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## *Which Baptism?*

**Acts 2:37-41**

**Keywords:** Acts, Believer's Baptism, Baptism, Spirit Baptism, Paedo-Baptism, baptism by fire

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** none

**SermonAudio Blurb:** In the debate regarding baptism too often there is not enough time spent considering the contexts of the many passages that make reference to it. But upon a closer examination it readily becomes apparent that there are more than one type of baptism in the New Testament. In this sermon we are able to see the various types of baptisms and how, if we confuse them, it creates ample opportunity for doctrinal strife and error.

### **I. Introduction.**

- A. We come again to the topic of baptism and today it is my plan to clarify for you how the term is used in the New Testament.
- B. When we talk about theology and doctrine we need to understand how words are used.
  - 1. Words are symbols for thoughts and ideas and as such they create images in the reader's mind.
  - 2. The reader or the listener also takes those words and creates a meaning that is not always what the speaker intends. This is caused by mood, inflection and even a person's experience.

An example would be a Dutch man who interacts with an English boss. The boss tells the man that his report is fine. But then it comes out that it was not fine at all, but it is too late to fix it. What happened? The Dutch are very open and frank so they take words at face value. Whereas in the English culture "it's fine" means that it is not fine.

- 3. But words do have meaning and it is the responsibility of the hearer or reader to figure out what is meant. And nothing can be more important than this task when it comes to doctrine and theology from the bible.
  - 4. Today I want to show you how the bible uses the word "baptism" in different ways. The importance of this is because if we can see that the term "baptism" doesn't always mean the Christian rite of water baptism, then most of the disagreements will go away.
- C. Remember what was learned last week:

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1. Sacramental view of baptism sees that in some way the water baptism conveys grace to the person.
    - a. The Roman Catholic Church says the rite itself saves the person.
    - b. Lutherans say that through the waters of baptism faith is given to the infant and they are now united with Jesus Christ. The Anglican/Episcopalian church says similar things. The Methodists see it as how you become part of the Body of Christ and is the beginning of one's salvation.
    - c. So the key thing to note is that baptism unites us to the Body of Christ in this view.
  2. The Covenantal view is that baptism is the New Testament version of the sign that the person is in a covenant relationship with God.
    - a. So a common way to describe this is that it is an initiation into the Christian community, meaning the church.
    - b. So the child is not saved in this act, but the infant seen as now being part of the visible Church and will be raised up as if they are a believer.
    - c. At the same time though they would say that the baptism does not save, that the child, if they die in infancy, will be saved because they had been baptised.
- D. As you can see, baptism in these views actually places you into the Church, the body of Christ in one way or another. The reason is because how these various groups understand how the bible uses the word baptism.
- E. Today we will see that there are at least five different baptisms in the New Testament. The goal is to see that much of the confusion and disagreements over baptism arises out of confusing different categories. The use of the term "baptism" does not always mean the rite of baptism with water.

## **II. Four types of baptism.**

- A. Baptism of suffering.
  1. Mark 10:38-39.
  2. Here we see Jesus using the term repeatedly but the meaning is metaphorical rather than an immersion into water.
  3. The background is that two disciples, James and John, want to be granted positions of honor in Christ's glory—likely speaking of His Kingdom.

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4. Jesus' answer is simple, He will enter into His glory through suffering upon the Cross. The cup is another metaphor for the drinking of the wrath of God upon Him as He became the sin bearer of His people. He is to descend into the fulness of death, not merely lightly taste or feel it.
  5. They assure Him they are able and ready to endure, but of course that is said in ignorance and pride. But nonetheless He assures them that they too will follow Him into the same type of baptism.
  6. And that is what happened. James is killed by King Herod Agrippa's order in Acts 12. So he wanted a throne but he received a sword upon his neck. He wanted glory but he received a grave.
  7. His brother John is last heard of in Acts 8 with Peter and then never another mention of him. However it is quite likely that he was caught up with many other believers and executed. And one who likely participated in voting for his death was Saul, who later became Paul the Apostle.
  8. So this is the first way baptism is used. It is speaking of fully experiencing suffering to the uttermost—to death.
- B. The baptism of John the Baptist.
1. Matthew 3:11 (keep your finger there).
    - a. Here we have a unique baptism that was performed by John and his disciples.
    - b. Vs 3 shows that the call of John was for those coming to hear him to repent. To prepare themselves for the coming Messiah. The Kingdom of God is near and the only proper response was to turn from their ways back to the Lord.
    - c. Vs 6 shows that as they were baptized in the river (certainly this is not merely a sprinkling of water) they were also confessing their sin.
    - d. So taking those two points together we see that John was doing what he was called to do, prepare the people to receive their Messiah and King.
    - e. This is why Mark 1:4 says, "*John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*"

