

Jewel of Baptism
Selected Scriptures
ABC 4/24/22

We are gathered together today because of the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. Paul tells us that Jesus...

...saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration & renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7).

Thanks be to God for His mercy, grace, & love in providing for us salvation by faith in our Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ. It's our joy today to celebrate with those who are stepping forward in obedience & faith by publicly proclaiming what God has done for them by being baptized. Before we get there, it's important we all know & understand what this is all about. What is baptism? Simply put, it's something commanded by Jesus by which a person is immersed in water. Baptism is a simple ceremony but has great spiritual significance. Baptism is an object lesson of a profound spiritual truth. God has designed it to teach the wonderful truth of salvation.

It's said that during the Gulf War one *army chaplain reported his amazement at the large number of Desert Storm soldiers who gave their hearts & lives to Jesus Christ, then asked if they could be baptized. To accommodate their requests, he used the only "baptismal" available in the middle of the Saudi Arabian desert: a coffin—a potent & perfect symbol of the death, burial, & resurrection of which baptism is a picture.*¹

Our baptistery is kind of like a large coffin. The cross on the front symbolizes death, & those who enter it to be baptized are making a public statement of death to the old sinful life. They're declaring they have new life in Jesus. Luke tells us of a time a funeral was underway for a young man. A crowd was watching as Jesus...

came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!" (Lk 7:14-16).

Today those being baptized, will be lain in a coffin-like baptistery. They too will rise & climb out to walk a new life glorifying God. As Christians, we're united with Jesus in His death, burial, & resurrection. Going into the water symbolizes death & burial; coming out symbolizes new life. It's

¹ Jon Courson, *Application Commentary*, p 920

an external, symbolic act which depicts a profound spiritual truth. It's a public symbol of faith in God. Baptism is ...

1. Commanded by Jesus & practiced by the church since the beginning. In **Mt 28** we read Jesus' last words to His followers before He ascended to heaven. These words weren't just for the apostles. These words from the risen & living Savior are important & apply to all Christ's followers for all time. Matthew writes,

Jesus came up & spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven & on earth. Go therefore & make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & the Son & the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; & lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (18-20).

Why do we believe baptism is important? Because Jesus did. He singles out baptism as the 1st & foremost act of obedience. Baptism is clearly important to Jesus & should be to us as well. The pattern of the Great Commission is also the pattern of Acts 2 & of the early church. Peter preaches that Jesus is Lord & Christ, & when the crowd asks Him, **what shall we do?** he says, *Repent & be baptized* (38), & many were (41). That's the beginning of the fulfillment of Christ's word in Mt 28. We're still doing the same today because that is Christ's command to us & we want to be obedient to Him in everything. Those being baptized today are declaring by their baptisms that the Lord Jesus Christ, who has died, was buried, has been raised from the dead, & is now seated at the right hand of God, is their Savior. But that's not all it is. Baptism has meaning & importance only because the death & resurrection of Jesus are infinitely important for our rescue from the wrath of God & our everlasting joy in His glorious presence. Baptism isn't a religious ritual or church tradition. Baptism is all about Jesus & His magnificent work of salvation in dying for our sins & rising for our justification. When a Christian is baptized, they're demonstrating not just the death, burial, & resurrection of Jesus, but also their union with Him in that death, burial, & resurrection. For whom did Christ die? You. Whose sins did He bear? Yours. For whom did He rise? You. Paul expressed that reality by saying,

I have been crucified with Christ; & it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; & the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, & delivered Himself up for me (Gal 2:20).

Through a sovereign, spiritual miracle at the moment of salvation, God puts you *in Christ*. It's as if you died when He died & you rose when He did. The NT sometimes uses the word *baptism* to speak of that spiritual union. Gal 3:27 says, **All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.** Col 2:12 says, **having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.** & perhaps the most explicit passage of all on our union with Jesus reads, **Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into His death? (Rom 6:3).** Although those passages aren't referring to water, it's water baptism that symbolizes our spiritual union with Jesus. What saves isn't water baptism but our spiritual union with Christ, also spoken of as **the washing of regeneration** in Titus (3:5) & the washing away of sins in Acts (22:16). Water baptism is the symbol of what saves. It's an illustration & helps in explaining the reality of salvation to others. When we observe baptisms, we're seeing an object lesson of the spiritual dynamics of new birth. Baptism portrays what happened spiritually when we received Jesus: Our old self of rebellion, unbelief, & sin died & a new person of faith & submission to Jesus came into being. That's what baptism proclaims. Baptism produces nothing but the blessing of obedience. It's not designed to make you more holy, to make you more secure, nor to save you. It's simply a public step of obedience to Christ's command. Baptism exists for the purpose of showing in symbol form the reality of every Christian's identification with their Lord & Savior & of leaving of the old life & embracing new life in Christ.

