Celebrating Baptism — Delivery Transcript

Acts 9:13–18 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, September 11, 2022 · *Family Matters*

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Did a great job in leading us in worship. If you guys have a Bible, you can open them to the book of Acts. We're going to be in Acts chapter 9 this morning. And as Taylor mentioned— or as Taylor— good grief, as Claire mentioned earlier, it's a special service today. We're actually taking a break. If you're new to our church, we've been going through the book of Revelation chapter by chapter, line by line, and we're taking a break. I know some of you're thinking we finally got to the good part.

Why are we stopping now? But there's a little rhyme to the madness, a little reason to the madness. We're going to do a series on the church, and the title of the series is Family Matters, because when I think of the church I think of a family. I don't know about you guys. I've heard from some that, you know, their church family is actually more of a family to them than even their biological family and that's a difficult thing for them to say, a difficult situation, but in many regards the church is a family, and we need to, from time to time, answer the question, What does that even mean?

What does it mean to be a church? And what does it mean to belong to a church? And so for the next several weeks, we're going to answer that question from the New Testament. And today we're going to examine the core of what it means to actually enter into belonging to a church, and that's the ordinance of baptism. So we're going to look at baptism from the book of Acts in particular. We're going to look at Paul's baptism, but before we get there, I want to look at a definition of what it even means to be a church.

And I'm taking this definition from the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. It's a doctrinal statement that our church uses to kind of guide what we think the Bible teaches on various different matters. And this is their definition for the church and I think it's a good one we

can start with as we open up this series— on baptism. And so as they say, a New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation. All autonomous means is no strings on us. We're not controlled by some outside organization or some board that's telling us what to do and how to do it.

We're autonomous, meaning Jesus is the only boss in this church. So it's an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers. That's what we're looking at this morning, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel. And they observe two ordinances, that's the Lord's Supper and baptism, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. I know that's a long definition. I know it's a wordy definition. You're like, please never show me that again.

But it's a good, solid, comprehensive vision of what the church is and why we gather. And so for the next couple of weeks we're going to be examining that definition. But today we're looking at that key word there, baptism, because the local church biblically is supposed to be made up of members who are believers, people who've repented of sin, made Jesus the Lord of their life. Because if Jesus is the Lord of this church, then those who make up this church need to be submitted to the lordship of Christ. And baptism is the way, it's the sign of that faith.

It's the sign that I've come to repent of sin and put my faith in Jesus as Lord. And so what does the Bible say about baptism? Why do we baptize? How do we baptize? Who gets baptized? Those are all questions I want us to look at this morning. And so if you take notes, I want to give you a definition of baptism, and I have two definitions back to back. But before we look at the definition, why even bother? Some of you say, I know what baptism is. I grew up in the church.

I read a story this week that I think is a good reminder why knowing what the Bible says about baptism is actually pretty important. It's from the life of St. Patrick. You guys know St. Patrick. We have St. Patrick's Day. You know, today we wear green and everybody gets drunk, but the original St. Patrick's Day was the actual Saint Patrick, who is a saint of the Roman Catholic Church, who was an amazing evangelist and did some tremendous work for the sake of the kingdom. It's sad that his holiday has been hijacked by green and drunkenness.

But anyway, Saint Patrick was doing evangelism, and he actually evangelized the king of Munster, which was a place in Ireland, and the king was going to be baptized and of course the king didn't know all there was to know about baptism. He was unconverted. He didn't know what the Bible said about baptism. And so they were doing the ceremony. In fact, I've got a picture. Can you throw the picture up there? This is Patrick up there at the top. You see that stick he has in his hand? That's called a crozier or something along those lines.

It was a stick that the bishop or the preacher would carry, and the very end of that stick was actually pretty sharp because they would use it to fend off wolves or enemies or whatever the case may be. You've heard of a pistol-packing preacher? Well, that was pistols back in the day. That's the stick that he wore. And then you've got King Aengus there underneath him, the king of Munster. And he was going to be baptized. And so St. Patrick, they were, I don't know, down at the lake or the river, wherever they were.

St. Patrick was doing what preachers do, talking about baptism. And he got caught up and I don't know if it was during his prayer or while he was talking about it, but he started pounding that stick and he accidentally shoved that stick through the foot of the king, King Munster. And so the foot of King Munster is just bleeding profusely; supposedly St. Patrick had no idea whatsoever. He takes him down into the water, blood gushing everywhere, baptizes him. Brings him back up, none the wiser. And then later they come up to King Munster and they said, King Munster, why did you allow St.

