

Baptism: A Simple Ceremony

Matthew 28:19-20

July 24, 2022

“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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

These two verses, known as the *Great Commission*, describe the mission of the church. According to one author, a mission is a sending to accomplish a task and a commission is an official charge or authority to accomplish the task, often associated with military officers. In verse eighteen, Jesus stated “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” The mission is to make disciples and the authority is delegated to the church by Jesus. The first of the two commandments given by Jesus in the Great Commission is to baptize disciples, then teach them to observe all that He had commanded.

In our study of the first three chapters of the epistle to the Romans, Paul’s focus was on justification. The doctrine of justification is manifested in various ways, including the ordinance of baptism. Baptism is not a human concept, it is of divine origin, given by God. The evangelical church today recognizes two ordinances: baptism and The Lord’s Supper. Baptism needs to be celebrated only once, after a credible profession of faith in the salvific work of Christ, while The Lord’s Supper is to be celebrated repeatedly. While different evangelical traditions celebrate this ordinance with various frequencies, Southside celebrates this ordinance weekly. This frequency is supported by Acts 20:7, “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread.”

Sadly, the two ordinances are becoming less prevalent and/or are being distorted in the church today. While it is true that neither baptism nor The Lord’s Supper is required for salvation, and neither is salvific, both are commanded by Jesus, and both should be observed out of obedience to Him. Jesus commanded the Lord’s Supper in Luke 22:19-20 and in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. We see in today’s passage that He also commands baptism. Both practices were commanded by Jesus, were taught by the Apostles and are practiced by the church.

Many churches today treat The Lord’s Supper in a very flippant manner, offering the elements to everyone in attendance, whether a believer in Christ or not. In days gone by, each Sunday before the worship service began, the elders would examine the character of each person prior to admitting them to the table. Jesus, speaking through Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 gives a stern warning not to celebrate The Lord’s Supper unless we are in fellowship with God. Verse

twenty-eight states, “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” While Southside does not examine those wishing to participate in The Lord’s Supper, it is expected that each person will examine his/her own heart to see if there is any reason why they should not participate. Verses twenty-nine and thirty warns us that taking The Lord’s Supper without discerning the body brings judgment on oneself, and risks becoming ill – even dying. God takes this matter seriously and so should we.

Today we see that baptism is a simple act, with a simple meaning, leading to a simple truth.

I. A Simple Act

We at Southside believe that the biblical model for baptism is simple: a person realizes that he/she has sinned against a Holy God, hears and believes the gospel, receives Jesus as their Lord and Savior, repents of known sins and is baptized by total immersion into water signifying that the old nature is dead, has been buried, and the believer is now raised to new life in Christ. Many churches distort this simple act and its meaning through a lack of discipleship and a lack of clarity. They teach that, to be saved, a person must make a decision for Christ (decisional regeneration), or that baptism assures salvation, or teaching infants should be baptized (paedobaptism), or by teaching self-baptism.

The issue of infant baptism is one that has divided true Christians and is one which we are not likely to resolve. The leadership at Southside holds to credobaptism by immersion after articulating a saving faith in Jesus. Paedobaptist rely heavily on Covenant Theology to make the argument that New Testament baptism correlates to circumcision in the Old Testament, where infant males were circumcised. They also argue that when the households of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15) and the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:25-34) were baptized that included infants. If you are interested in looking more deeply into these matters, Matt Waymeyer, in his book, [A Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism](#), effectively argues that baptism does not replace circumcision and that household baptisms did not include infants.

An ordinance is simply a re-enactment of the gospel message. When we observe one of these ordinances, we are reminded of our own salvation.

- A Jewish Baptism

In Matthew 3 we read that John, the Baptist, was baptizing in the Jordan River. John stated that he was baptizing with water, a baptism of repentance, but one greater than he was coming, one

who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. This is an obvious reference to Christ. Verse seven tells us that both Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to him for baptism. The Jews had an ordinance, *tvilah*, that involved immersion of a person in water for purification following a defilement. This immersion was also applied to Gentile converts to Judaism. While some Jews came to John for baptism, others likely came out of curiosity or to condemn him for baptizing while not being a member of the ruling class. Thus, the act of baptism, immersing people in water, was familiar to the Jews.

