

## Baptism: Why It Matters!

Well, we come to rejoice this morning in those who are taking this step of obedience in Jesus Christ and declaring openly and publicly their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. And Baptism is something believers do. That is one of the reasons we do not practice paedobaptism or infant baptism. This is a response to trusting Jesus Christ. This is the response to the gospel. We realize that there is one God and that all of us are responsible to him, and he is of infinite value and glory. But the problem is that we have sinned against him, by just not worshiping or loving and thinking of him, let alone the breaking of his commands. And we have sinned against him of infinite value. Since we have sinned against infinite value, it calls forth a penalty of infinite value. Hell was made for people like us. But the good news is that Jesus has come, lived a perfectly sinless life and died in our place taking the punishment that we deserve. And how we respond to that message is through repentance and faith. Repent - in that we recognize our sin and the cost of that sin, and we turn from it. Faith - in Jesus and him alone - not in our good works but his perfect life and substitutionary life. These individuals are coming forth to give that testimony through word and picture that they have done so.

But it does bring in the question that if salvation is through repentance and faith, if it is something personal and inner between the sinner and God, then why the need of baptism? Why even have it as a requirement for church membership? After all it is a secondary issue. A secondary issue is something that is taught in the Scriptures but not necessary for salvation. An example where people differ is the coming back of Jesus and the timing over that. We do not separate from believers over that issue, so why make a big deal about baptism? It seems for many that we make unnecessary divisions in the body of Christ, and I have been challenged on this very issue from individuals who want to join the church but do not want to be baptized.

And those are great questions. Questions that need answers. And one of the ways that we answer those questions are through the teaching of Scriptures. One of the things we have done today is that we have reduced salvation down to something that is personal and individual and private. You can live a moral life and keep to yourself and no one would ever know your a Christian. But is that true Christianity?

Christianity is certainly personal. God through the work of his Spirit and Word causes us to be born again, and gives new life. But there are obvious and external results of that work of God. And the most obvious is that our faith in Christ will go public. In fact pure faith is meant to go public. If it does not go public then we have to wonder if it is really a true faith. Jesus even said in Matthew 10:32-33, **“So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”** What is Jesus saying? He is saying a true faith will be visible. It will be public. Others will see it. If they do not see it then there is no true faith. Jesus even said that some believers will even suffer persecution because of the public manifestation of this faith. He said just a little earlier in Matthew 10:17-18, **“Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness**

**before them and the Gentiles.”** This hardly sounds like that Christianity or our faith in Christ is just a personal and private matter. There will be a public and external manifestation of faith in Christ. And if Jesus paid it all, which he did, how could there not be anything else but that public manifestation of faith in Jesus?

1. When does faith go public?

And that is such a great question. When does faith begin to manifest itself? When does it go public? And the answer is at baptism. Baptism is the first command given to new believers. Baptism is the public testimony of the believers trust in Jesus Christ. It is a public announcement that, that person has separated themselves from the world and the hopes and dreams of the world and I now identify with both Jesus and with His people. This is my Lord. He is the one I trust for salvation. My hope is in his death and resurrection, and I am eternally identified and connect to him. And also, these are the people of God - these are my people, my family. In this world these are the individuals I identify with. My hope is in Christ with these individuals that have their hope in Christ.

We see this on the Day of Pentecost so clearly. Peter preaches about the signs and wonders. He preached Christ. The one that they just put to death God raised from the grave, and they all knew about it. Thousands, no doubt had seen the resurrected Lord. This was not done in secret. But you crucified the one that God raised from the dead. The guilt of the people of Jerusalem and the pilgrims that had gathered for the festival was evident. They ask the disciples, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And listen to Acts 2:38, **“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”** Notice the dual command, “Repent and be baptized.” Now repentance is a change of mind and heart about sin and Jesus Christ. It is used as a synonym of salvation throughout the Book of Acts. And repentance is something inward. So how do I know if someone truly repented? How do you even know of you truly trusted Christ? Here it is, they leave the larger crowd and they identify with the smaller crowd. No longer are these my people, but these are my people. There is a public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ.

