

Baptism – Matthew 28

I heard the story of the little three-year-old girl who was watching a baptism at church for the first time. She said, “*Mama, why did Pastor Bob push that man in the water?*” And the mother tried to explain what was going on but she knew three was too young to really understand. So, she said, “*Well, the man is trying to be a better person so he got baptized.*” She knew that wasn’t really good theology but it was okay for her young daughter for now.

The little girl thought about it for a second and then said, “***Well, then, why didn’t Pastor Bob just spank him?***”

I heard that story and I thought that’s a pretty good question. In fact, I think I’m going to start spanking some people from now on. Some of you deserve it. That’s for sure. What is baptism? Why do we do it? Where does it come from and what does it do?

Over the centuries Christians have debated what baptism accomplishes, to whom it should be administered, and how much water should be used. (Christian Theology in Plain Language, p. 158.) So, let’s start by looking up the word then we will see if we can answer some of those questions. The first time the word is used is in **Matthew 3** where it says John the Baptist was baptizing. That word in the original Greek is “baptizo” and it literally means “to overwhelm” or to fully immerse. Sprinkling or pouring water is not the definition of baptism. It means to completely dunk under.

I went to a rather interesting church out in San Francisco one time and they said they were going to baptize a young man. So, the preacher gets a red Solo cup and dips his hand in there and then flicks a little water in the guy’s face. That’s not baptism. That’s what you do when your friend is complaining about being hot. But not what Jesus commands us to do in **Matthew 28**. Let’s look there at what Jesus says and then we will continue to try to answer some more questions about baptism.

In **Matthew 28**, Jesus has risen from the grave and has reappeared to many people. He has talked to the two Marys and told them to tell the eleven disciples to go to Galilee and He will meet them there. So, they go to Galilee and they found Jesus and Jesus gives them one last command and one last bit of encouragement. Let’s read just **verses 18-20 of Matthew 28**.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Not long ago, I went to the Wise County Jail to do a Bible study and it was baptism day. That's always fun. They set up a galvanized stock tank in the gym and fill it with nice, warm water and, on this day, there were half a dozen guys wanting to be baptized and there were three of us ministers in there to do the baptizing. I stood up and explained a little about what baptism was and then I asked the other guys if they wanted to add anything. One of the other ministers gave a good illustration about what baptism is and then the other minister, who I had never seen before, stood up and told the inmates that if they didn't get baptized today they would never get to Heaven.

The other minister looked at me with his eyes open wide and I think I looked back at him the same way. And some of the inmates looked confused because that's not what most of them thought. So, I tried to nicely explain that baptism does not save you but it's what saved people do to identify themselves as followers of Jesus. The third guy protested about this but the other minister backed me up and even some of the inmates said that's what they believed and finally the third guy just shut up about it and I thought all was well.

Then, just as we were about to dunk the first inmate, the third guy said, *"Now, in whose name are you baptizing these men?"* I thought that was a crazy question but I answered, *"In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."* He said, *"Oh no, no! Only in the name of Jesus! Only in the name of Jesus."* And all I knew to say was, *"Well, in Matthew 28:19, Jesus said to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so that's what I'm going to do."* And that's what I did and the other guy just left at that point. I don't know what religion or denomination he was but he may have been well-meaning, but he was wrong.

In this passage, Jesus says He has all authority. God the Father and God's Spirit have agreed with the Son that the Son has all authority on this and Jesus said to baptize in the full name of God. In the book of **Daniel**, Daniel has a vision in **chapter 7** and says, *"One like the Son of Man is coming and to Him is given dominion...that will not pass away."* And in this passage this morning, Jesus, in His dominion, commands us to baptize this way. So, that's what we do.

For those of you that are married, how many of you got wedding rings? I bet most all of you did. And does that wedding ring make you married? If I slipped on your wedding ring would that make me married? Of course not. That ring is a symbol. It is a powerful symbol. A wedding ring on your left hand is a neon sign to the world telling everybody that you are taken. You are off the market.

Baptism is similar in that it does not make you a Christian but it symbolizes that you are one. It is a neon sign to the world that you are a Jesus follower. When we baptized Heather and Nancy out at the lake a few weeks ago, not one person in Wise County Park thought, *“Hmm...I wonder if they are Muslim. Or maybe they are Jewish. It’s hard to tell.”* No, everybody knew right then that those ladies follow Jesus. Nobody gets baptized for any other reason.

Now, John the Baptist was baptizing before Jesus came on the scene bodily. John used baptism to prepare the way for Jesus, requiring *everyone*, not just Gentiles, to be baptized because *everyone* needs repentance. However, John’s baptism, signifying repentance, is not the same as Christian baptism. And yet, we see in **Matthew chapter 3** that John actually baptized Jesus. Have you ever wondered what that was about? Does that mean that Jesus had some sin in His life that needed to be repented of? Of course not.

I’ve said before that when Jesus came along, he changed everything. And it’s true with baptism. The Jews sometimes used baptism to symbolize cleaning or washing away of sins. John did it to symbolize repentance. Jesus told John He was being baptized to fulfill all righteousness. (Matthew 3:15) In **2 Corinthians 5**, Paul is talking about how God provides righteousness (the way to be right with God) to us by exchanging our sins for the righteousness of Jesus. He says, *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* That was done by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and that is what baptism symbolizes for us today.