In many ways, baptism is like a precious jewel. Set apart by itself, it's nice but has nothing within it to really compel. But place baptism against the backdrop of our sin & turn on the light of the cross, & the jewel explodes with significance. Baptism reveals the beauty of the cross & the darkness of sin. As a diamond has many facets, baptism has many sides: cleansing, burial, resurrection, the death of the old, & the birth of the new. & as a stone has no light within it, baptism has no inherent power. Baptism does not save or forgive sins. But it reveals the many colors of God's grace. In its essence, baptism is a...

2. Symbol of a Union Baptism symbolizes the connection we have with Jesus, a picture of the uniting of sinner & Savior. To understand & celebrate the connection we share with Jesus, let's go back a couple thousand years to the muddy shores of the Jordan River. The Bible says:

Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee & was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, & the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; & a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased" (Mk 1:9-11).

Matthew tells us,

Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan *coming* to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him (3:13-15).

It was onto this ordinary stage that the Son of God stepped, wading into the muddy Jordan River. It's easy to understand why John was hesitant to baptize Jesus. After all, John had been **preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**, & Jesus was the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. But Jesus insisted. Why? Because as Jesus descended into the water, He was coming down to our level. He was identifying with sinners. Baptism was for the immoral & impure, the prevaricators & the proud, the hot-heads & hypocrites. & yet Jesus willingly plunged into the water as if to say, *I'm with them!* Jesus came to be baptized because we are sinners. He was washed because we weren't clean. He did what was right because we do what's wrong. He became like us so that we could become like Him. When we're baptized, it's as if we're joining Jesus in the water. The Bible even says that **we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism** (Rom 6:3). Just as a wedding celebrates the fusion of 2 hearts, baptism celebrates the joining together of Savior & sinner. Turn the stone so the light hits from another angle, though, & baptism becomes a...

3. Symbol of Repentance The Bible says that John went **into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance** (Lk 3:3). Peter repeated a similar sentiment on the day of Pentecost, saying, **Repent each of you & be baptized...** (Acts 2:38). So both John's baptism & Christian baptism were signs of repentance. *Repentance* simply means *to turn*. Ezekiel explained what God wants His people to turn from: **Thus says the Lord GOD, "Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations"** (Ezek 14:6).

One time, a young girl who was usually the model of good behavior in church, was particularly bad one Sunday morning. After distracting all those around her & ignoring her father's warnings, he finally scooped her up & began walking to the rear of the church for an attitude adjustment. Just before they got to the back door, the girl screamed for all the church to hear, *I repent! I repent!*

Baptism is our way of shouting for all the church to hear, *I repent! I repent!* Baptism is a sign that you've done this. Isaiah tells us what God wants us to turn toward: **Turn to Me & be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, & there is no other (Is 45:22)**. All through the Bible, God pleads with people to turn from their sins & to turn toward Him, trusting in Him alone to save. Baptism is a stake in the ground that marks the turning point of your life.

Refract the light of the cross from yet another angle, & baptism becomes a...

4. Symbol of Resurrection The Jews saw baptism as a means of ritual purification for priests or as a rite of passage for converts. John the Baptist preached baptism with repentance. But Jesus would add a whole new dimension to baptism, as it came to be a living picture of the death, burial, & resurrection of Christ. This is what Paul says:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4).

Just as the waters of baptism provided Jesus with a way to identify with us, they also provide us with a way to identify with Him. Baptism paints a vivid picture of our Christian faith. The plunge beneath the water is like a death; being submerged in the water is like a burial; rising up from the water is a symbol of resurrection. Baptism without personal faith in Jesus means nothing but getting wet. But baptism as an act of faith is full of meaning & significance. Not only does it signify our reuniting with Jesus, our repentance from sin, & our resurrection with Christ, but when the light hits it from another angle it's also a...

