over here so we can play with him." So hey, we're really glad to have you back. Excited for your insights on the early New Testament today, some of these early chapters.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 02:23 Thank you all. I hope everybody woke back up after you read the little phrase about medieval studies, which I find thrilling and we will be talking about all day today. So glad to be with you, Hank, John, my good friends and I really enjoy this. You did hear in John's intro that an Old Testament Hebrew scholar, but I've done some work in Greek, but if I mispronounce the Greek, please do not hold it too strongly against me. So this is a good space for me, but my Greek is not quite as far along as my Hebrew is.
- John Bytheway: 02:57 So I just can't wait to say it's all Greek to me. I just couldn't wait. But Shon, one of the things we are hearing, back me up on this Hank, from a lot of our listeners is just last year with Old Testament, "This was so great in helping me understand the Book of Mormon more and the New Testament." Well, I'm glad you come with that background because there's so much we're going to see. Matthew's going to repeat things from the Old in the New Testament and to see those connections is going to be worthwhile today for our listeners.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 03:29 Well, I totally agree with that. Actually, you don't get very far into the chapter we're going to be covering today before there is some Hebrew Bible showing up and it's all intertwined. It really is. They flow into each other and I think Latter-day Saints are oriented to trying to understand all the scriptures in one. We learned that from the way Jesus taught in the Book of Mormon. And to me, that's deeply satisfying seeing the way that the scriptures intertwine.

Hank Smith: 03:57 Beautiful. Well, let's do it. The lesson has us spending time in Matthew 3, Mark 1 and Luke 3. The title of the lesson is Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord. Sounds like we may be talking about John the Baptist. Is that right, Shon?

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 04:10 Yes. Okay, so we've got John the Baptist, we've got the baptism, Christ's baptism, which is extremely important of course. So this is a big deal today. We're going to spend our time primarily in Matthew 3 if that's okay with the two of you. We may wander elsewhere just a little bit into Mark 1 and Luke 3, but primarily in Matthew 3. I am hoping that we can take a running start to get there. You have covered Luke 2 and had some discussion about the very little bit we have from Jesus's childhood, but Matthew 3 as the next time we see him, I want to connect some dots. We may talk about this differently than you have as you were discussing Luke 2, but I suspect we'll do some similar things. We won't spend tons of time here, but could we go backwards?

05:01 I said we're going to be primarily in Matthew 3, but now if we could go to Luke 2, there's two verses that I want us to look at. And again, you've discussed these, so we don't want to spend a lot of time here. But if you look at Luke chapter 2, verse 40, this is sort of the last we get of Jesus, is this Passover feast where he is 12 years old. You see that in verse 42. When He was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. But go backwards to verse 40. The child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him.

05:42 I think all of us can picture Jesus in maybe different ways and there's probably truths to all of them. But if you think of, I have a really amazing nephew, Jackson. Seems like he was born an old soul, so to speak. He's contemplative. He is cute as can be and smiles a lot, but pretty serious, a thinker it seems like, but he's very young. But then you've got others that just have this sort of fresh innocence. My grandson is just bright-eyed and highly energetic. So in all of those childlike attributes, we can imagine Christ, this idea of he waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom. And of course I'm talking about little children, almost

infants and then toddlers. But then as he's growing older, think of a seven-year old, an eight-year old, a nine-year old, a 10-year old with just a lot of goodness, a way of looking at the world that you sense wisdom at a young age. And then of course we're talking about the Messiah, the son of God here. I'm guessing little children are coming to each of your minds as these examples of innocence and goodness.

06:52 So that's verse 40. And then of course we have the Passover experience when you get this hint that he understands more of what is going on here, that He's beginning to come into His own. "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" He gives this, I don't know if it's a mild teaching, rebuke is probably too strong to his beloved mother there when she reprimands Him. "I have to be about my father's." So there's the sense He's beginning to understand things more deeply.

07:21 I have wondered at times if He knows anything yet about the atoning sacrifice, if He's begun to understand things. And then this is all speculating, but as He's looking at those Passover sacrifices, is there some soberness that comes upon Him? Is this may be the beginning of, "Oh, this may prefigure my role"? And then you get this beautiful verse that has been used in the youth programs a lot of times to encourage youth and encourage each one of us. This is verse 52, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." And of course you talk about intellectual, physical, social, spiritual, and you just think of Christ developing.

08:08 With that, now let's go over to Joseph Smith-Matthew. You find this at the tail end of Matthew 2. If you look at Matthew 2, verse 23, I think it's footnote C, that then leads you to the appendix and you can read what the JST numbers as JST-Matthew 3:24-26, we only have this from the JST. Another childhood growing up reference, "Came to pass that Jesus grew up with His brethren and waxed strong and waited upon the Lord for the time of His ministry to come. And He served under his father." We would assume that that could either be Joseph who of course isn't His biological father, but it could be Joseph or it could be the Father, Heavenly Father.

09:01 "And he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught." Now, I don't read that as he's unteachable. I read that He's an active learner, so to speak. That He is anxiously engaged in His own... So He is listening and He's learning, but there's this wisdom that's flowing in it at the same time. Well, this is going to sound a little weird when we equate it with Christ. Remember in Pearl of Great Price, Enoch is described, "There's a

wild man among us." You say, "Well, what does that mean?" What I've taken that as meaning is he's not following societal norms because he's following spiritual truth. He's following what he's learning from his father. Sometimes he's going to be kind and sympathetic when anybody else would be angry. And other times he's going to be maybe angry or see something wrong where others wouldn't pause to see something wrong.

09:57 You would love this child and then teenager and then young man for his wisdom. Think of if you had a friend who didn't have any guile, maybe you can think of somebody like that, and you just have this sense that they love you deeply and completely and how those friendships would grow, but maybe that person would challenge you and challenge the weakness in you as well in ways that were uncomfortable at times. I don't know. I'm just thinking through the lead up to Matthew 3.

10:25 Well, so let's finish reading. "That he served under his Father. He spake not as other men, neither could he be taught for he needed not that any man should teach him. After many years, the hour of his ministry drew nigh." So that then leads us to Matthew 3. And of course we're going to start with John the Baptist, but a little bit more. Is it okay Hank and John if we talk a little bit more about the lead in here?

Hank Smith: 10:45 Please do. What a great JST there. I hate that these are all hidden back in the appendix.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 10:51 It makes it so hard. Yeah, when they're in the appendix instead of just being able to look straight down into your footnotes and now of course with our electronic scripture, sometimes they get hidden. You don't even see them. Although once you find them, then they're probably easier to access because you just click the button and you're there.

11:06 And in fact that JST, as we've said, is just an addition. There's nothing else there that it's sort of modifying and it's emphasizing the relationship of Christ with the Father, it would appear to me, and certainly his spiritual wisdom and that there are things going on. And then we have this sacred silence that's there over his teenage years. I think we long. In teenage, they wouldn't have thought of it in those terms of course.

11:36 But one more thought experiment if we could and then maybe we could pause and sort of contemplate any application that would come. The fact that Jesus is sinless and that's going to become very clear in Matthew 3 when John is baptizing unto or for repentance, and when Jesus comes, Jesus says, "You don't

need to be baptized." And it seems to be this nod that, "What are you talking about? You don't have things to repent for." And then Jesus says, "Suffer it to be so, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." And of course Nephi is really going to talk a lot about the reasons why Jesus needed to be baptized. So He's clearly sinless.

12:17 I just wanted to do a little thought experiment with everyone about what that may mean that I have found helpful and I find it helpful with my students. Does the fact that Jesus is sinless mean He doesn't cry as a baby? And of course not. I mean that's silly. Of course he cried as a baby. Does it mean He doesn't soil his diaper or that He never trips and falls? No, of course he's going to trip and fall. He has to learn how to walk. And then the verse that we didn't quote is Doctrine and Covenants 93 where we're taught Jesus grows from grace to grace.

12:55 And then we could sort of go further and say, "Well, does Jesus ever fall asleep during synagogue?" And now I don't know the answer to that one, but He is mortal. He has mortal weakness so to speak. He's a human. He needs food, he needs sleep, yes. As His father's training Him as a craftsman, does He ever make a mistake as He's carving something or as He's crafting something, building something? Probably. There's certainly nothing wrong with making mistakes. Did he ever make a mistake because He just didn't hear it perfectly? I can certainly picture that. Does He ever have an awkward human moment or interaction where it's uncomfortable? Or does He always say exactly the perfect thing all the time? Is that what it means to be sinless?

13:49 And of course now we're delving into questions we just don't know the answers to. But as we consider that, then I think what starts to be revealed to me or what I start to feel is that where does he cross that line? Will any moment of rebellion or a rebellious attitude? Never. Never ever. As I ponder my own life, I think sometimes the things that I'm embarrassed about and give me pain aren't the things that actually matter a lot in the overall scheme of things. And I try to ignore my rebellious spirit and not account that as sinful, but that sometimes the mistakes in the things I say or I fall asleep at the wrong time or something like that, then I feel a lot of guilt for those and I'm really embarrassed for those. I feel shame for those. And I just think I don't know what equals sin or what doesn't equal sin in Jesus's sinless life. I know He was sinless and I certainly know He was never rebellious. That resonates deeply with me. And I say I certainly know that resonates deeply with me.

14:58 And I think as we think about Jesus' sinless nature and what that may or may not mean, it actually helps us zero in on what it means to grow from grace to grace and to grow in stature and in wisdom with God and men. So just a little thought experiment I wanted to engage in. I don't know if there's any thoughts you've had as we've sort of discussed that.

Hank Smith: 15:16 I like that a lot. I think it was Elder Scott who used to say the Lord treats rebellion and weakness differently. Those are not the same thing. And you're right, I have a tendency to be ashamed of my weaknesses when I probably should be a little bit more zeroed in on my rebellion. That was a great thought. I don't like it when I get called out like that, Shon, but it is helpful.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 15:39 That was the goal. I was really thinking about you Hank when I was talking. I was really thinking about John actually.

Hank Smith: 15:46 Mr. Rebellion himself is.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 15:49 That's right. Well, and these are tender topics. Those listening may think, "No, that's not. He wouldn't have tripped and fallen down." But we don't know. And I'm not trying to say that I know. What I do deeply believe and I'm deeply committed and Matthew 3 is clear, Jesus was sinless and He had to grow grace to grace. He had to progress. There had to be movement, there had to be learning. He has to be improving and gaining increased knowledge. We're going to get to the end of Matthew 3 here at some point. We're going to get to the end of Matthew 3 and see another really important moment. And Jesus, I wouldn't say he springs on the scene fully formed yet. It's not the end of his mortal story yet where then he's going to die and be resurrected and exalted. And so he's still learning. And that seems pretty clear. But wow, he's a long ways along the path.