When the Jews conquered Gentile nations and brought to Israel people from these nations, many of them began to question why the Jews worshipped only one God and what was the identity of the God of Israel. Such questioning often led to Gentiles coming to faith in Yahweh. After they believed, they were circumcised, and then baptized. Their immersion under the waters of baptism would signify death to the old life they were leaving behind; they were leaving their old idols and old philosophies. Their being raised out of the waters would signify their new life into Judaism and belief in the one true God. Even after being adopted into the Jewish community, the Gentile proselytes continued to be second-class citizens. When they went to the temple to worship God, they must remain in the court of the Gentiles.

- John's Baptism

John was baptizing both Jews and Gentiles. This infuriated the Jews because they saw this as essentially putting them on the same level as Gentiles. The Jews hated John because the baptism of both Jews and Gentiles showed that the Jews needed repentance as well. At this point in time, the Jews had forsaken idol worship and were now worshipping only the one true God. Since Gentiles worshipped many gods, the Jews saw them as needing repentance, but they, themselves, having forsaken idolatry, thought that only Gentiles needed to repent and be baptized. John understood that the Jews needed to repent also, repent of their legalism, a sin to which the Jews were blind; they needed to repent of their self-reliance and place their faith in the coming Messiah. John's baptism of Jews symbolized the gospel; they needed to die to their old, legalistic way of life and be raised to a new life in Messiah. Another reason the Jews hated John is because he suggested that they were outside the grace of God along with the Gentiles.

- Jesus' Baptism

Matthew 3:13-17 describes the baptism of Jesus by John. John did not want to baptize Jesus, for he knew that Jesus had nothing from which He needed to repent. Jesus insisted that His baptism was fitting (necessary) to fulfill all righteousness. This act showed that Jesus was

identifying with sinners, the sinners for whom He would suffer and die, and it symbolized the baptism that believers would undertake – dying to self and being raised to life in Jesus. Jesus’s baptism secured righteousness for all who would later come to Him in faith. The baptism of Jesus and the commission of His disciples to baptize is a transition from the Jewish baptism of proselytes to the baptism of those who follow Jesus.

II. A Simple Meaning

- Baptism defined

Let us consider the significance of this ceremony, and why obedience in this area is so important in the Christian life. The significance is seen in the meaning of baptism and what it represents. The meaning of the word baptism is to immerse. There are two Greek words for baptize: *baptisma* (or *baptismos*) and *bapto*. The first Greek word is used seventy-seven times in the New Testament, while the second is used only three times, but both the verb form and the noun form of these two words means to immerse.

- Baptism illustrated

One of the greatest examples of believer baptism is that of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-39. The text says that Phillip and the eunuch went down *into* the water and came *out of* the water. Scripture also tells us that the road on which they traveled was through a desert. Clearly, they would not have begun the journey from Jerusalem to Ethiopia without having sufficient water. If sprinkling was an approved form of baptism, Phillip would have taken a handful of water and baptized the eunuch, rather than waiting for a body of water where he could immerse the eunuch.

When the Holy Spirit led Phillip to the eunuch’s chariot, the eunuch was reading the book of Isaiah, and Phillip asked him if he understood what he was reading. Acts 8:32 tells us that the passage he was reading at the time was from Isaiah 53:7, "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth." The eunuch asked Phillip if Isaiah was speaking about himself or about someone else. Perhaps the eunuch had also read chapter fifty-six, which discusses foreigners joining with God’s people. Phillip identified the suffering servant as Jesus and then explained the process by which anyone, Jew or Gentile, becomes identified with the people of God. Phillip shared the gospel with him. At this point the eunuch believed and asked to be baptized.

- Baptism commanded

Baptism was commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28 and also by Peter in Acts 2:38 where he said on the day of Pentecost, "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.” The ordinance that we observe today is that commanded by Jesus and the Apostles, and it follows the procedure set forth in Holy Scripture.