We go down into the water to symbolize the death of Jesus and His going down into the tomb. And then we come out of the water to symbolize the rising again of Jesus from death and out of the tomb. As I always say, we could bury you in the backyard and dig you up again in three days but it’s not necessary because Jesus modeled baptism for us and in doing so, prophecy was once again fulfilled by Jesus with John the Baptist who was *“A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord”* just as it says in **Isaiah 40:3**. John was preparing the way for the Lord to start His ministry and in doing so, Jesus modeled what true baptism was to look like for His followers.

Romans 6:4 puts it this way: *“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”* We are baptized to show that we are dead to sin. That doesn’t mean that we never sin anymore. It means that is not our lifestyle. That’s not our normal. It’s not routine for us. We live a new life.

Jesus didn’t come to Earth, live a sinless life, die on the cross and come to life again so I could get baptized and then live like the rest of the world lives. My baptism on March 2, 1975 was to show the world that I am in the world, yes, that’s very true, but I am not of the world. My baptism shows the world that I want to be more and more like Jesus everyday. That is what followers do. They imitate and emulate their leaders.

My baptism didn’t make me a Christian. It marks me as an imitator of Christ. Jesus said in **Mark 16:16** that *“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved. But he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”* Jesus was making it clear that it is failure to believe, not failure to be baptized that sends a person to Hell. But when you get baptized, it tells everybody that you are on your way to Heaven.

But what does it say when you are baptized like Jesus was baptized and you are baptized because Jesus commanded us to be baptized but then your language is no different than those that are of this world? What does it tell people that are of the world when you get baptized but you watch the same movies they do? What does it tell them when you are just as worried as they are? What does it tell them when you cheat on your taxes or work on Sundays?

Our baptisms are meant to be where we start our process of sanctification. And, especially at first, we will be a long way from where we want to be. But if you have been a Christian for any length of time and your lifestyle is no different than that of an unbeliever then something is very wrong. I’ll tell you this. If unbelievers are comfortable doing their unbeliever stuff in front of you, something is wrong. If your regular friends cuss and watch bad movies and use the Lord’s name for no good reason when they are around you, something is very wrong.

That’s what sinners do. That’s what you can expect them to do. They are alive to sin. But your sanctification, your holiness – not your holier than thou – but true holiness ought to make them feel uncomfortable doing their unbeliever stuff around you. They ought to expect that you would be offended by that. And if they are not uncomfortable, then you are not sanctified like you ought to be.

We are dead to sin now that we are Christians and now that we have been baptized we have told the world that we are dead to sin. And if sin is still your lifestyle then you have made yourself out to be a liar and Jesus with you.

Another time I got to baptize some men in the jail, I went down the line of guys asking them quietly why they wanted to be baptized. I wanted to make sure they knew why they were doing it. This one guy said, *“Man, I don’t know. I ain’t never been to church before but I got a Bible in here a while back. And I read that Jesus got baptized. And that He commands us to be baptized. And...I guess I just want everybody around here to know that I’m a follower of Jesus now.”* I wanted to kiss that ol’ boy! That’s the best answer I’ve ever heard!

But I warned him that people are now going to be watching him to see if there really is any difference in him. They are watching you and they are going to test you. They are going to see how you react to bad news and how you react when you stub your toe and how you react when you are bored. And if you do it right, you will make a lot of people uncomfortable. Sinners are alive to sin and if you are dead to sin then they don’t like that. And that’s okay. That’s how it should be.

In **Acts chapter 16**, Paul and Silas are cool breezing through town and they got arrested for basically doing nothing. They are put into jail and put in an inner cell and then their feet are put in stocks and they are beaten with rods. That’s just another Tuesday for Paul but it had to be bad. But in **verse 25** it says that Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.

Then you know what happened. God created an earthquake that shook the whole place and even shook all the chains and stocks loose. Then let me read to you the jailer’s reaction. *“The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*

³¹ They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized.”

That’s what it is supposed to look like. At some point, the people around you are going to see your lifestyle. They will be uncomfortable around it but then something will happen and they will know that they want what you have. Some crisis in their lives will draw them to you because Jesus is drawing them to Himself and you are the only Jesus they know.

Music

But you can't do that on your own. You can't be a better person on your own. You can't live holy, stop cussing, stop doing drugs, be honest and love the unlovely by trying harder. That is God at work in you, sanctifying you and making you more like Him. That's His job. We just announce to the world that He is in control of our lives when we get baptized.

Have you done that? Have you done what the jailer and his family did? Paul told them to just believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. But that belief changed their lives. And it will change yours as well. Believe that Jesus, who is God, came to Earth, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for your sins and then rose again and wants to have a relationship with you. Then be baptized to tell the world and allow God's Spirit to live in you and sanctify you and allow you to live a full and abundant life here on Earth (John 10:10) and have assurance of Heaven in the next life. Do that right now as the music plays.