16:43 I think then one other little thought, if I think about all the ways that I slow down my own progress by my own fears, by my own doubts, by my own closed off nature between me and God and how sweet and good it is to just be open and vulnerable before God and before others, I mean, in healthy ways there, how much God could just really elevate us as we seek to honor him. I think each of us have had those times in our lives when we're better at that and all the sweetness of it, and mortality. It has its challenges. But I love pondering on Jesus I guess and what He teaches me, what His life teaches me about my own life and how I can understand this mortal journey. Thanks for taking that little journey with me. Any examples with your own children coming to mind as you think through that?

Hank Smith: 17:40 You keep using this term Jesus growing grace for grace. I just want to make sure that we appreciate the prophet Joseph Smith in section 93 in the Doctrine and Covenants for that. The idea that Jesus is mutable, that He's changing, doesn't that make us heretics for a lot of the Christian world?

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 17:57 Certainly it is a debatable fact across Christianity what this looks like. There's a series that's popular right now and I think it's been so popular because it shows Jesus both as divine and human and it sort of emphasizes in I think beautiful ways his humanity. I think we also long for that. But understanding the interplay of those two things is very difficult. But this idea of Jesus, the mortal as mutable, as learning, as growing. Let's do just take a moment and read Doctrine and Covenants 93. I'm there and I can read it. It's verses 11 through 14.

Hank Smith: 18:36 I remember studying section 93 back when we had Casey Griffiths on our program. He said, "Here Joseph Smith takes millennia of debate between the divinity and the humanity of Christ and addresses it in an afternoon in 1833".

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 18:52 That tends to be the way that the Lord worked through him. Like these thorny issues and then just cut through them. And this is another example. I love that Hank. Thank you. So 11 through 14, "And I, John..." Most Latter-Day Saints who have studied this closely think, I wouldn't say we're 100% sure, but think that John is quoting something from John the Baptist now. So we're getting something that originally came from John the Baptist, which is sort of fun because we're going into Matthew 3. "And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, even the spirit of truth which came and dwelt in the flesh and dwelt among us."

19:34 "And I John," and this is the moment, "saw that he received not of the fullness at the first but received grace for grace. And he received not of the fullness at first, but continued from grace to grace." There's an interesting change, very mild but interesting change in language work. He received grace for grace and then He continued from grace to grace until He received a fullness unless He was called the son of God because He received not of the fullness at first.

20:00 Now, Abinadi is going to talk about this and he may not be talking about exactly the same thing, but it's similar where he says Christ is both the Father because He has the power of the Father and He does the will of the Father and He is the Son by virtue of His flesh. And look at this in verse 14, "And thus He

was called the son of God because He received not of the fullness at first."

20:21 Hank, the way you've talked about it, God, Christ as mutable or changeable or progressing. And that is a fascinating thing to understand, Christ as sinless and as learning at the same time. That's a pretty joyous way to think about mortality. And it's not a shame ridden sort of, "Oh, I got to be perfect all the time in mortality." No, I'm learning. We're growing. It's progress. If I were to pull in something else, 2 Nephi 32 when he says, "When you get the Holy Ghost, you're going to speak with the tongue of angels." I love that. You got to learn a new language. You're immortal, but you're trying to speak a heavenly language. And if you think of language acquisition, you make a lot of mistakes. The idea is you need to make a million mistakes to learn a language. Get going, get started in making your mistakes.

21:10 I don't think when we're learning Spanish or whatever language and we make mistakes, we would ever think of those as sins. They're our effort to learn and progress and to grow. So again, I don't know the boundaries of all of that. And some of those who are listening I'm sure have some of their own feelings about that. I don't mean that I've got the right answer there, but I do think that the thought exploration can yield some powerful things in our own lives and that the spirit may direct some of that exploration so that we learn some things that we need.

Hank Smith: 21:41 You see a child learning to walk, you wouldn't say that a child falling down is somehow sinning by making those mistakes. And we can see that in our own children. I can see that in my own children all the time. The difference between rebellion and weakness is pretty stark.

John Bytheway: 21:57 I like this discussion because as a kid I used to wonder about being perfect. I wondered what a perfect 100-yard dash time is. Is 10 flat the perfect time? But if you're perfect, maybe you can do it in five flat. It's really helpful I think to talk about it as rebellion because I think that that helps me understand the opposite of rebellion might be meekness. And meekness is a trait that my students and I have struggled to understand because the world's definition of meekness is... Oh, what was it? We looked it up on dictionary.com once and it was like weak, spineless, tame and I thought, "Well that's not Captain Moroni. And if all men had been unto Captain Moroni, the very powers of hell would've been shaken forever. So do we want to be weak, spiritless and tame? But then we see Moroni who gives such deference to God always takes the blame when things go

wrong, always gives credit to God when things go right. And that helped us understand meekness just by looking at Captain Moroni's deference to God to the Savior.

- 23:03 I like the way you put rebellion as a definition of a sin there. Can I add one more thing? In section 93 that you said was kind of comforting to see, "I, John, saw that he received not of the fullness at first but received grace for grace." And I'm looking in my dad's scripture, he's got an arrow pointing over to verse 20 where Jesus says, "Therefore I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace." And it's one of the wonderful things I love about section 93, verse 21. "I was in the beginning with the Father" and verse 23, guess what? You were also in the beginning with the Father. This is a really nice section for that sort of a thing. So I like what you said, I'm going to remember that, rebellion is kind of what we're talking about when we're talking about-
- Hank Smith: 23:50 Sinless life.
- John Bytheway: 23:51 Yeah, being sinless. Jesus never had a rebellious spirit in him.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 23:55 I have a really hard time imagining him rolling his eyes at his mom or his dad, right?
- John Bytheway: 24:00 Yeah.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 24:01 But I could imagine him possibly sleeping past his alarm. He didn't have an alarm, but I could imagine that a little more easily. I don't know. And then I think of my own sort of young teenage years and the progression there. And I liked hearing you talk about that, John, because I can remember I have got this memory of walking along the track. I think I was in seventh grade and it was PE beloved/dreaded hour of the day. And I don't know what was pressing on my soul or what we had been talking about in church, but I was thinking about perfection and how oppressive that idea felt. "Wow, I can't even have a personality. I just have to be serious all the time." And I think the two of you model that you don't have to be serious all the time. I mean, yeah, that sinful laughter right there, John, that's what I'm talking about.
- John Bytheway: 24:54 We're in such trouble.
- Hank Smith: 24:55 Oh, man.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 24:57 And then I thought, "Wait, my two biggest religious heroes besides Christ, Joseph Smith and Gordon B. Hinckley, and at the time it was actually Spencer W. Kimball and then we could talk about President Nelson. These are not people who lack personality. You can be serious, that's great, but God brings those things out. And we get to be ourselves and it's a journey and we're just growing grace for grace. Let's do go into Matthew 3 and if it's okay, we're going to read most of this chapter, 17 verses long, and we'll just sort of work our way through it. Let's do the first two verses, okay?"

John Bytheway: 25:31 We love reading the actual verses of scripture on followHIM, don't we, Hank?

Hank Smith: 25:37 Yes.

John Bytheway: 25:38 Okay. How many verses? First three?

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 25:41 Let's just do the first two.

John Bytheway: 25:43 "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'."

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 25:52 So all kinds of things here. And I'll try not to belabor any of these points too long, but pause me if we want to talk about any of these a little bit further. John the Baptizer, this is how he has known. Let me just pause there with his name and mention that we have a statement from Josephus who is an early Jewish historian. Well I say early, he lived during the war in 70 A.D. We're now pretty close to his lifetime here. And he may have been alive during this time. He describes John the Baptist. Most scholars, Josephus scholars, actually think this is legitimate. It wasn't added later. There's not a lot of debate around the statement. One of the reasons is because it's slightly different. He talks about John slightly differently than the New Testament does, which is not a surprise because he's an outsider to the things going on.

26:41 So I thought it would be fun to hear the way Josephus talks about John the Baptizer. This is in Antiquities 18. So let me read this to you. "Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, that that very justly is a punishment of what he did against John that was called the Baptist." Here's Josephus, an external source talking about the figure. And he's going to describe him in much more influential terms than we even get in the New Testament. In the

New Testament, he is the forerunner to Christ. And we get this sense that people are attracted to his message, but it's always sort of in the context in the New Testament of he's the preparer of the way, which is because that's true.

27:23 But Josephus doesn't describe him that way. "John, that was called the Baptist, for Herod slew him who was a good man and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue both as to righteousness towards one another and piety towards God. And so to come to baptism. For that the washing with water would be acceptable to him if they made use of it. Not in order to the putting away or the remission of some sins only, but for the purification of the body, supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness." So there's some religious commentary here about what he's understanding baptism to be. It's really fascinating.

28:01 Now, when many others came in crowds about him for they were greatly moved by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion." And you can see these concerns as soon as you have someone who's gaining a following, Oh no. There's these Messianic expectations. We can't have this." And the Jewish leaders tends to be sensitive before it ever gets to the Romans being sensitive. They're like, "Oh no, we're going to lose. This is going to get out of control."

28:36 So, "Who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise, thought it best by putting him to death to prevent any mischief he might cause and not bring himself into difficulties by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it should be too late. Accordingly, he was sent a prisoner out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned and was there put to death."

29:04 That's the story of John from Josephus. I don't know if any of you have been to Macherus. That's one of the places we take BYU students during the Study Abroad Program. So it's over in Jordan, which would've been considered part of land. It was on the other side of the Jordan. And in the nation we call Jordan today, you can go visit the remains of one of Herod's palaces there in Macherus. Sort of fascinating. John was a big deal, I guess, is one of the things that we should say here.

Hank Smith: 29:29 John was a big deal. I like that.

John Bytheway: 29:31 And isn't John in... Every one of the gospels touches on John.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 29:35 Yeah, well said. And then later on, he's going to sort of weave through the gospels, sort of pop in and out as an important figure. And then this touching moment later on when he is talking about Christ, he says he must increase, and I'm going to misquote this a little bit, "But I decrease." And this I think gives some context for that, that he was so important that Josephus, he spends longer talking about John than he does talking about Jesus. Josephus does. That's sort of the way that he saw it.

John Bytheway: 30:02 I inherited from my dad those three volumes of Josephus, but I confess I haven't cracked them open. There's one thing I use about the destruction of Jerusalem, is Josephus is really graphic about how bad that was, the 70 A.D thing, but I got to look that up. So which volume was that in, what you just said?

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 30:24 So that was the Antiquities. It's one that Latter-day Saints tend to enjoy reading because it sort of works its way through. And it's book 18, Antiquities 18. So if you want to go find that there. And then you can look at it instead of having me read just a whole bunch of words at you while you're waiting for me to finish. But fascinating stuff.

Hank Smith: 30:43 I was just going to mention, you said John the Baptist is a big deal. Whoever wrote the Bible dictionary felt the exact same way. Listen to this, it says, "John was the embodiment of the law of Moses." So he is the law of Moses in human form because both were designed to prepare the way for the Messiah and make ready a people to receive him. And then this statement, "He was the outstanding bearer of the Aaronic Priesthood in all history." I was like, "Wow, that's quite a statement." I think that was probably Robert Matthews who wrote that, but the most outstanding bearer of the Aaronic Priesthood in all history.