5. Symbol of Rebirth & new life. As we just read in Rom 6:4, we're to **walk in newness of life**. The Bible says,

when the kindness of God our Savior & His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration & renewing by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-5).

The washing mentioned here doesn't refer to water baptism itself; but to the work of the Holy Spirit who regenerates & renews our souls. But the invisible work of the Spirit is visibly seen in the waters of baptism. Baptism symbolizes our spiritual birth into God's family. During His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said,

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, & that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, *You must be born again*. The wind blows where it wishes & you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from & where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit (Jn 3:6-8).

The Holy Spirit is invisible. When a person is born again of the Spirit, you can't see it or hear it, but baptism is the visible symbol of our invisible birth. When Jesus said, **You must be born again**, Nicodemus saw only complications & impossibilities. But, as Jesus would later say, **With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God (Mk 10:27)**. The only way a person can really start over in life is by being born from above, **born again** by receiving God's life-giving Spirit. Baptism pictures that. The early church sometimes after baptisms would give new converts milk & honey, the OT symbols of the Promised Land. It's another way to picture salvation as a personal exodus from our old life & a newness of life to walk in, freed from our slavery to sin. Baptism is also a...

6. Public Proclamation In our day & age we're told that religion is a private matter. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you keep it to yourself. Because of this, some don't want others to know they're a Christian. They accept Jesus, but reject His demand to openly proclaim their allegiance. Maybe this is one reason Jesus instructed His followers to make disciples & baptize them (Mt 28:18-20). I think Jesus knew that a faith never publicly expressed has little chance of surviving. The church throughout history couldn't have survived unless Christians had been willing to go public with their faith, even when it cost them their lives. Baptism is an outward & visible sign of an inward & spiritual reality. It's an act of obedience & a public statement of faith. Like a wedding, its great value is in its being seen because visible vows are vows of greater strength than those that are private & never known.

Since baptism is so meaningful & so intimately connected with repentance, resurrection & rebirth, it raises a whole bunch of questions. Not the least of which is, *What about those who've never*

been baptized? Is baptism necessary for salvation? When it comes to that kind of question, I tend to side with Augustine, who said, *It is not the absence of baptism, but the rejection of it that condemns.* In other words, why isn't the Christian baptized? Some people just reject baptism; they just don't want to do it. That kind of resistance reveals a deeper problem of the heart. If we aren't willing to join Jesus in baptism how can we join Him in anything else? Jesus commanded baptism. If we reject His commands, we can't call Him Lord & if we can't call Him Lord then we can't call Him Savior. On the other hand, some people are never baptized because they were never taught about it or they died before they could be baptized. What if I put my faith in Jesus, repent in my heart, but get attacked by a swarm of killer bees before I can arrange to be baptized? If that's the case, don't worry. The answer is found in the character of God & the example of the thief on the cross. Think of it this way: When does life begin? At birth? No, life begins at conception. If a mother loses her baby before giving birth, is that baby any less her child? Of course, not. The same can be said spiritually, if baptism represents our new birth, then we must concede that life began when the seeds of faith were 1st planted by the Holy Spirit. You belong to God from the moment faith is conceived in your heart. But keep in mind that you can't live in the womb forever. Baptism is an essential threshold that every believer should cross in order to be in obedience to Jesus & to experience the fullness of life & the inheritance that God promises to His children in this world. Baptism isn't to be taken lightly. It's a willing plunge into the promise & power of Jesus Christ. It embodies & represents our reunion with Jesus, our repentance of sin, our resurrection with Christ, & our rebirth into God's eternal family. While baptism is necessary for obedience, it isn't necessary for salvation. Salvation is through God's mercy & grace, by faith alone. Most of the passages that discuss baptism explicitly mention faith. To require baptism for salvation is to run counter to the plain teaching of Scripture, & brought Paul's anger for teaching salvation by works of the law (Gal 1:8-9).²

It's NOT that you have to be baptized & then you're saved. It's that if you're saved you're eager to do all Christ tells you to because you now love Him because He 1st loved you. By His grace

² Bill Mounce, *The Believer & Baptism*, position paper, p 4

you've begun to be His disciple. Jesus has transformed your desires so now you want to pursue what He calls you to. You aren't perfect but you do have a new direction & desires that's called by Paul **a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come** (2 Cor 5:17).