True faith wants to be identified with Jesus Christ, and true faith will be made public. There is a desire to follow Christ. Now do you have to be baptized in order to be a Christian? And the answer to that question is no. Faith in Christ and Christ alone is the prerequisite. The thief on the cross was not baptized, yet listen to the promise that Jesus gave to him just before he expired in Luke 23:43, **“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”** But that is not the norm. If he lived on and functioned with other believers he would have been baptized. Those were exceptional circumstances and certainly not the norm.

And many will quip that you are setting the bar too high by requiring individuals to be baptized. But let me answer that in a couple of ways. One is that baptism is important because it is part and parcel of the Great Commission. Matthew 28:19, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”** You cannot carry out the marching orders of Jesus Christ if we do not make disciples and baptize. This is not rocket

science. And secondly, that is what a disciple is - he is a follower of Jesus Christ. He not only believes in him but follows and seeks to obey him. A disciple does not decide how to follow Christ. And if this is literally the first command given to new believers and there is an unwillingness to be baptized then you have to wonder about whether that person is a true believer, disciple of Jesus Christ. We are not saved by baptism but all those who are truly saved desire to be baptized. They want and are eager to be identified with Christ and the people of God. You have to really wonder about a person if they are truly in Christ if they do not desire to be baptized and follow Christ, if they do not want to obey the first command that he gave them. You see, requiring someone to understand the gospel and seeing evidence that they have trusted him is not setting the bar too high, but I believe it is the barest minimum that we should expect from anyone claiming to be Christ's. These individuals have trusted Christ and now desire to obey him. They are saying that Jesus is my Lord and these are my people.

## 2. The churches responsibility.

It is amazing how the idea of membership is taught throughout the New Testament, and is absolutely necessary in our witness of Jesus Christ. We teach there are some people that are in and some people that are out. 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, "**For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you.'**" The church makes a proclamation through the ordinances that these are in and others are outside. You need to be inside. You need to trust Christ. But these belong to Christ.

Baptism is the churches recognition that someone is in Christ, and part and parcel of the church and belongs to the local church. Listen to Acts 2:41, "**So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.**" There is a recognition that they have received the Word, and after they received the Word they are added to the church, and what this is talking about is the local church. It is not that they get baptized and sometime later they decide to join the church. And we have to think through membership because we have such weak views. Church membership is a covenant. It is an agreement of responsibility and love toward the one joining to the congregation. They will be part and parcel of the body. They will love the other members as Christ loved the church. This agreement is made before God and others to follow Christ in this way. A covenant is a promise isn't it. It is not something light. We realize the marriage covenant is not something light, but enduring and to be growing in love for one another no matter what comes into that relationship.

But the church also has a responsibility to the new members to love them because it is the members that are bringing them into the body and accepting them as one of Christ's. We do not make them Christian anymore than baptism does, but we recognize Christ's work in their life. And part and parcel of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20 is, "**teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**" We teach them all the counsel of God. We instruct, encourage, correct, counsel, rebuke those who come in.

I want us to recognize that when we baptize and welcome into membership these individuals, it is not the pastor who is saying we should vote them in, or the deacons who have listened to their testimonies and are welcoming them in. It is the church as a whole making the public testimony that these are Christ's - these are ours! Baptism is how not only the individual publicly testifies that they are in Christ, but how the church publicly testifies that this person is in Christ. We are all involved in this glorious testimony this morning. Jesus gave baptism in part so that we can tell another from the world. Baptism draws the line between people of God and the people of the world. Baptism is the team jersey of Christianity if you will. We are publicly stating this morning these are Christ's - these are ours. It is an exciting moment in the life of our church or any church when they welcome new members in.

Listen to what Bobby Jamison writes about this, **“When a church admits a member, they’re not saying, ‘The pastor thinks this person is a Christian,’ or ‘Steve Smith thinks this person is a Christian,’ or ‘This person claims to be a Christian, which is good enough for us.’ Instead, they’re saying, ‘We as a church, on behalf of Jesus and according to the criteria he’s given us, solemnly affirm this person’s claim to be a Christian.’ They’re making a public statement that’s bound to a public standard. Because church membership is a public affirmation of someone’s profession, that affirmation is bound to Jesus’ own criteria, and baptism is on that list. Jesus appointed baptism, in part, to be the church’s formal, public means of marking someone off as a Christian. Which means baptism is among the criteria he’s given the church for formally recognizing Christians.”**

And with that, we will ask for our first candidate.