John Bytheway: 31:18 I was just going to say because Robert J. Matthews I think wrote a book on John the Baptist and I think he was the major writer of the Bible Dictionary.

Hank Smith: 31:27 Of the Bible Dictionary.

John Bytheway: 31:27 When you said, "I don't know who wrote this," I thought, "I think I do" and because he loved John the Baptist and so did Jesus, I mean, not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 31:37 Yeah. And by the way, we do get in Luke... Let's see, it's Luke chapter 1 verse 36. We won't go there, but we get this statement that he and John were related because Elizabeth and Mary were related. And so it says in the KJV cousin. Kinswoman is probably the best we have from there. But we do get that there is a familial relationship between John and Jesus. So they are close. John was in the wilderness during much of the time when Jesus was in Galilee. How well they knew each other? It's hard to know, but they are family. So that's sort of nice.

Hank Smith: 32:14 Jesus does say, "Of them that are born of women, there is none greater than John the Baptist." I think that's everyone, "Them that are born of women." I think that's a pretty high percentage.

John Bytheway: 32:22 Yeah, that doesn't narrow it down much, does it? Yeah.

Hank Smith: 32:24 "Of them that are born of women."

John Bytheway: 32:25 Where did John the Baptist... This is such a fascinating story. Where was he given the priesthood and what age was that? I think you mentioned that he was one of those that was almost impossible not to listen to because he was so filled with the spirit. So what do we know about how John the Baptist received his priesthood?

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 32:45 Okay, so we have from modern day revelation, Doctrine and Covenants helps us with this information. I'm going to read from Doctrine and Covenants 84 verses 27 through 28 is where you can find some information, some more information about John. "For God raised up John the Baptist being filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb." The same way that the scriptures are talking about Jesus as having this wisdom, this strength. "For he was baptized while he was yet in his childhood and was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old unto this power."

33:30 Now of course, eight days, that's going to be the time of circumcision. And something else is happening that's really important at eight days. That's when Zacharias' mouth is opened and he proclaims his name shall be John. And we've already gotten the angel interacting with his father, Zacharias, saying, "Hey, you need to proclaim his name."

33:50 And then in fact, if we could just go backwards, and we won't go back and read it, but the whole New Testament account opens in Luke. We're spending time in Matthew, but if you go to the

way it all opens up. It opens up, and I love to see this, with a faithful woman, Elisabeth.

John Bytheway: 34:09

Good point.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 34:09

And then Mary. I've loved seeing that strong, faithful women... I mean if you think of Eve, the way she blesses the entire storyline of the human race, how she stands there at the beginning of the storyline, as does Adam. And then if you think of Elisabeth and Mary, I think this may be helpful, there is no salvation without Mary, the mother of the son of God. Now Christ is the son of God who works out the Atonement through His grace and power and goodness, but the one who gives life to the life giver and teaches and raises.

34:54

Let's talk about Elisabeth and then Zacharias. It's sort of a Latter-day Saint kind of story where it's his turn by lot to be the one who's going to present the prayer, the morning sacrifice at the veil. He's not a high priest. He's not the high priest, he's a priest. And so he can't go into the Holy of Holies, but where they would go is to the altar of incense that's just before the veil. There's smoke ascending from that altar of incense that symbolizes prayer before the veil. You have angels stitched on the veil sort of representing the cherubim leading the way back into the presence of God. And as he prays and the priests are around the temple also praying at the same time, sort of circling the temple there, an angel comes down and stands there at the veil bringing a message from God how to enter into the presence of God. "God's going to descend among you."

35:54

And in Matthew 3, you've already read it, "The kingdom of God is at hand." I mean God is on earth. I mean you're in his presence so to speak. He's here. And this is what the angel Gabriel brings that message, "Before the veil, here's how you are going to enter into the presence of God." And Zacharias doesn't have the faith to fully accept it there. He can't speak and he becomes this symbol of apostasy that you can't get divine messages unless you're willing to hear them and share them. And the moment he is able to share it at John the Baptist's eight day circumcision ceremony at what's called the bris of these days, the moment he's able to share that and he has the faith to share, his mouth is open and it becomes, I would say, the first revelation of the dispensation of the meridian of times. Brought from an angel in the temple at the veil to a listener and then carried forth. And that opens first with Elisabeth's faith, but then as it carries forward, that opens this new dispensation.

36:57 And there's something else clearly that's going on. He's ordained by an angel of God at the time he was eight days old unto this power. We went further than what you were pointing to there, John, but...

John Bytheway: 37:07 I'm so glad you talked about it. And I think what you added about Josephus and the popularity of John, I mean if you can imagine someone who's filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb, that's going to be a powerful teacher. And no wonder the crowds were following him and Josephus commented on him. But it's not the normal way that somebody gets ordained at eight days old, but John the Baptist was anything but ordinary. I just thought it's interesting if we were to see John the Baptist's line of authority, it's a little different than what we might expect.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 37:40 And whether this is his ordination to what we would think of-

John Bytheway: 37:44 Was it a priesthood ordination or was it a...

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 37:46 Right. He's ordained unto this power either way.

John Bytheway: 37:49 or his mission.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 37:50 But this is a very powerful moment when he at a very young age is prepared for this future mission that he's going to fulfill. And I like what you read from the Bible Dictionary about him being sort of this quintessential example of what it means to be a priesthood holder. He represents the power of what God has been trying to do amongst his children and then preparing the way how then, they, he then prepares the way. All right. Shall we go back then to Matthew 3? We've been talking for a while. We're through two verses. This is about right.

John Bytheway: 38:27 Got some Isaiah. Isaiah coming up here.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 38:30 We do. It's coming. First, let me say briefly, verse 1, preaching in the wilderness of Judea. There are a couple of different traditional baptismal sites. One of them, it's just probably traditional because it's really beautiful and it's up north near the Galilee, right at the entrance to the Galilee where the river Jordan is there. The other one though is probably more likely and it's down near Jerusalem and it's very deserty, very wildernessy.

38:55 If you think of Isaiah who we're about to read proclaiming, "You are going to return, I'm going to bring you through the

wilderness back. You're going to redeem the land," there's echoes of redemption right there that we just read right over. "Oh, he is in the wilderness" as a technical thing. Yes. And we're talking about, "I'm going to bring you up through the dry wilderness to holy places. I'm going to return you into a holy relationship." Well, this is John the Baptist. He's sort of like the one who's preparing the way for the return. And that's what Isaiah's about to say. Before though, I keep saying that, before we get to verse 3, let's spend a moment on this word repent, which then the connotation to this word in Greek, which is... Let's see. I think it's metaneo, is that correct? Yeah, metaneo. And if I'm mispronouncing that, forgive me. John and Hank, don't get upset with me.

- Hank Smith: 39:55 We'll try not to.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 39:57 Change one's mind. To change one's mind. You were thinking of things in one way. Now think of them in another way. Change your viewpoint, change the way you see things. And if you think of missionary work or if you think of the spirit working with you and how you can be viewing things one way, and then your heart will change, your heart will soften.
- 40:22 Let's not forget as we interact with others the way that God interacts with us. I know there have been times I'm just seeing things a certain way. That does not predict that I'm going to see them the same way after the spirit of God touches my heart. And for those that we love, who you think they're never going to see things a different way, they're too sort of embroiled in this worldview, and then when God touches the heart. So I just think there's plenty of reason to hope on, to exercise faith, both for ourselves and our own weaknesses and for those that we love to change one's mind. God's pretty powerful to help us see the world afresh, to see it differently.
- Hank Smith: 41:05 I love it. It's the first word we hear from John, right?
- John Bytheway: 41:08 Right.
- Hank Smith: 41:09 The very first word, repent.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 41:11 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 41:11 And I have used this in classes to just put the word repent on a big slide and say, "All right, what's the first thing you think of?" Because I love the Bible Dictionary, it's such a nice definition, a fresh view about God, about oneself and about the world. And

because I think sometimes we get the scolding type of feeling with the word repent. And a fresh view about God, about oneself and about the world. That's a beautiful definition. President Nelson, there's a talk called Repentance and Conversion from General Conference in April of 2007 and he said, "When Jesus said repent, his disciples recorded that command in the Greek language with the verb..." Now how did you say it? *Metanoeo*.

- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 41:54 Yeah. Good. You probably did that better than I did.
- John Bytheway: 41:59 President Nelson said this powerful word has great significance. In this word, the prefixed meta means change, like metamorphosis or something. The suffix relates to four important Greek terms *nous*, N-O-U-S, meaning the mind, *gnosis* meaning knowledge, *pneuma* meaning spirit and *no*, meaning breath. Thus when Jesus said repent, he asked us to change our mind, our knowledge and our spirit.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 42:28 Wow. That's pretty good, John. I love that.
- Hank Smith: 42:32 Yeah.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 42:33 Repentance feels good. I've often said my experience, and maybe there is a time where the despair is darker sometimes in life where you don't feel that ray of hope. But my experience has been I know that it's true repentance. And I'm just speaking for myself here because it feels sweet to me. Maybe there's something that comes before that I could pinpoint a little more. But certainly when it's just I'm awful and nobody can love me and I make so many mistakes that I'm just a loser, to me that doesn't have quite the right flavor. It feels right when there's this, "Oh, I've done wrong and I see it." And it's in one sense devastating, but in another sense it's hope filled because it's full of faith in God, that God loves me and he's helping me see it because he wants me to be happier, because he wants me to change my mind and see things more accurately. And that's only about joy. It can require sacrifice for sure, that it is so joyful to see the world afresh. Well, I love what you just shared, John, that was really powerful.
- John Bytheway: 43:38 Well, it's President Nelson. And Elder Holland said... What was it, Hank? Repentance is perhaps the most hopeful and encouraging word in the whole Christian vocabulary. It's just that we have a chance to, that that option's there and that it's there repeatedly. There's lots of exits on the covenant path, but there's lots of on-ramps too.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 43:59 Yeah, I think I've shared this before when I was with you. I don't know who I got it from or if the spirit brought it to my own mind or not, but this idea that repentance takes care of my past, covenants take care of my future, and it's all hope-filled. Because of the Atonement of Christ, I am not defined by yesterday. It's not that yesterday doesn't exist, but the Atonement can transform yesterday and today.

44:24 Another way to say that is the Pool of Bethesda, the man who's waiting for 38 years. Well, the past evidence of 38 years of evidence is not an accurate indicator of what will happen to him on this day. When God is involved, everything changes. And so 38 years, "Nope, this is not going to work out." And then Christ shows up. The evidence of yesterday is not an accurate indicator of what God is able to do in your life and my life today.

