

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Does Baptism Save?

Acts 2:37-41

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SermonAudio Blurb: In this final sermon on the nature and purpose of baptism we consider the several passages used by various groups to argue that in some manner or another baptism brings a person into some sort of covenant or redeemed relationship with God. This can span from actual salvation to becoming part of the visible covenant community.

I. Introduction.

- A. We come again to the topic of baptism.
 - 1. We have seen quite a lot so far in our journey through only 1 ½ chapters in Acts.
 - 2. Kingdom of God, the filling of the Holy Spirit vs baptism of the Holy Spirit, the nature of tongues, the power of the gospel and the importance of baptism.
 - 3. If we can address these well early on in the book of Acts it will make the other chapters a lot easier to work through so it is worth our time to go slow here.
- B. Last week we worked through several passages to see that the term “baptism” or “baptized” has several meanings depending on the context. A baptism related to John the Baptist, baptism of fire, Spirit baptism, and water baptism as we know it today.
- C. Today we need to jump right in and begin to look at several passages that are commonly used by various groups to argue that baptism somehow saves a person. There is quite a broad spectrum of views on this topic so it is hard to summarize it in a way that does not offend someone.
 - 1. On one extreme you have those who argue that baptism itself actually saves a person.
 - 2. Then you have more middle ground positions who say that through baptism saving faith is granted by God so that the person, an infant, believes and is saved.
- D. Our church requires that you be baptized after having made a clear profession of faith in Christ.

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1. This is known as believers baptism and it is simply a non-negotiable at Missio.
 2. We believe that Scripture shows baptism to be a symbol of what has already occurred in the life of a person. It is an external sign of their death and life in Christ and the washing away of sins.
 3. It is also the entranceway into the visible Church which is to be made up of all who profess faith in Jesus Christ alone.
 4. And finally on the other end would be that the child may or may not be saved but they will be treated as saved because they were baptism and carry the sign of God's covenant upon them.
- E. Today we will focus our attention on three key passages that are almost always used to try to prove that baptism conveys some sort of saving grace to a person. Whether it is Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, these three passages show up over and over. My goal is to show that these cannot be used for baptism.

II. Does Baptism Save?

A. John 3:5:.

1. What does Jesus mean when He says, “unless one is born again...?” (Vss 5-6).
 - a. These verses are making a distinction between two states of existence or being. The first state is natural life, the second is spiritual life.
 - b. Now in verse five there are many ways people try to understand it. There are over 7 different views on what Jesus means by the phrase “born of water.”
 - (1) Much of it, however, comes from seeking some deeper, spiritual meaning, rather than simply taking the context of the passage and finding the most natural sense.
 - (2) The three main views are in order of popularity.
 - (a) The water refers to baptism.
 - i) Now, nowhere does it speak of baptism, but simply because of the word “water” there becomes the assumption that this is the meaning.

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- ii) And this is something you will see in the next passage as well.
- (b) The water refers to a spiritual cleansing.
 - i) He is telling Nicodemus that you need to be spiritually cleansed, have your heart washed and renewed and that this is accomplished by the Word of God.
 - ii) This is assumed because Nicodemus is a Pharisee and would know the Old Testament very well. There are several times where there is a figurative use of water that refers to cleansing.
 - iii) Ezekiel 36:25, *“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.”*
 - iv) However, this passage is not talking about regeneration but salvation in the fullest sense. It is looking to the future ingathering of Israel and their conversion.
- (c) The water refers to physical birth.
 - i) Best and most natural meaning. The entire passage is speaking of two births, the physical one and the spiritual one.
 - ii) This is seen in the parallel structure in vs 5-6.

Born of water

[born of] the Spirit

Born of flesh

Born of the Spirit

- iii) Nicodemus was a Jew and would easily assume his being born as a Jew was what set him apart. But the physical birth, no matter what your lineage is, will not bring you eternal life with God.

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- c. What Jesus is saying is that for you to see the Kingdom of God, here referring to salvation, eternal life with God you must not merely be born and live a good life, you must have a second, Spirit caused birth.
 - (1) So what does it mean to be born again?
 - (2) It means that there is a complete change of heart and character which is brought about in you by the Holy Spirit.
 - (3) We call it becoming a Christian.
 - d. What it **does not** teach in any way is that you are born again through baptism.
- B. Titus 3:5.
- 1. This passage is often used with John 3:5 to argue for the sacrament of baptism conveying saving grace to a person. Let's simply make observations of the actual text.
 - 2. First, there is no mention of baptism. So why would we insert it into the text?
 - 3. Second, the point of the passage is salvation. That is the main point, "He saved us. . . ." Everything else enlarges and explains that act of salvation.
 - a. Note first that the basis of that salvation was not based on deeds of righteousness. This is simple because it is literally written down in front of us.
 - (1) But in the Greek it is even more stark because the main point is stuck in the middle and the point that it is not by deeds is put to the front for emphasis.
 - (2) The KJV does a great job showing this, "*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*"
 - b. Second, because it has nothing to do with what we do, Paul then says it is upon God's mercy.
 - c. Third, this mercy is by two things: regeneration and renewing.
 - (1) Both of these are works of the Holy Spirit.