III. A Simple Truth

- **Salvation by immersion**

We have already stated that baptism does not secure salvation; it is not salvific, but it signifies, or is a visual picture of our salvation. Immersion secures our salvation in the sense that we believe the gospel, repent of our sins, and obey the command to be baptized by immersion; then we are saved. On the day of Pentecost those baptized were giving testimony to how God had worked in their life to bring them to faith and repentance. Acts 2:42 describes the impact of the gospel on those who were saved, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” The testimonies that we hear today will tell of how God saved them and how they have been changed. It is important for us to see how they interacted with the gospel and how God changed their hearts. They will testify to the new union they have with Christ and to the fruit they see in their lives as a result of this union.

Believers are joined with Christ. Galatians 2:20 states, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Romans 6:3-4 asks the question: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Baptized believers are immersed into Christ, into His death and into His life. We are partakers of the divine life. Baptism by immersion represent our death, burial and resurrection; death to sin, burial signifying our old self being left behind, and resurrection signifying our new life in Christ.

- **Immersion into the church**

Not only are we baptized into Christ, but we are also baptized and immersed into the church. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:13, “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” In Ephesians 4:25 Paul repeats the message that believers are members of a body, the church. No where in Scripture is there mention of a *Lone Ranger Christian*. We need others to encourage us in our Christian walk, and we need others to hold us accountable. Baptism is a visible representation of a secret, internal transformation.

IV. Simply an Ordinary Means of Grace

Ordinary means of grace is defined as the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption. In this sense, communicate doesn't mean *to tell* us the benefits of redemption; rather it means *to give* us the benefits of redemption. Peter tells us that the angels in heaven are awed by the grace shown to sinners by God (1 Peter 1:12) and Luke tells us that there is joy in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke 15:7). Truly the conversion of a sinner is an awe-inspiring grace of God, and, if the angels in heaven are rejoicing, so should we!

The means of God's grace are vast. Some we recognize are: God is faithful, He has given us His Word, He produces fruit in the lives of people, He saves people from His rightful wrath, believers are walking in obedience to faith, God is dispensing His gospel to the world through faithful believers, the gospel is the grace offered to everyone, an effectual call which cannot be thwarted has gone out to the elect, God regenerates lost people, we can walk in obedience, we have been forgiven of our sins, we have eternal life, we can now overcome sin by the Holy Spirit living within, we are washed by the Holy Spirit, we are part of the church locally, globally, and universally. This list is only the tip of the iceberg!

In simple terms: baptism is justification made visible. Such justification will be manifested to us today as we baptize multiple people, and we rejoice with the angels in heaven!

Scripture is clear, all are sinners because all inherited the sin of Adam, Jesus being the only exception. Even young children raised in a nominal Christian home, a home where good moral values are promoted and the family regularly attends worship services, but where there is lacking a real relationship with Christ recognize their guilt when they disobey a parent. However, it is unlikely that they will have any real understanding of the fact that to disobey a parent is an offense to God, that is, a sin. Thus, it is especially encouraging to see such an understanding in the young children being baptized today. Their sins are mostly a willful disobedience to their parent's rules. As children mature into adulthood, their sins become more along the lines of willfully defying God's rules. As we saw previously in our study of the epistle to the Romans, all people know that God exists (1:19) and all have His law written on their hearts (2:15). From man's perspective, admission of sin and guilt is the first step toward salvation. A sincere desire to repent (forsake the sin) is the second step. All persons baptized today gave testimony to the fact that they had taken these steps.

One young girl stated that a few years ago her grandmother explained the Christmas Story to her and that the reason why Jesus stepped out of heaven and came to the earth was to save sinners. Through this discussion with her grandmother, she understood that she was a sinner, in need of forgiveness. She asked Jesus to forgive her sin and be her savior. One of her favorite

verses is 2 Corinthians 5:7, “We walk by faith, not by sight.” She sees God working in her life by convicting her of sin now, whereas before, sin didn’t bother her very much.

Another young girl said that she put her trust in God in chapel at age six. She loves Jesus because He died on the cross for her. She said Jesus is her savior and the lord of her life. “I show God that I love Him by praying and believing Him. I love Him with all my heart, mind and soul. I want to be a follower of Christ and a part of the church. I will live out my life to shown Him honor and glory.”