44:56 I mean, I don't know that all that is embedded in the word repent, but it sort of is. You don't tell somebody to repent if there actually isn't an ability to have it washed clean. And then he's got this ordinance of washing. Washed clean and move forward and be a new soul again. And how grateful I am for daily repentance, as President Nelson's talked about, for the opportunity to take the sacrament weekly, for ordinances that helped me reconnect and be reborn, so to speak, again and again and again.

Hank Smith: 45:26 I think I was somewhere in my teenage years when it occurred to me that repentance was more about seeing your value, your infinite worth, and learning to make choices that match that infinite worth. It was very uplifting, very ennobling. Perhaps I didn't make a choice that matched my value. And the difference between those two, my value and the value of that choice perhaps was so stark that you want to come up and you want to reach your value.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 46:02 I love that. I totally agree. And forgive me for interrupting a little bit there. You got me excited. We're about to go to Isaiah 40, that's what he's going to be quoting from. But there's another space in Isaiah that I'll mention to those who are listening. You should go back and look sometime at Isaiah 55. We are familiar with, "My thoughts are higher than your thoughts and my ways than your ways." I'm probably misquoting that a little bit. But we often think, "Well, God knows better than we do. We need to submit to the Lord." Well, and that is true. That feels a little bit weighty maybe. And that's fine because we do need to submit to the Lord. But if you keep reading those verses and yet keep going to verse 12, here's what he's saying. Let me just read it for you really quickly so I'm not misquoting it too badly here.

- 46:46 So if you look at Isaiah 55, and then I'm going to take you to another place in Isaiah here in just a moment. I do like Isaiah. So verse eight, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways, my ways, saith the Lord." And then look at the conclusion of this. "For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace." He goes through this whole thought process about the rains come down and they do their work and "My thoughts are higher than your thoughts."
- 47:14 And this is what you're talking about, Hank. It's not, "Hey, you're bad, so think better about things." Although sometimes we just need to think better about things. It's joyous. "You don't get it," God is saying. "You think you're not going to make it. I am telling you I know better than you do. I have power and I'm going to bring you out with joy. And ye shall go be led forth with peace. That's how my thoughts are higher than your thoughts. I see you correctly and you over and over and over again, do not. So repent. See yourself through my eyes. See your yourself afresh. See yourself anew. Let your heart take hope again, that your God loves you." I love that space in Isaiah. You got me a little so excited that I interrupted you, Hank. Thank you.
- John Bytheway: 47:59 Wow, that's great because I think sometimes we look at that verse just by itself just because we're having a trial. "Well, I guess God's ways are higher than my ways" or something like that.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 48:09 And fair enough, right?
- John Bytheway: 48:10 Yeah. Yeah, sure. And it works, but you shall be go out with joy.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 48:14 And be led forth with peace. Ah, so those of you, of us, who are feeling a little bit weighed down today, mortality tends to do that. Let your heart see it again. Let your heart spring forth and hope again that you will go out with joy.
- 48:34 All right. Now while we're here in Isaiah, let's go ahead and we'll read it here in Isaiah. I'll go ahead and read. And then when we go back to Matthew 3, maybe Hank, we can pass the baton to you. So Isaiah 40, verse 3. And by the way, this starts a new section of Isaiah. This is how Handel chose to start the Messiah. We're more familiar with when he quotes Isaiah 9:6, "Wonderful counselor."
- John Bytheway: 48:59 (singing).
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 48:59 I was hoping I could get John to burst into the song there, John.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 49:03 Mission achieved. This fits so well with what we're saying because I think sometimes we think of John as this feisty prophet. He's all about repentance and hellfire, and damnation. But look, the section that we're talking about, repentance, "Comfort ye my people." Verse 2, "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem. Your warfare is accomplished, your iniquity is pardoned. She hath received the Lord's hand double for all her sins." And then here's the voice, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness," that's what John says, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God." So let's go back to Matthew 3. And then Hank, would you be willing to do verses 3? And let's go ahead do 3 and 4.

Hank Smith: 49:52 "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, and that's Isaiah, saying, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make his path straight.' And the same John had his arraignment of camel's hair and a leather girdle about his loins and his meat was locusts and wild honey."

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 50:12 Good. All right, so we'll pause there. Locust is the only insect that is kosher under the Law of Moses. And people in Qumran, they ate locust. They talk about locust. You can bake them, you can fry them, you can boil them. It's a very wildernessy kind of a thing. And then of course, he's dressed in a way, and the way he's described here is, "Gives echoes of Elijah." And the interesting thing about Elijah, remember, that's the one that Malachi prophesies, "Hey, Elijah's going to come." And so that's why they're asking, "Are you Elijah? Are you the preparer of the way?"

50:46 And there is in the Greek, of course, Elijah is going to sound like Elias that comes out in the Anglicized Greek. And so you have Elias is Elijah. That's always what it is. It's the Greek form of Elijah. But then this idea of an Elias being, or an Elijah. But Joseph Smith used the term as this Greek form, and Elias being a preparer of the way. Well, Elijah is a preparer of the way. And John the Baptist is going to say, "Well, yes, I am Elias. I am a preparer of the way. I am the one who's coming." And then of course, in Latter-days, Joseph Smith is an Elias for Jesus Christ.

51:28 You could say in another sense, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon is almost like John the Baptist with Joseph. But Joseph in the more, I think, powerful sense is the Elias for Jesus Christ. And each of us, I would say, are called to be preparers of the way and those who make the path straight. Now, if a king is coming and has his retinue and he's coming to visit, what would happen is people would go beforehand and they would make sure that the path was prepared and they would fill in little divots or

valleys and they would take things down so that the animals and the crowd, the group that's with the king himself, can go forward without injury. So they'd straighten out the pathway and they would prepare and level the way for the king. It's almost like laying out the red carpet. "So I'm a preparer of the way. I'm making sure, if we're going to now apply this a little bit, when Christ comes the way is prepared." He's got a people prepared to receive him, that the message has gone forth.

52:35 And Christianity has been that in powerful ways and the restoration of the gospel, which could not... I mean, God can do anything he wants, but it could not have occurred without all that's come before it. But then God is able to restore the gospel in the last days. And then our goal as we send forth missionaries, I've got a son, our youngest son just went into the MTC last Wednesday.

John Bytheway: 52:59 Oh.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 52:59 He's headed to New Zealand. Yeah, it's feeling a little weird around my house this week. I was always the guy who stayed up late with the kids and now we get to 11:00 PM and I'm like, "Wait, who am I? What's my job? I don't know what my job is now."

Hank Smith: 53:11 Identity crisis a little bit. Yeah.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 53:14 A little bit, yeah. So John is the one who will prepare the way so that there's a people and some of his apostles are going to come straight from those who have heard and been persuaded by John the Baptist's message.

John Bytheway: 53:28 I love this idea of a forerunner. When my wife and I were first married, we bought a Toyota 4Runner when the kids started to come and I thought, "Let's get a license plate that says Elias." And when we drive by, people will say, "Oh, I get it. Elias was a 4Runner."

Hank Smith: 53:45 Always teaching, John. Always teaching, yeah.

John Bytheway: 53:51 Please join us for part two of this podcast.



- John Bytheway: 00:01 Welcome to Part II with Dr. Shon Hopkin. Matthew chapter 3, Mark chapter 1, and Luke chapter 3.
- 00:10 Do you remember Hank in the Old Testament when Jesse is supposed to go get a new king? 1 Samuel chapter 8, the Lord says, "They haven't rejected you. They've rejected me, but tell them the manner of their kings. He's going to take your daughters and make him confectioneries. He can take your sons and make them run before the king's chariots." And that reminded me of that, Shon, when you said that, that they will be forerunners to clear the way, take out the rocks and fill in the divots. But I love the symbol of that. So make the path straight means to be a forerunner.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 00:42 We won't go there, but I'm looking at Luke chapter 1, verse 17. "He shall go before him," this is John the Baptist, "in the spirit and power of Elias to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children." So notice, John the Baptist isn't saying, although he dresses sort of in this way and he's described in the gospel of Matthew in these terms that are reminiscent of Elijah, of Elias, and he's going to go in the spirit and power of Elias. That's then what Joseph Smith is going to talk about.
- 01:09 Let me read you something from Joseph Smith about the spirit of Elias. So this is from teachings of the prophet Joseph Smith. Many of us recognize that as the old blue book that I used to love that had compilations by Joseph Fielding Smith, pages 335 to 336. "The spirit of Elias is to prepare the way for a greater revelation of God which is the priesthood of Elias or the priesthood that Aaron was ordained unto to. And when God sends a man into the world to prepare for a greater work holding the keys of the power of Elias, it was called the Doctrine of Elias even from the early ages of the world. John's mission was limited to preaching and baptizing, but what he did was legal. When Jesus Christ came to any of John's disciples, he baptized them with fire and the Holy Ghost." You can see the connection there with what we're reading here and what we're working to get to, which is the baptism.

Hank Smith: 01:55 I explained this to my daughter the other day when she's like, "Well, what is John the Baptist's role exactly?" And I said, "Well, think of it as he gets Instagram account going that gets a couple of hundred thousand followers. And then when Jesus shows up, he hands that Instagram account over to Jesus, gives him the password and says, 'It's all yours, take it away'." And she went, "Oh. Oh, okay. I get it." So a modern-day example of how John might look today.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 02:19 I love that. And she's like, "I get it, dad," because that's what-

Hank Smith: 02:21 Yeah. "I get it."

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 02:22 And honestly, let me just say I think as Latter-day Saints, for me the goal is, so if I serve as a bishop and it's okay to want to be the best bishop ever, but I've sort of reoriented following John the Baptist's example, or at least tried to reorient to say, "No, my goal isn't to be the best bishop or whatever ever. I want to prepare the way so that the bishop who comes after me will be the best bishop ever." And there's something that sort of centers on us that says, "I've got to be the best one. It's about me." But no, I am preparing the way so that we have this crescendo, this increase and it's not about me. I am just as willing to disappear so that when I'm gone, everybody isn't like, "Well, that was the true bishop. Now we've got the follow-up Bishop." No, he's going to be in a better position to succeed after me.

03:14 And I think that's what we all want with our children, isn't it? I don't want to be better than my children. I want to prepare the way so that there is this crescendo leading up to the second coming of Christ. And to see our children go beyond us is one of the greatest joys that we can have in life. And they do so often. And that's sort of something I've learned from John the Baptist, the preparer of the way.

Hank Smith: 03:40 That's beautiful. I never even thought about that. That's great. It took me actually going to Israel to recognize how important verse 5 is. Then I went out to Him, Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region roundabout Jordan. I don't know in my head I just had Him close to Jerusalem before I went there. And then I go there and I think, "That is a long journey. To go from Jerusalem down to the Jordan River, that is a waste. And to say all of Jerusalem and the region roundabout, this is a popular guy." There's a lot of people heading down that road from Jerusalem down towards Jericho, towards the Jordan River.

John Bytheway: 04:14 It's one of the really fun things about that area is below sea level.

Hank Smith: 04:20 Right. It's the lowest place on the planet.