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- f. In fact in the book of Luke Matt Miller just finished preaching on vss 29-30 of chapter 7. (Turn there and make quick points about John's baptism.)
  2. Remember that Acts is a book of transitions. Turn to Acts 18:25 with Acts 19:4-5.
  3. So while it is very similar it is not the same baptism that the Lord commanded in Matthew 28:19.
- C. The baptism of judgment.
1. Matthew 3:11.
  2. This passage is unique because it actually speak of three different types of baptism. John's baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of fire. **Note that none of these actually refer to rite of baptism that we are all familiar with.**
  3. This baptism is a baptism of judgment, of wrath.
  4. Note vs 7.
    - a. If you ever have seen the type of wildfires that can erupt in the S. Cal. area you can understand this context rather easily. As the fire is raging animals are fleeing before it and snake are included in that event. It can be a bit creepy as you watch everything wild moving in a very specific direction as fast as they can..
    - b. What is it that is making the religious hypocrites come out to him? Is it a fear of judgment and wrath or what? He knew they were there to check things out, not because they believed the Messiah was coming and they were not ready for Him. Therefore they needed to first repent and then come to John.
    - c. In vs 9 he is anticipating what they really are thinking and he is unimpressed.
  5. Vs 10 needs to be read with vs 11. In 10 we see that if a tree does not bear good fruit (here it is the repentance of vs 8) then it is destroyed by fire. This fire is what is described in vs 11.
  6. It also gives you the sense of the word "baptize" again. It is not just a little tongue of flame but a bonfire into which the trees are cast, fully engulfed in the flames.

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7. The message is always the same to people. You show them Jesus. You speak of the coming judgment. And you call them to repent and come to God through Jesus for forgiveness.
  8. But it is always an all or nothing reality. You either fully identify by faith Jesus or you will be fully plunged into His wrath.
  9. So notice here that we have seen three different ways that the term “baptize” is used and none of them are related to the rite of Christian baptism.
- D. The baptism of the Spirit.
1. In all four of the gospel accounts we have the story we already mentioned in Matthew 3:11.
  2. After Jesus rose from the dead and spent 40 days with His disciples it was the baptism of the Holy Spirit that was the next big event that they were to wait for. Acts 1:5, *“for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*
  3. So from the beginning of His earthly ministry to the very end Jesus spoke of this event. But it did not occur until He ascended into heaven. But this baptism of the Holy Spirit is one we dealt with in detail already earlier in Acts 2.
  4. 1 Corinthians 12:4-13 is the key passage on this point.
    - a. Now this passage is showing that the body of Christ (Church) is made up of many. But they all make up only one Body.
    - b. The gifts are all different, but they all come from the one Spirit (4).
    - c. Each believer is uniquely gifted and this is evidence of the Spirit’s work in them (7). So vs 8-11 simply shows how regardless of your gifting it is because of the Holy Spirit.
    - d. Vs 12 transitions to the focus off of the individual and back to what matters, the Church. Or to use Paul’s terminology, the Body.
    - e. Vs 13 is the key.
      - (1) Literally it says, **“in one Spirit.”**
      - (2) In this passage, the Spirit is the *element* in which they were baptized. Not water, but the Spirit.

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- (3) Now, note what was the *location* that they found themselves after being baptized? In the Body of Christ.
  - (4) **This is important. Paul is teaching that baptism in the Spirit happens at conversion.** This baptism is not an external event but a spiritual one.
  - (5) And it has no connection to water. It is connecting the person to the true, universal Church.
5. Now if you follow what I say at this point then a lot of the problems related to baptism go away.
- a. Remember that in one way or another, most groups who practice infant baptism do it because they believe that baptism places us “in Christ” or into the Church, which is His Body.
  - b. But the passages they use are not speaking of water baptism, but this Spirit baptism.
  - c. Romans 6:1-11.
    - (1) Shows that our identity and salvation is utterly connected with Jesus Christ.
    - (2) This is why the term “in Christ” occurs 90 times in the New Testament.
  - d. Galatians 3:27.
  - e. To sum it up, when a passage is speaking of being placed “in Christ” we are not seeing the rite of water baptism; rather, it is being baptised with the Spirit into the true Church.
- E. Water baptism.
1. At this point we have eliminated the vast majority of passages that reference baptism because they fall into one of the categories just discussed.
  2. So now we come to what is nothing more than a symbol, an important symbol but still a symbol.
  3. Remember that for many groups, water baptism is seen to do something spiritual. It conveys grace to the person from God.