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- (2) Just like in John 3. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us this new birth, which is simply another term for regeneration.
 - (3) And you could reword this and be totally proper by rendering it as “the regeneration’s washing.”
4. But people try to make the term “washing” mean baptism. And so when you baptise a baby it washes away their sin and they are born again, or regenerated.
- a. However, to say that demands that doing the deed/work of baptism makes you now born again.
 - b. But this is utterly opposite of his point. It is never because of a deed or act you do or have done to you. You are saved by the mercy of God.
 - c. And the Holy Spirit does two things in this act of salvation. He regenerates you so that you are washed clean and become new. And second, He is in the process of renewing/cleansing you daily.
- C. 1 Peter 3:21.
- a. Take note of the term “corresponds” or one similar because it is key.
 - (1) An antitype is the spiritual idea of something earthly in nature.
 - (2) eg. Romans 5 says that Adam was a type of Christ, who is the antitype. Just as all who are in Adam are in sin and are dead in those sins, so too, those who are in Christ are righteous and are alive.
 - (3) But the bible only makes a few clear statements that we can absolutely say are types and anti-antitypes.
 - (4) There are many that appear to function like this but if the New Testament doesn’t say so then you cannot be adamant about it.
 - b. In this passage the type being referred to is the fact that Noah and his family were saved by being in the ark going through the flood waters (20).
 - (1) What is its antitype? Some might say the water or baptism, but that is not the correct answer. It is Christ.

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- (2) Now, what is going on here? The whole issue surrounds what is the corresponding thing that is connected to baptism. To do this requires you to think back to the Flood and what happened.
- (a) Did the waters of the flood save Noah and the others? No. What did? The ark did.
 - (b) The ark is the issue in verse 20, not the water.
 - i) The waters were a picture of God's wrath and judgment poured out on sin and sinners. But because they were in the ark they were covered and protected from His wrath.
 - ii) Look at Heb 11:7. There we find out that the ark was an expression of Noah's faith in God. The ark was the way God saved Noah.
 - (c) Now, what is our spiritual ark that safely carries us through God's wrath and judgment?
 - i) Romans 5:8-9.
 - ii) 1 Thessalonians 1:10.
 - (d) 1 Thessalonians 5:9.
 - i) Beloved, remember how I told you last week not to assume that just because you see the word "baptism," that it is talking about water baptism? Here is another example.
 - ii) In fact the answer is seen in 1 Peter 1:18, Christ also died for sins once for all for the purpose that He would bring us to God. You can hear the metaphor in that. As the ark carried them to safety, so Christ brings us to God.
 - iii) The baptism here is speaking of our union with Jesus Christ.
 - a) When we come to Christ in faith who are we baptized in? The Holy Spirit.

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- b) Where does that spiritual baptism put us? Into Christ.
- iv) And that, beloved is the glorious message of this verse.
- v) Just as Noah was saved from God’s wrath by being in an ark he built by faith, so too, we are saved by being in the spiritual ark of Jesus Christ, whom we entered by faith.

III. Conclusion.

- A. So what have we learned? A few things, all worthwhile.
 - 1. First. Baptism is subject to the same pressures that most every other doctrine and practice in the Church. Tradition and philosophy of the day both help make these doctrines and practices conform to the norms of some point in history. Once accepted they are very hard to remove.
 - 2. Second. The term itself can mean many things in the bible and it is unwise to assume that when the New Testament uses the term “baptism” or “baptize” that it must mean the rite of water baptism.
 - 3. Third. The efforts to teach and practice infant baptism is bound up in cultural and philosophical arguments rather than the clear teaching of the Scripture. To arrive at infant baptism you need to first embrace complex theological systems of thought or simply accept that your church does it that way and they must be right.
 - 4. Fourth. Baptism does not do anything spiritual. It does not convey special grace nor put you in union with God in some way. And it certainly does not save you from God’s wrath.
- B. Let us always be a people who know and teach that salvation comes from God through Christ and let our hope rest there, in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone. Let us teach our children and our spouses this. Let us remind one another of this fact every time we gather as a church.

Benediction

May the God of peace who raised Christ from the dead Strengthen your inner being for every good work. And may the blessing of God Almighty Father, Son and Holy Spirit Rest upon you and dwell within you This day and evermore. Amen.

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Small Group Questions

- Have you ever believed or known someone who believed that baptism somehow was part of salvation and forgiveness of sin? How you understand it at that time; or, how was it explained to you?
- What are some possible consequences to seeing baptism as a means of God bringing grace to a person?
- How important, in your mind, is this doctrine and why? Why do you think this is not a doctrine and practice that is seen in many circle as being important?