John Bytheway: 04:23 And so we get this really literal physical level of meaning where Jesus descended below all things because he went to the lowest spot on earth to be baptized and he descended below all things in the way he was treated, in the way he was born, but even to be baptized went below sea level.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 04:43 That's such a great insight. I mean this is the only time that the Messiah, the Son of God, is going to be baptized. And where does he pick to do it? Literally the lowest place on earth. I'm making this up, but he's like, "Okay, where are we going to send Christ? Well, let's send him where he can be baptized at the lowest place on earth to symbolize that descent and what his ministry is going to mean and where it's going to start." That's really great.

Hank Smith: 05:12 Yeah. And to have all these people going out there, this must have been quite a scene that all of Jerusalem and Judea and the region roundabout Jordan, everyone is going out there to hear this guy, he must have been so charismatic and powerful as a speaker and they all want to be baptized of him and even gets the attention of the leadership.

John Bytheway: 05:31 Well, yeah. And why would that be? In verse 7, "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Do you think they were coming to repent or to observe or maybe both?" What do you think?

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 05:44 Now we're talking about some feisty, right? He is not afraid to speak truth. And by the way, he is speaking in the classical tradition of prophets where there's truth speakers and they speak what God wants them to speak because that's what needs to be heard. And why is he critiquing these leaders? He sounds a lot like Isaiah. He sounds a lot like Elijah where he is saying, "You have actually stepped on the face of my people. You are crushing my people." And he comes to protect the innocent. We see him as being feisty, and He is, but I want you to think of Him as protecting God's children. He is standing up manfully, so to speak, to really speak out for goodness and righteousness. There's some pretty sinister things going on or else he would not speak this way.

Hank Smith: 06:37 Shon, you might have already mentioned this, but maybe it's worth hitting again that by going down to the Jordan, do you think he's recalling some Old Testament going back down to the Jordan and saying, "Look, let's go back to the days of Joshua and Moses"?

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 06:53 And I mentioned wilderness sort of this exodus from Babylon back to Jerusalem, but I think just as well said is the exodus as they come up out of the world, so coming up out of the water. And you remember that Joshua was going to bring them so to speak through the Jordan. Moses had earlier brought them through the Red Sea, and now Moses, "Okay, now we're going to the Promised Land." I've almost liked the imagery, but it's imagery and so it can mean... I'm not saying this is the correct interpretation, but I've loved the imagery of the Red Sea being baptism. And then when Joshua brings them through, now we're passing through the veil into the presence of the Lord, speaking of sort of Solomon's temple imagery. But here, and he comes into the presence of the Lord. We don't want to jump too quickly to the baptism but we probably need to get there eventually, where God is going to show up. That's where this chapter is leading.

Hank Smith: 07:44 I love that, the Red Sea, then parting the veil and coming through, and here, the presence of God.

John Bytheway: 07:50 That's why Moses is such a strong type of Christ, leading them out of physical bondage through the waters of the Red Sea. One way I've heard it is to Sinai's the mountain temple type of a thing, but they wouldn't go with him, right? But that same kind of Moses being such a strong type, this is what Jesus is going to do.

Hank Smith: 08:11 So he uses one verse to teach them. So Shon, would it be fair to say that John the Baptist, going back to the Jordan, it's kind of like somebody today in the US going back to Valley Forge or going back to Boston and going to the Harbor and say, "Let's go back to our roots. Let's get back to what we were supposed to be, the people of the Promised Land"?

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 08:31 Oh, I really like that a lot. Yeah, they're going to be crossing over the Jordan. It was all one land, which you didn't have to get across that river, but to pick that spot to stop and do things. And then if you're going to talk about that sort of historical memory, I think that's really powerful, Hank. And then of course we've got all kinds of other things. We've got ritual immersion going on here and this purification ritual, and now this is for

repentance and it's going to end up being to enter into this relationship as God's people.

09:00 Biblical scholars will debate ad nauseum about when they see baptism starting. There were at some point ritual immersions for proselytes that we would think of as pretty close to what baptism are to bring Gentiles into the fold and they debate whether they can see that early or not. But of course we've got some things in Doctrine and Covenants that talk about ordinances of washing baptism as Doctrine and Covenants talks about it continuing on. What exactly that looked like or how that played out over the course of all of Israelite history is really tricky, but there's clearly... I mean the symbols of immersion and of purification and then He's talking about repentance and being forgiven, this is all going back to home base a little bit. It's all redolent with symbolism and meaning for his Jewish listeners I would say.

Hank Smith: 09:57 It seems to be something they're used to. I mean, at least the fact that they don't say, "What are you doing? Why are you baptizing people?" They seem to be somewhat used to it. But He is bold with them. This is the leadership of His people and the things He says.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 10:10 Indeed, I mean verse 10, but first let's look at this, what's going to be a real challenge and it really prefigures Christ's message and then what's going to happen after with the ministry of the apostles after Christ's resurrection? Look at verse 9. "Think not to say within yourselves we have Abraham to our Father. I say to you, God is able of these stones to raise up children in Abraham." He's sort of blowing it all up and saying, just like Abinadi does with Noah. Nope, you are missing it. Let's go back to the 10 commandments is what Abinadi does. And he says, "Listen, God can make of these stones." It's about holiness, it's about discipleship as we would talk about it. It's about seeking after the Lord with all of your heart. You've got to change the way you see the world. It's not about power dynamics.

Hank Smith: 10:56 Who's your genealogy, right?

John Bytheway: 10:58 Yeah. This sounds like a genealogy thing and it's fun to see particularly I think in John's writings where he talks about becoming the sons of God. And as a teenager I thought, "Wait a minute. I thought we're all sons and daughters of God," but there's kind of an encouragement to act like it. If you're the children of Abraham, do the works of Abraham. If you're a son of God, act like a son of God type of thing.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 11:21 Sometimes I do think there are those who feel some loss, "Well, if I come out of the wrong kind of family or even the wrong kind of genealogy." I think it's very comforting and it just happens to be that way right now, but has been for quite some time. If you look at our highest church leaders, the First Presidency and the 12 Apostles, the majority of them come out of home situations that have each their own challenges. Maybe less active parents, maybe one parent or an early death. Some real challenges.

11:53 That doesn't mean that you have to come out of some challenges in your early life for God to use you, but it just says God can use all of us. It's about us seeking after the Lord. So He's trying to blow all of that stuff up. And it's persuasive. People love it. It resonates with them. They're like, "Oh, wow, this guy is speaking truth. This isn't just the way it is. He's speaking to my soul and they flock to hear him because they feel it," I would say. It's persuasive. Well, He's going to keep going. There's some really great imagery here about verse 10. And now also the ax has laid into the root of the trees.

Hank Smith: 12:32 That's quite a threat, isn't it? I mean...

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 12:35 Yeah, He's not pulling any punches.

John Bytheway: 12:38 I love that imagery. Right when you're going to chop it down, the first thing you do is, "Let's see, here's where I want it to hit." You lay it at the root, and then you take your back swing. That's exactly what you do.

Hank Smith: 12:47 Goodness.

John Bytheway: 12:48 And it's like, "Oh, this is really close."

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 12:51 And then you hit about six inches different than where you planned on and whatnot.

John Bytheway: 12:55 Yeah, where you aimed. You know that Hank loves to talk about Jacob 5, but it's so interesting how often in the scriptures, trees are people. In Isaiah, the cedars of Lebanon will fall by a mighty one, but God becomes a lumberjack and he'll hewn down. He's not talking about deforestation here, is he?

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 13:15 Yeah, no.

John Bytheway: 13:16 He's talking about, "You guys are the trees and the ax is laid at the root." That's like, "I'm just about to strike."

Hank Smith: 13:22 Yeah, like, "Where's your good fruit?" What'd you say, Shon? He's not pulling any punches. I like that. He is very bold with his leaders.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 13:30 He goes to a tree and you're talking about this, Jacob 5, and trees are individuals. We just came in the previous verse out of, "Hey, your ancestry isn't going to save you." And then he goes right to what we still today use as sort of this genealogy symbol. He's like, "No, this can be chopped up." If you're not drawing sustenance from the roots, you're sort of already separated from the roots. So let's just make that clear.

John Bytheway: 13:57 I've heard somewhere that vipers, distinct from just being snakes, vipers, a subset of snakes, but that vipers are venomous and that he's actually referring to them as not just snakes but venomous. We know from the scriptures, in fact it's a source of confusion, that snakes have been used for good symbols too like the brazen serpent. But that here, they're not just snakes, but they're vipers. And comparing this Pharisees and Sadducees as being venomous is a strong indictment on how John's talking about them. Does that make any sense?

Hank Smith: 14:30 Yeah, it does. I think I would be really uncomfortable here because I just don't like conflict. So to witness this little exchange, I'd be, "Whoa, he's really saying some strong things to these guys."

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 14:41 That's really great. And I love that. I've just been looking that up while you were talking. Echidna or echidna, a snake, our texts do not permit identification of species, but the term ordinarily suggests a poisonous one. *Vipera ammodytes*, commonly known as sand viper. So I think you're spot on. We may not know that with 100% certainty, but that seems to be what he is doing, a poisonous snake.

Hank Smith: 15:06 Goodness.

John Bytheway: 15:08 Oooh. And Hank, I just think you're right. When you look at an example of courage, you think of John the Baptist, don't you?

Hank Smith: 15:14 In front of the crowds, no less, right?

John Bytheway: 15:16 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 15:16 The crowds are there, right? I wonder if all the crowds are hearing this and they're going, "Whoa."

John Bytheway: 15:21 And oh, and what's the example Jesus uses later on? Like, "Yeah, I'll answer you if you answer me. The baptism of John, was it of God or of men?" And they're like, "We can't say that."

Hank Smith: 15:32 "We can't say that." Yeah, they're still scared of John after his death.

John Bytheway: 15:34 We fear the people. "Oh, we do not answer thee." And Jesus says, "Well, neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things." I love that Jesus brings up John the Baptist again after he's already gone anyway,

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 15:44 He's preparing the way.

Hank Smith: 15:46 What a great connection between they thinking their genealogy is going to save them and him saying, "The Lord can cut that genealogy right in half with the root of the tree." I'd never seen that before.

John Bytheway: 15:57 He can change your roots and branches. To use the Malachi language, yeah, your roots and branches.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 16:03 Now in classical Hebrew prophetic form, he's feisty, but look at he turns it positive. It's not lacking in hope. So he's going to a pretty strong sort of saying, "Hey, you got to see this accurately." But notice the very next thing that he says, "I indeed baptize you with water and repentance. Come on, come be baptized. Repent. Come and be cleansed. Change. Adopt a new way of seeing the world. But he that cometh after me..." And he's testifying of Christ even as he's baptized, he's pointing beyond himself over and over again, "He that cometh after me is mightier than I, and he's the one that's going to baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

16:49 But then, "His fan is in his hand. He will thoroughly purge his floor." I think most understand the imagery that's being used there. There is a chaff that gets ground up as you're trying to separate the wheat from the chaff, and then you toss it into the air and the wind will blow that chaff away because the chaff actually, there's no substance, there is no value. What you want is the wheat head. You want the fruit that has really substance in it. And then, "He is going to gather his wheat into the garner." That's the imagery there in verse 12.