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- a. For some, this means it actually saves the person. We will look at the passages often used to try to show that baptism saves you next week.
  - b. For others, God gives saving faith to the infant through water baptism.
  - c. And for others, it places you into a unique covenant relationship with God through the Church. You are treated as a Christian.
4. What is key is that all of these positions see water baptism as a way to become, in one way or another, in union with Jesus Christ. The New Testament phrase is to be “in Christ.”
- a. So for example, *“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”* (Romans 6:11)
  - b. *“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1)
  - c. *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17)
5. What has happened is that they have confused Spirit baptism with water baptism. Or they have conflated them, which simply means that they take two variations of baptism and combine them.
6. Ephesians 4:1-6.
- a. Notice vs 3-4 and the tight relationship of the Spirit and unity. Why? Because we become part of the Body (4) via the Spirit (4).
  - b. Then in vs 5 we have the idea of what is likely referencing water baptism. We share that experience too.
  - c. The Spirit baptism focuses on union with the Body of Christ. And water baptism focuses upon faith in the Gospel. In other words, it is an outward expression of what you believe.
7. Matthew 28:19.
- a. The point is to make disciples. A disciple simply means one who follows another. The command is to go and make people who follow Jesus Christ.
  - b. A disciple is not merely one who has made a profession of faith in Christ. We see this in a simple way in John 8:31, *“So Jesus was*

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*saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine."*

- c. So the way this is done is described for us in vss 18-20.
    - (1) Vs 18 is our authority to do so.
    - (2) Vss 19-20a is the command and process.
    - (3) Vs 20b is the promise and encouragement.
  - d. Going to the nations, baptizing, and teaching to obey.
  - e. And in Acts 2 we see this immediately portrayed.
- 8. Water baptism always is seen as a result of hearing and believing. It never once is shown to be prior to hearing and believing. This is again why it is so important to keep Spirit baptism and water baptism separate. They are not the same thing, ever.
  - 9. Act 2:41, all who received the gospel were baptized.
  - 10. Acts 8:12, all who believed the gospel were baptized, male and female.
  - 11. Acts 8:36, The Ethiopian eunuch believes and then is baptized.
  - 12. Acts 9:18, Paul, having believed, is now baptized.
  - 13. Acts 10:47, all who believed the gospel when Peter preached were then baptized.
  - 14. Acts 16:14, Lydia and her household all believed the gospel and were baptized.
  - 15. Acts 16:33, the jailer in Philippi and his household heard the gospel, believe and were baptized.
  - 16. Acts 18:8, A Jew named Crispus and his household believed the gospel and were baptized.
  - 17. Acts 19:4-5, Paul finds disciples of Christ who had not yet been baptized, so he baptizes them.
  - 18. The point is simple, the biblical record is to believe and then be baptized in water.

### **III. Conclusion.**



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- A. Some people wonder why we don't do altar calls here. It is simple. They create a great temptation for misplaced faith (explain). The same with praying the sinner's prayer, or raising your hand or signing a card.
- B. Infant baptism presents the same temptation. You look at your baptism as the way you are saved. And so now your faith is not resting in Jesus Christ alone, but in an act that took place before you can even remember.
- C. So I ask you this today? What is the object of your hope and faith. Where or who or what are you believing that makes you convinced you are saved?

### **Benediction**

**“Now may the Lord of Peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. the Lord be with all of you.”**

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## **Small Group Questions**

- Some may think that baptism is a doctrine that isn't all that important to quibble over—do you agree with them. Why or why not?
- What are the key differences between baptism of the Spirit and water baptism? Think through who is doing what? Such as who is baptizing a person in the Spirit as opposed to who is baptizing a person in water?
- Why is it important that we distinguish between baptism of the Spirit and water baptism? What errors can it lead to if you don't? Thinking about how baptism is connected to “make disciples” in Matthew 28, how might a confusion over water baptism and spirit baptism affect how one makes a disciple? How about if you think baptism conveys saving grace?
-