One young boy said he learned about God from his family and the church. “I used to think that God was all about songs, but then I learned that Jesus died on the cross for me and forgave me of my sins. He is my savior and He saved me for a reason. I love God because He created me and I love Him with all my heart.”

One man shared a very familiar story; brought up in the church but living in the world. Like Solomon, pursuing material things and pleasures that he thought would bring happiness, but found all was vanity. There was a hollowness within. After his son was born, his heart began to change. He realized that he was no longer the center of the universe. He began to recognize his responsibilities as a husband and father and began to ask God to make him that man. While there was no definite eureka moment, the Holy Spirit began to work in his life, and he is now a much different man than he was just a couple of years ago. He daily analyzes his sin and rejects anything that doesn’t help make him a better Christian, husband and father. His main focus now is to be a strong, focused leader of his family and grow in his knowledge of God’s Word.

One woman shared that she had been raised in a nominal Christian home, had asked Jesus into her heart at age eight; she thoughts she was a Christian. Her confidence was in the fact that she had made a profession in Christ and attended church. She along with her youth group would attend retreats, rededicate their lives to Christ, come back home all fired up – for about a week, then fall back into the same sin pattern. She lived with her boy friend right out of high school and later married him, thinking that this would put her back into God’s good graces. She understood that good works don’t save, and that a person is saved by grace through faith. She had knowledge of the truth, but the truth wasn’t in her. She divorced this husband a few years later for completely unbiblical reasons. She remarried but this marriage suffered because neither of them was a believer. She tried in her own strength to be the wife she knew she needed to be, but she failed miserably. When she became pregnant, she began seeking a way to articulate her faith with their son when he was old enough to understand. Much to her surprise, while trying to find a way to share the faith she lacked, she was born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. She then realized that she had never been a Christian. She explained that people like

her are the most difficult to reach with the gospel because they don't see themselves as sinners in need of a savior. When she realized that she had new life in Christ, she understood that she needed to live for Him wholly, and that is why she is being baptized today.

Another man said he had no memory of not being a non-believer and he always loved Christ. However, gradually he began to understand the need for repentance as he gained clarity in the understanding of his sin and how faith in Christ can work to overcome that sin. He began to understand more fully the meaning and purpose of The Lord's Supper. Through a study of God's Word, a fire began to be ignited within, challenging him to learn more about God. He gained a clearer understanding of the character of God and fallen man. He now more fully understands that salvation is through faith in Christ alone. He professes his faith in Christ, he dedicates his life to Christ, he desires to bring his family to Christ, and he desires to continue to study God's Word while fellowshiping and learning with other Christians. He was baptized as an infant, but he now realized that he needs to be obedient to Christ and be baptized by immersion as a believer.

Another woman said that she had attended church each week, because that is what people do. She joined the youth group but did not know Christ. In middle school, she began to question her faith and she went into a dark spiral of depression. There was constant fighting and yelling in her home and she felt like she was a burden to the family. She wrote a letter to her cousin who invited her to begin attending her church; she would not take no for an answer. Over time she began to understand the love of Christ and desired to accept Christ as her savior. One evening she prayed with the pastor to accept Christ and felt a great weight had been lifted from her. She experienced joy as never before, but she did not find this same joy at home. Her life changed and she wanted to have a close relationship with Christ, but she didn't know how to make it happen. At age fifteen, she was diagnosed with a life-threatening heart condition. During surgery her heart stopped and there was darkness. But suddenly a bright, warm light appeared. Drawn to the light she heard a voice telling her she had to go back, it's not time. In college she fell away from the church, entered another period of dark depression and tried to take her life. She was married then became a Sunday only Christian. She knew that a change in their spiritual life was needed, but then COVID hit, and churches closed. However, they found that Southside was open, and they made their way here. The first Sunday they were here, she cried the whole service as she felt the Holy Spirit convicting her of her sin. She truly desires to seek God with her whole heart and discover His plan for her life. In repentance and in obedience to Jesus, she is pursuing baptism today.

Selah:

- 1) Before consuming the elements at The Lord's Supper, how do you examine yourself?

- 2) If you have been baptized as a believer, what was the most important factor causing you to make the decision?
- 3) What sin do you find difficult to leave dead in the water?
- 4) What does being immersed into the church mean to you?