Hank Smith: 17:21 So you're tossing it up and the chaff gets blown away while the wheat comes back down to you.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 17:25 Exactly. But the other way, you're going to burn it and it's there. The chaff remains to be burned. It's the wheat that you want. So there's different ways of doing that, but you're separating the chaff from the wheat and then gathering. President Nelson talks a lot about gathering, and we have John the Baptist right at the beginning of the Meridian of times using gathering image for imagery for the wheat. "Gather the wheat into the garner." It's really nice.

Hank Smith: 17:54 Yeah. So he is bold, but yet he offers them an opportunity.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 17:57 Yes, it's tinged with hope, an opportunity as you said. You don't have to stay where you are, change your way of seeing things and then come and show it by being baptized, by going down into the water as he says unto repentance.

Hank Smith: 18:13 Now we come to it, the big moment.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 18:15 Here we are, we've been building to it. Let's read all of the verses and then we can talk about them.

Hank Smith: 18:20 Yeah, let's have John do a little reading. John's got a great reading voice.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 18:23 Verse 13.

John Bytheway: 18:25 "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan and to John to be baptized of him, but John forbade him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?' And Jesus answering said unto him, 'Suffer it to be so now for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he suffered him."

Hank Smith: 18:44 16, 17, "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straight way out of the water. And lo, the heavens were opened unto him and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him. And lo, a voice from heaven saying, 'This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased'."

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 19:03 This is so crucial. This is so pivotal. There's all kinds of imagery that we learn and we sort of pull from different places about baptism, but this is right at the beginning of Christ's ministry. So this first 30 years leads to this moment and it's a gateway. And it doesn't end thing. It's not the capstone, baptism isn't. It's the beginning of a pathway. It's the beginning of a journey, but it changes everything here, that symbol, that moment.

- 19:39 So let's talk about it in the New Testament, but before we're done, I want to talk about it a little bit in the ordinance of baptism here in the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But first, let's sort of dig into these verses a little bit. Make sure as you're studying this, that you spend some time with Nephi, in 2 Nephi 30, as he talks about Christ the sinless one who still fulfills righteousness to show us the way. An epistle to the Hebrews is going to do a lot of this, where Christ is marking out a pathway. He's strengthening us for that path. He's showing us the path, and he's enabling us to walk upon that path.
- 20:19 I often ask students, "Did Christ need baptism? And the answer is, "Well, no. But if Christ hadn't been baptized, would that have been sinful, so to speak?" Well, that would've been his first moment of rebellion. Here in this moment, he could say, "I don't need this. This is extraneous." And I think sometimes people may feel that as they gather on the Sunday, "Well, I'm doing fine. Why do I need to go to church? Why do I need to gather here?" And others are feeling, "No, I need this like a thirsty man needs water in the wilderness." But Christ here is saying, "Suffer it to be so. I love my father and I submit," so to speak. This symbol of loyalty, the symbol of submission, and of course it's a symbol of new birth.
- 21:13 So if you think of the way the earth began, the way it's described in Genesis 1 is that it's a watery globe and then land emerges, right? And if you think of imagery from Christ's atoning sacrifice, you have both in the Garden of Gethsemane where it's his sweat were as great drops of blood. And so you have this bloody sweat water and blood imagery. You have at his crucifixion as the spear goes into a side, water and blood imagery. You have birth imagery from his atoning sacrifice. And Christ, the sinless one, the perfect one, becomes a new soul, so to speak. This is part of growing grace for grace or grace to grace, and it's so powerful. It's so crucial that we signify our inner commitment with a behavior of holiness by going down into the water. "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him." This beautiful moment.
- 22:15 Joseph Smith has talked about, and you see it in verse 16, "Jesus when he was baptized went up straight way out of the water." We've all seen depictions as Latter-day Saints that are a little sensitive to us when Jesus down in the water and then he's not immersed, but there's some other form. This is immersion that's being talked about here. Joseph Smith talked about the meaning of this word where it's to immerse or to dip. You're going into the water. Joseph Smith says this, "We find no

subject so nearly connected with salvation as that of baptism. In the first place, however, let us understand the word baptize is derived from the Greek verb baptizo, which means to immerse or overwhelm. And that sprinkle us from the Greek verb brantizo, it means to scatter on by particles. The gospel requires baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, which is the meaning of the word in the original language, namely to bury or immerse or as we might say, to dip."

23:08 You have all kinds of doctrines that are near and dear to the Latter-day Saint heart, the importance of baptism, Christ showing us the way. If even the son of God needs to fulfill all righteousness by being baptized, then how much more so we? There can be a debate with some of our Protestant friends, "Well, is it essential for salvation?" And in my discussions with them, not that I'm winning the argument or anything like that, I mean we both go away still viewing it pretty much the same way, but I say, "Well, they're a requirement, and that's sensitive to some because they don't want there to be works that we're..."

John Bytheway: 23:45 It sounds like a work that you have to do or something.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 23:48 But at the same time, if baptism is available and I say no, then I've rejected a gift God is offering me. And I can't be saved and reject God at the same time. So it starts to feel a little bit to me like we're parsing meaning so far that I don't understand the difference anymore. Yes, God offers all of us this gift as Latter-day Saints would understand it, and we need to accept so that we don't reject God, God's love so to speak.

Hank Smith: 24:18 In preparation, I spent a little time in the Bible Dictionary under baptism, and there's just some great statements here I'd like to share. This is the last paragraph. "Baptism is a most sacred ordinance which a person having received it can remember throughout life as a reminder of the personal commitment to Jesus Christ." Kind of that day I committed my life. "Its symbolism is beautiful and its consequences ever so desirable." Isn't that beautiful? "Its symbolism is beautiful and its consequences ever so desirable."

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 24:50 Well, why don't we pause then and talk about baptism for a moment as we experience it as those of us who are members of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. There's a verse that I've always loved in Doctrine and Covenants 84 that says, "In the ordinances of the priesthood, the power of godliness is manifest."

- 25:11 I had an experience on my mission, I served in Spain. We didn't see very many baptisms during my mission or at that time, but there was a baptism occurring and we had invited some people who were learning about the church to come and see the baptism. Well, we got there and it was a rented chapel. I was used to sort of a bigger American style chapel and they had sort of a swimming pool with little metal rung stairs that was there for the baptism. That's how they had set it up. I remember being distracted because I was a little embarrassed at the way that it looked. And the little children, as we often do, were invited up to the front to this beautiful ceremony, this beautiful ordinance. At the end of the ordinance, the children started clapping and they're like, "Do it again. Do it again." And I was like, "Oh goodness." Oh, my 19-year old self was feeling a little embarrassed that it wasn't a little bit grander, so to speak.
- 26:08 And then I looked over at those that I had invited and they were weeping and I realized that I had totally missed. And it's so quick. There's all this buildup, and then you're immersed and then you come up. One of my Baptist friends, Pastor Brian Reed is his name, and he ended up joining the church, had to quit his pastorate at that point and join the church, and he actually asked me to be the one who baptized him. I didn't get him under the first time. We had to do it twice and he said, "That's okay, Shon. It gave me more time to appreciate what was going on." It's so quick, but it's a gateway. It's a door.
- 26:45 And if you think of what's happening, if you think of the baptismal waters almost like a veil and you're going into them and Paul says it symbolizes death of the old man and then the new man is reborn and then we emerge and the very next thing that happens at Christ's baptism that happens at Latter-day Saint Baptisms, at baptisms today are the gift to the Holy Ghost is given. You enter into the presence of God. It's powerful, it's sacred. You've got even the way we set up at the baptismal font with those cherubim, so to speak, guarding the way into the presence of God. They want you to come in, but they're saying, "We got to do this right. Oh, a toe floated up. We're just trying to do it the way that God has indicated. Well, let's do it again."
- 27:26 And then you come into the presence of God, and that's exactly what we see happening here. And it's so powerful. It's life changing. My son who's just started his mission, we we're all different, but I can remember the day I was baptized and sometimes people can't. My son remembers after. He wasn't sure he felt very special with the baptism, but then after hands were laid on his head and he was offered the gift of the Holy Ghost and then he talks about my grandma getting up to speak

and bearing her testimony and he said, "I've never felt that way before." And then as he has born testimony of that in later years, it comes back to him and the spirit reaffirms this is real. In the ordinances of the priesthood, the power of godliness is manifest.

- John Bytheway: 28:10 Oh, that's good.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 28:12 So if you think of this gateway to opening the path and then that's how it functions for Christ himself... And this is powerful. I don't know. The two of you, any thoughts from your own baptismal experience or that with your family members?
- John Bytheway: 28:26 I just love the idea of a new start and the born again idea. We sometimes can say baptism is being born again, but I think baptism is more, from what I understood, one of the events in the process of being born again, that being born again is a process. Elder Christofferson and Elder Bednar have talked about that. And baptism's kind of an event, but... I mean, it's fun to read Alma 5 where he says, "My brethren of the church, have you been born of God?" And he is like, "You've been baptized but you haven't been born again." And that it's part of the beginning of that process.
- 29:01 But I love that it's kind of like the sacrament, this kind of physical outward symbol that we do, but there's great meaning in it. Like you said, it's a new start to be born again and start over. And as you mentioned Paul, it's like the old man of sin is buried and you walk in newness of life. And it's such an outward symbol. And I think of just anciently, not everybody was literate, but they could be taught by these symbols and they could see the power of godliness in the symbols like you mentioned.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 29:34 I love that you took us to Alma 5. If you think of something else, he says, "If you've felt to sing the song of Redeeming Love, can you feel so now?" Well, so think of an Old Testament precedent for that is after they've come through the Red Sea and they're on the other side, Miriam's song there, this song of, "I'm saved. I've come up out of Egypt. It's miraculous. How could this have happened?" And this song of Redeeming Love. And notice, it's right after what? Paul describes as a baptism symbol of the coming through the Red Sea and up and out on the other side, and they sing what I would think of as the song of Redeeming Love. And then he is like, "But then you put yourself back into captivity. I redeemed you, but you keep going back." Sing that song again. And I'm so grateful that the sacrament... It's these moments when we have these internal beliefs and then we act

them out with behaviors of holiness with our physical bodies that God has given us.

30:30 I will stand as a witness and it's personal. It's between me and God. We do ordinances. We tend to do them in very public kind of spaces because it's like marking our doorpost. This is who I am. I'm like John the Baptist. I'm not embarrassed by it. I will participate in this ordinance because I'm standing as a witness of God and I'm using my body to sort of cement my belief so that they become engraven upon my very soul, so to speak.