We've seen some of the facets of baptism & hopefully we understand it better. Now let's actually see & experience it. It's with great joy that I ask those being baptized to come forward at this time. Baptism is a willing plunge into the promise & power of Jesus Christ. It embodies & represents your union with Him, your repentance of sin, your resurrection with Christ, & your new birth into God's eternal family. **Rom 10** tells us,

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, & believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, & with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation (9-10).

Testimonies

Do you believe that Jesus died in your place & took the punishment you deserved upon Himself?

Is your faith in Jesus alone for your salvation?

Having heard of your faith in Jesus, I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit.

Baptisms

We've remembered what Jesus did for us on the cross & we've seen it pictured in baptism. If you haven't yet placed your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, His invitation is still open. Turn from your sin. Trust in Jesus & what He did for you on the cross. Be forgiven & made new. Experience abundant life that only He can give. Jesus invites you today to come to Him. But like every invitation, you have to respond. You have to acknowledge your sin, turn from it, trust in Jesus by faith that it is His blood that covers you so that the wrath of God will pass over you, that you would get a new heart & a new life. If you're a Christian & haven't been baptized, why not?

PRAY

Song/change

AFRICA – As you know, I will be leaving for Africa this coming Saturday. As always I, & the team, covet your prayers, not just for travel, health, & safety. But more importantly, that God would work, not just in our lives, but especially in the lives of those who attend & that the gospel would continue to spread because of our time with them.

As with all my trips, I'll be traveling & teaching with Joel, Muriel's brother, who our church helps support. He is part of a mission organization put together by Paul, another brother, some 18 years ago to train pastors and church leaders in countries where biblical education is lacking, called Global Training Network.

GTN has a full set of curriculum covering all major doctrines of Scripture. For every training event, the curriculum is tailored to fit the needs of the local church leaders. Through on-site conferences, church leaders are trained by providing teaching and training in essential doctrine, vital Christian character, and practical ministry skills.

In keeping with Paul's instruction in 2 Timothy 2:2, GTN staff members build relationships with key multiplying indigenous leaders, who then take on the long-term responsibility of training the next generation of church planters, pastors and leaders.

Through intensive, on-site training seminars, Global Training Network staff members serve Majority World pastors by providing teaching and training in essential Christian doctrine, vital Christian character, and practical ministry skills.

GTN training is designed to convey God's truth to the mind, strengthen the heart, and empower the hands of each pastor:

HEAD – the major doctrines of the Christian faith: Doctrine of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Scripture, Salvation, the Church, man, sin, and future things. It also includes teaching on hermeneutics (how to correctly interpret Scripture) and how to study the Bible for yourself.

HEART – the character of a Christian leader: growing in Christlikeness, personal integrity, family relationships, devotional life – all of the character qualities expected of pastors and elders that are listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

HANDS – the skills and abilities that pastors and Christian leaders need to develop in order to be effective in carrying out their calling: preaching, teaching, counseling, leadership, and evangelism. It's always the goal to do more than simply impart knowledge. To weary pastors and church leaders – and their spouses – we try to bring spiritual refreshment and encouragement.

This trip I'll be teaching bibliology, the doctrine of Scripture, & theology proper, the doctrine of God. In bibliology we'll be focusing in on the inspiration of Scripture, it's inerrancy, & its authority. In theology, I'll be concentrating on why we study theology & then on some of the attributes of God Himself.

I had hoped to have Joel's prayer guide by this Sunday, but I'll do all I can to make sure it's available to you next Sunday. As I've never been to this part of Africa before & seen what their training looks like, I'll simply give you what I know.

I'll be leaving this Saturday from Medford at 6 a.m. & arriving in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Sunday evening around 6 p.m. where we will overnight. Monday morning we'll fly into Ndola, Zambia. Tuesday through Friday we will be teaching in two locations with 25-50 students in each location. After 2 days, the teachers will switch locations & repeat the things that they had taught. On Sunday we'll be preaching in local churches. The following week we'll be doing the same thing in a different location, Lusaka. & then begin the journey home on Sunday, May 15, arriving in Medford on Monday afternoon.

Questions?

Song – Great is Thy Faithfulness

Dismiss