30:59 I'm not just going to hold it in here or in here. "I will act it out in behaviors of holiness." Those are powerfully changing moments. And they have to be replicated elsewhere in scripture study and prayer and in private personal religious behaviors, but those ordinances are powerful gateways that help us connect with our God who as Latter-day Saints we believe of course is a physical/spiritual being himself. And He reaches through the veil to connect with us and help us to become as He is.

John Bytheway: 31:31 Thank you.

Hank Smith: 31:32 There's a great verse in Moses 6:59 where the Lord talks about being reborn. He says, "You were born into this world by water, blood and spirit, and became of dust a living soul. Even so you must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water and of spirit and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine only begotten."

31:56 You talked earlier, Shon, about birth imagery. There's a lot of three things when a baby is born, I've seen this happen with my own children being born. There's a lot of blood, there's a lot of water, and there's a lot of spirit. The Lord seems to be saying, "We were going to do that again. You're going to be born of water, you're going to be immersed totally in water. You're going to be given the gift of the Holy Ghost, but this time it's not going to be the blood of your mother that gives you life. It's going to be my blood that gives you life."

32:25 I've always liked this connection because the day that my children were born, I remember that day. And yes, there was a lot still left to go. It definitely wasn't an ending point, it was a beginning point. There's a lot of growth still left. But man, that day where they became ours is a special day. And I think of baptism the same way, that the Lord looks at this brand new member of his family saying, "Now you're mine. Now you go where I go. Now I take care of you. You're in my family now."

John Bytheway:	32:57	Thank you, Hank. That's a very Book of Mormon. Wow. It is Mosiah 26:30 "Blessed is this people who are willing to bear my name, for in my name shall they be called and they are mine." I love that because I put my name on my scriptures at Deseret Book, they emboss it, and that means they're mine. And we put upon us the name of Christ and that means we're His. In Mosiah 18, when Alma the Elder takes him out to the waters of Mormon and he gives them, what Elder Holland called, the most complete scriptural statement on record as to what the newly baptized commit to do and be."
	33:34	I think together we could probably remember it all, "Are you willing to come into the fold of God to be called his people, to mourn with those that mourn, to comfort those who stand in need of comfort?" And to me, it's interesting that part of it is personal as part of it is, "Now what are you going to do for others? To mourn with those that mourn, to comfort those who stand in need of comfort." And as you said Shon, "To stand as a witness of God at all times in all things and all places." We get such a nice list about what it means for us to be baptized in Mosiah 18.
Hank Smith:	34:06	Yeah, I just like the idea of the same way I care for my children, I take that responsibility when they become mine, when my wife and I held that baby in our arms and said, "Hey, this is our responsibility, to make sure this one grows and is healthy and safe." I think the Lord sees us that same way when we're baptized, "I will take care of you. You are mine. You are in my family. It wouldn't be heaven without you there. I will take you with me."
Dr. Shon Hopkin:	34:35	So blood, water and spirit. We talked about these sort of blood and water images at Christ's atoning sacrifice and then the sort of pregnant... I probably shouldn't use that word, but this sort of pregnant pause as he has promised them the gift of the Holy Ghost. And then it's fulfilled 40 days later on the other side of this 40 day time of preparation and testing and kind of thing. But then think of birth. So there can be a lot of water and there's a lot of blood, but then that breath of life when the baby breathes in, oh, and then the spirit you feel at a childbirth and then the spirit you feel as you are witnessing that at baptism. But as Joseph Smith says, "Might as well baptize a bag of sand as a human if you're not going to give him the gift of the Holy Ghost."
John Bytheway:	35:18	Yeah, it's half a baptism.

- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 35:19 Yes. Yes. And the spirit. And then for that then to play out in this very powerful way. I love the family connection because there is something clearly crucial in Christ's development here when God, his Father now, shows up so to speak and proclaims the family relationship.
- 35:45 If you look at the gospels, it appears to be a public moment. Maybe Jesus is the only one that can see the Father, but the voice appears to be heard by others. He's speaking and, about Christ, "this is my beloved son". Not you are my beloved son. So in third persons. That appears to be a public witness that is both for Christ to then cement that surety and then it propels him forward through the rest of his ministry, but also for others where God places his name, so to speak, his family name upon him. I love what you talked about putting your name on the scriptures, it's engraven. Have you had Christ's image engraven?
- 36:23 Even the word for ordinance in Hebrew is choq or the verb is hoq. A statute or an ordinance is from the same word as engrave, right? Sort of think of God engraving the 10 commandments. And so He's engraving His identity. "This is my beloved son. This is something unique. This is something different. This isn't just a really good guy. This is, or as it's called in another language, my only begotten son, and I am pleased."
- 36:55 Then Satan in the very next chapter is going to come and try to wipe all that away. And notice that when Satan comes tempting, he does often does so just before spiritual experiences or just after them. The goal is not just to erase the spiritual experience, it's to turn it upside down. There are those who when that happens, then all of a sudden their early spiritual promptings begin to feel sinister to them. "Oh, that was false. It wasn't just not true. It was a lie." And Satan tries to come and turn it upside down for Christ. But it's so powerful what happens.
- 37:30 So let's talk about this last reason. We've talked about the importance of baptism by immersion, leading to the gift of the Holy Ghost. Well, we didn't talk about this, but he comes to the authorized individual in order to perform that baptism. And now let's talk about this emphasis on three members of the Godhead.
- 37:51 Now by the way, your Catholic and other Christian friends can read this verse and it does not undo for them the Doctrine of the Trinity, right? Certainly the understanding the traditional Christian understanding of the Trinity is that God is... The trinity can be represented in the way that's here in these verses. And I

would say at the same time for Latter-day Saint readers were like, "Yeah."

38:16 It seems almost like the gospel Matthew is pushing this point, is emphasizing this, the location of this. Jesus is coming up out of the waters. The spirit of God is descending like a dove. So you've got movement from heaven to earth and lighting upon him. And then God's voice from heaven, "This is my beloved son." So it's almost emphasizing there's a father, there's a son and there is the Holy Ghost. And of course for Latter-day Saints, that first article of faith in this understanding that they are one but three separate beings. Other Christians would say three persons, but one being. Latter-day Saints see that really strongly taught and echoed here in chapter 3.

John Bytheway: 39:02 I think two things. First, I think one of the finest kind of our understanding of the Father, Son, Holy Ghost talks I've ever heard was Elder Holland, October 2007, called The Only True God and Jesus Christ Whom He Hath Sent. Super good explanation. But one of the things I love to show my classes here is how often do we hear the voice of the Father? Not very often. And the footnotes are right there. So if you look at footnotes 17B, you see Matthew 17. So there's the Mount of Transfiguration, you see 3 Nephi 11, there's Jesus coming to the righteous among the Lamanites and Nephites. And then you see Joseph Smith History 1:17. So there's the first vision. And the consistent part is what does he do? As you said Shon, he confirms "This is my son" in each case. And I love the titles of Jesus', Mediator, Advocate, Intercessor, but sometimes the one that Jesus is advocating us to is that, the way I would say, the Father, sometimes the Father's voice shows up and confirms, "This is my son." So I like those footnotes.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 40:15 They are certainly significant moments when you hear the Father's voice. Interestingly enough, if you look in 2 Nephi 30 and 31, there's this really fascinating thing Nephi does, the Father says this and then the son says this, whether that's actually the father speaking or if it's Christ in his role as the one who gives spiritual life. It's sort of fascinating, but it's all connected to baptismal discussions. At the opening of the pathway it's there. And then like you said, the Mount of Transfiguration, and then how fascinating is it for Latter-day Saints. At the opening of the dispensation of fullness of times, there is the Father once again confirming that this is going to center on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who is the power to lead us to the Father. And then it's really beautiful to see Christ own his sonship, so to speak. And that's so meaningful to him. And he's constantly pointing to the Father. As the Father

points to him, he consistently points back to the Father. That beautiful relationship, father-son relationship that's there.

- John Bytheway: 41:23 I love that you said that. To open up the restoration, here's the Joseph Smith history 1:17 reference. It's also kind of fun to think that here's John the Baptist at the Jordan River, and then when he shows up at the beginning of the restoration, where is he? The banks of the Susquehanna River. He's at a river and then invites Joseph and Oliver to be baptized there.
- Hank Smith: 41:46 John likes rivers, that's what we're hearing. That he likes rivers.
- John Bytheway: 41:51 Yeah.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 41:51 It would appear so. He liked cleansing imagery, new birth imagery. All right, there's maybe one other point that we should take a moment on here before we start to conclude, and that is this idea of the Spirit of God descending like a dove.
- John Bytheway: 42:06 Like a dove. Right.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 42:08 Yes. And as Joseph Smith, he's going to talk about this here, and I think it's important for us as Latter-day Saints to understand this, and this comes from teachings of the prophet Joseph Smith pages 275-276, "The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost. And the devil cannot come in the sign of a dove." We don't learn that anywhere else. That's from Joseph Smith that we learn that the devil cannot imitate that sign. "The Holy Ghost is a personage and as in the form of a personage."
- 42:38 So the point he's making is that the Holy Ghost doesn't shape shift, right? It's not like the Holy Ghost is a dove or he's put himself in the form of the dove. You could say the Holy Ghost descends. And if you look at John, he's descending like a dove, and then Matthew here as well so peacefully, beautifully, the symbol of new life. It does not confine itself to the form of a dove, but in the sign of a dove. "The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove." But the sign of a dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed as the dove was an emblem or token of truth.
- 43:10 Now, just for fun, let's look at where dove comes from. There is a dove that of course signifies that the land has emerged after the flood. And notice you've got water and new birth symbolism. And then a dove on the other side signifies, "Okay, now the story can move forward." If you look at the first

creation story, you may have implications of this. Remember, the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters is sort of the way that the scriptures describe it. Now that's maybe a little bit more symbolic or metaphorical, but I think there's a connection being made there with dove kind of imagery and the spirit of God. And then a really fun one is the name Jonah. And remember Christ is going to talk about Jonah as the symbol for his ministry. And in his atoning sacrifice, Jonah descends into the water, ascends out of the water three days later in this sort of similar kind of imagery, and Jonah's name, lo and behold, means dove. That's what the name Jonah means.

44:15 It's sort of fascinating to see the dove connected to these rebirth images and moments in a way that according to Joseph Smith seems to be set so that the adversary cannot replicate it or repeat it. One application of that and something you'll hear Latter-day Saints say a lot is that you can get a lot of different replicated feelings from the adversary, but I think most Latter-day Saints would feel comfortable of that, but peace doesn't seem to be one of those. Peace doesn't seem to be one of the things that Satan is very good at mimicking or replicating so to speak.

44:49 I think an important little, almost an aside but to help us understand the Holy Ghost better or at least not to misunderstand how we would read this, the Holy Ghost descending as a dove or like a dove.

John Bytheway: 45:02 I want to bring up a doctrinal point that to me is kind of interesting, is that we sometimes talk about baptism as having our sins washed away. And I found in the Book of Mormon there's many more verses that it's actually the Holy Ghost that cleanses us or the refiner's fire that cleanses. The Holy Ghost as a fire that cleanses us. But I found both in the Article of Faith baptism by immersion for the remission of sins and then it says Holy Ghost later. But scripturally, I think it sounds more like the Holy Ghost is the cleanser. That's why I really appreciate that Joseph Smith's saying, "If you baptize someone and don't give them the Holy Ghost, that's half a baptism." So I kind of feel like baptism is a word umbrella that has both of those things. Born of water, born of the spirit type of a thing. That's how I make sense of it. But I'd love your comment.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 45:55 I just totally agree that one needs to lead to the other. You go through a gate because there's something on the other side. And if you think of sort of Old Testament temple symbolism, then there's the symbols in the outer courtyard. There's water, there's blood with animal sacrifice. And then you're through the

door. If you're one of the priests, you pass into the holy place and there's this menorah, shining light. And Nephi even says, "Now the Holy Ghost is going to show you what to do." And now you're through the gate and now the Holy Ghost helps you out forward. To walk through a gate and then not receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, you think, "Well, okay, what was the purpose of walking through the gate?" You might say the second half as you're saying John, or the fulfillment of that ordinance, a member of the Godhead is promised as your companion through the walk of life.

- John Bytheway: 46:49 Perfect. So 2 Nephi 31:17, this is actually like the second half of the verse, "For the gate by which you should enter is repentance and baptism by water, then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost, then are you in this straight and narrow path." I feel like the straight and narrow path is very much a biblical metaphor, but the Book of Mormon either is talking about the same thing or a different thing, but I feel like it's the same thing but it's adding some more elements like the gate at the beginning of that straight and narrow path. You could even say and the tree of life at the end of it and this element of opposition in the great and spacious building and the mist of darkness and everything. Sorry to try to wax eloquent there.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 47:37 Oh.
- John Bytheway: 47:37 But that verse 17, I just thought, "Look, the remission of your sins comes by fire and by the Holy Ghost," but sometimes we speak of it coming by the water as well, don't we? That's why I wanted your comment on that.
- Hank Smith: 47:51 Great job.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 47:52 I loved that. That's beautifully said.
- Hank Smith: 47:54 Shon, before we wrap up, I wanted to just come back to something that I remember you saying earlier in our interview and I thought it was so important. It's just stuck with me. I'm always looking for motivators for me to do things because sometimes I don't want to do them. I sometimes find myself like you said, "I need to do this. Well, I don't want to do that. Or why should I? I don't need it. I'm fine the way I am." And then I think the application here of Jesus, his non rebellious spirit that you talked about saying, "I'm willing to do something that perhaps I don't need to do, but I'm going to do it because it's been asked of me," that can be applied in so many ways in our lives. I'm definitely going to talk to my children about this, about

there might be things you don't think you need to do or want to do but we do them because we're submissive to the Fathers will. Is that something that you remember talking about?

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 48:57 Yeah, and I love that. I would maybe just echo that with a couple of comments. First, that the way that baptism bookends the decision Christ makes to submit to the Father then maybe prefigures the decision he'll make in the Garden of Gethsemane. And you have another, it's either, water imagery, he's talking about, "I don't want to drink this cup, let this cup pass from me." It's either water or wine, which would maybe be blood imagery. "Nevertheless, thy will be done". And there's this really beautiful moment in Doctrine and Covenants 19 where he's talking about his Garden of Gethsemane decision and he says, "I shrunk and would that I might not".

49:41 Interestingly enough, that's exactly the same language Nephi uses when he's being asked to do something difficult with Laban at the beginning of the Book of Mormon story. I don't know that we want to equate those two closely, but being asked to do something that's hard, it changes us. And so I don't think I want to live life not ever.... Something that, "Well, you shouldn't make yourself do something you don't feel like." And it is true. We got to be careful not to suppress our feelings too much because God's given us feelings. But at the same time, to always just do whatever my feelings say, "I don't think that's what I'm going for either. I want to do what God wants me to do." And there's doing hard things changes us, so let's submit. Let's be willing to do that. He does it right here at baptism. Let's submit with priesthood ordinances whether it's sacrament and be in a position to take the sacrament, to go to the temple, et cetera, et cetera. I think that's a really powerful thought, Hank.

Hank Smith: 50:36 Yeah, I love the application of that. It's going to motivate me to maybe do some things that I've been putting off because I think, "Oh, I don't really need to do that thing." And here's the Lord saying, "Maybe I don't need to, but I'm going to because it's been asked of me." And to tie that to the Garden of Gethsemane, to trials and difficulties in submitting our will to God is, I love the bookend idea. That was really cool.

Dr. Shon Hopkin: 51:00 Well, and let me add Hank, as we've said there's the ordinance of baptism, but then it's only half an ordinance if the spirit doesn't come afterwards. So I love what you're saying. So yes, the ordinances, but then what does the Spirit tell you you got to go do? And if we don't get to that, it's sort of half an ordinance, then the Spirit comes in and it draws you into a new way of being, and new behaviors. I love that. Whatever the Spirit is

telling you, Yeah, you need to go do this. Stop delaying. Don't make it half an ordinance so to speak. Let the spirit come in and guide you forward.

- John Bytheway: 51:33 You have helped me kind of see John the Baptist. I've always seen the, "Giving it to him straight," but I love the invitation, kind of the softer, gentler, "Come and repent and come and be baptized." I like the way you've helped me with that today.
- 51:48 The first paragraph in the Come Follow Me manual, it says it beautifully, "Jesus Christ and his gospel can change you. Luke quoted an ancient prophecy of Isaiah that described the effect that the Saviors coming would have. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough way shall be made smooth." That's another Handel's Messiah, he is that. This message is for all of us, including those who think they cannot change. Listen to this line. "If something as permanent as a mountain can be flattened, then surely the Lord can help us straighten out our own crooked paths. As we accept John the Baptists invitation to repent and change, we prepare our minds and hearts to receive Jesus Christ so that we too can see the salvation of God."
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 52:38 Beautiful. Could I maybe bear a witness that I'd like to share here as we're beginning to conclude our study? And that is, as I think about ordinances, I think about Christ's baptism and then the Holy Ghost descending upon Him. And then as I think about ordinances in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I just want to share my witness that these things from my own experience are real. That they have power to change us, to call us into greater paths of holiness, to encourage us, to comfort us and to challenge us to be better. And these are not just nice things to talk about. There is power in the ordinances of the priesthood. I'm so grateful for the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the difference it has made and continues to make, and I desperately need it to continue to make that difference in my life. This is real and it has power and it continues to give me joy and to challenge me to be a better man.
- Hank Smith: 53:42 Beautiful. Beautiful. I think that was a perfect way to finish.
- John Bytheway: 53:44 Shon, thank you so much.
- Dr. Shon Hopkin: 53:45 Yeah, it's so good.

Hank Smith: 53:47 We want to thank Dr. Shon Hopkin for being with us today. What a powerful fun day. I've got so many notes in Matthew chapter 3, I think I've filled up every margin here. Thank you, Shon, for being with us.

54:00 We want to thank our executive producer, Shannon Sorensen. We want to thank our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen. And of course we want to remember our founder, the late Steve Sorensen. We hope you'll join us next week. We have another episode, another New Testament episode of followHIM.

54:19 Today's transcripts, show notes, and additional references are available on our website, followhim.co. You can watch the podcast on YouTube with additional videos on Facebook and Instagram. All of this is absolutely free, so be sure to share with your family and friends. To reach those who are searching for help with their Come Follow Me study, please subscribe, rate, review or comment on the podcast, which makes the podcast easier to find. Thank you.

54:46 We have an amazing production crew we want you to know about. David Perry, Lisa Spice, Jamie Neilson, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts, and Ariel Cuadra. Thank you to our amazing production team.

WHAT IS TRUE REPENTANCE?



- Hank Smith: 00:04 Hello my friends. Welcome to another week of followHIM Favorites. We take a small portion of each week's Come Follow Me lesson and talk about it for our followHIM Favorite. John, followHIM Favorites this week is, what is true repentance? John the Baptist comes crying repentance, Jesus picks up right there, crying repentance, for the kingdom of God is at hand. We use this word repent all the time. What would you say is true repentance?
- John Bytheway: 00:31 That is such a good question, because in one of my classes Hank, I'll put up on a PowerPoint just the word repent and say, what's your first reaction? Because it almost sounds like a scolding, "Repent!" Type of a thing.
- Hank Smith: 00:43 Like a negative term.
- John Bytheway: 00:44 Yeah, like a harsh type of a thing, but it's so positive. When you look in The Bible Dictionary for the definition of repentance, I think it's the second paragraph says, "A fresh view about God, about oneself, and about the world." Now listen to that, how positive that is. It's a new way of looking at everything. Yourself, God, the world. And I think one of the synonyms for repent is turn, isn't it Hank? It's like you're going this direction, turn, return, repent. We see those words together sometimes.
- Hank Smith: 01:16 Yeah. There's a quote right out of this week's Come Follow Me manual that says, "Luke quoted an ancient prophecy of Isaiah that described the effect the Savior's coming would have. 'Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth.' This is a message for all of us," the manual says, "Including those who think they cannot change. If something as permanent as a mountain can be flattened, then surely the Lord can help us straighten our own crooked paths."
- 01:47 So I think the message this week is, true repentance is believing that you can change. Part of it is believing that the Lord can

make this happen for you. When it feels like, man, I just keep falling into the same old patterns of behavior that cause my life so many problems, you go to the Lord and say something to the effect of, "I know you can do this, please help me make these changes." And then we see it, line upon line. If you're going to move a mountain, it'll probably happen shovel full by shovel full, but it will happen. If mountains can be made low, then yes, you can be changed.

- John Bytheway: 02:23 And I'm glad you say it that way, because I think an impression that we want to make sure people don't get that sometimes I had was that repentance was this one time thing. Like there was a list. Faith, then repent, then you get baptized, as if you never repent again. And no, we're going to need to repent all of our lives. I think in Doctrine & Covenants here, we heard someone use the phrase repent relentlessly. It is a way of life, to keep changing, keep growing, keep turning if you need to, keep getting on the covenant path and staying on it. So it's obvious that that's true, because he has us come back to the sacrament table every week. So it's this ongoing process.
- Hank Smith: 02:58 Yeah, part of repenting maybe even for a particular sin might be repenting of that sin dozens or hundreds of times. But eventually that will take effect. It will happen for you.
- John Bytheway: 03:11 The Lord will help you overcome it, but keep coming back, yeah.
- Hank Smith: 03:13 Keep coming back. Just decide you're never going to stop repenting. I think the Lord will see it all the way through.
- 03:20 Well, we hope you'll join us next week for another followHIM Favorites, and join us for our full podcast. It's called followHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcasts. This week we're with Dr. Shon Hopkin. We think you'd love joining us for our full discussion. And then come back next week and join us for another followHIM Favorites.