Patrick to just stab your foot during the baptism? He said, I thought that was part of the ceremony. And that's why you should know what the Bible has to say about baptism. Now is that folklore? I don't know if that's folklore or not, but this is an actual stained glass window from a church in England. So if it is folklore, it's historical folklore. I think it's probably true if it survived that long. Baptism is a big deal, and we need to know what it is and why it matters. So here's my definition of baptism.

Baptism is the bodily immersion of a believer into water to affirm and portray their union with Christ and their commitment to his lordship. Each of those words are important. Number one, it's by immersion into water. We in this church anyway don't sprinkle or baptize babies by wiping them with a wet cloth. It is by immersion into water. Secondly, it's for believers, meaning it only comes after someone puts their faith in Jesus Christ, repents of their sin, and trusts in Jesus as Lord. So we don't believe— I don't think the Bible teaches infant baptism, because they don't yet have faculties to believe.

Thirdly, it's a symbolic act in that it affirms and portrays a person's union with Christ. There is a sense in which baptism really is a picture and way for you as an individual to participate in the truth of the gospel. The baptism isn't the gospel. Baptism doesn't save you, but it portrays what salvation is and how it works in the life of a believer. And then finally it's a public confession. When someone is baptized, they may not say it out loud, they're not going to give a sermon. They're going to, through their actions— and so that's why baptism is in the New Testament.

That's why baptism matters. And to look at who gets baptized, how they get baptized, and why we practice baptism the way we practice it, we're going to look at Paul's baptism in Acts chapter 8. So you can turn there, Acts chapter— I'm sorry, Acts chapter 9. Acts chapter 9, starting in verse 13. While you're turning there, I'll give you a little bit of context. The book of

Acts is about the birth and spread of the early church. We all know about the Apostle Paul. If you've been in church world any length whatsoever, Paul was converted.

He was a chief persecutor of the church. He hated Christianity, he hated Christians, he saw them as a sect or cult of Judaism. He wanted to wipe them off the face of the earth, and he had authority by the religious leaders of the day to do just that. He had religious authority to go and murder and persecute Christians. And so he did, and he was very good at it. In fact his name was not Paul at that time, his name was Saul of Tarsus, and he was a tremendous threat. Every believer knew his name and didn't want to meet him in a cold, dark alley.

So this is Saul. In Acts chapter 9, he's on his way to Damascus. And he encounters the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, meaning he has a vision of Jesus risen from the dead, his worst nightmare come true, the guy that he didn't believe existed or was raised from the dead, the leader of this movement he was trying to wipe off the face of the planet, he shows up on the road and says, Why are you persecuting me, Saul? Why are you kicking against the goads? Now you could imagine if you were not a believer and you had all of these doubts and objections, and then Jesus literally appeared to you on a road, it would be a very powerful experience.

And that's what happened to Paul. He was through that experience struck by blindness. He could not see whatsoever. And so what he does is he spends three days holed up in a house at Damascus. No food, no water whatsoever. And I don't even know if you've ever tried to not eat for three days. It's pretty difficult, but if you've tried to not eat or drink for three days, that's extremely dangerous and very difficult to do. But that's exactly where Saul of Tarsus is, he's met the Lord, he's wrestling through his faith, he's trying to figure out is this for real, is this legit?

And he keeps having this vision of a man named Ananias who's going to come to him and reveal or preach the gospel and help him come to know Jesus as his Lord and Savior. And so the Lord tells Ananias, Saul of Tarsus is in this room, in this city; I want you to go and preach the gospel to him. And we pick our passage up in verse 13, where Ananias answers the Lord, I don't know about that. "I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem."

Besides that, "he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." So Jesus, I'm all about being obedient, but I'm going to go to jail if I go and talk to this guy about the gospel. But the Lord said to Ananias, Do it anyway. "Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." And so Ananias does that. He goes and he enters into the house. He places his hands on Paul, or Saul.

He says, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And I'm supposing between verse 17 and 18, Ananias preaches the gospel, shows him what it means to be filled with the Spirit, how to put your faith and trust in Christ. And as Paul exercises that faith, it says in verse 18, "At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized."

You guys know that song, "Amazing Grace"? "Was blind, but now I see" comes right from Acts chapter— the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who would later become the Apostle Paul. Now the first thing that stands out to me when I read this passage is that baptism was an extremely important thing for Paul to do, a first priority, because it's the first thing he does upon becoming a Christian. After not eating or drinking anything for three days. And I don't know about you, but if I was struggling with a thing in my life and I was wrestling with God over it and God finally gave me deliverance and I had not been eating or drinking anything for three days, waiting for God to bring about that deliverance.

The first thing I would do is say, Dear Lord, thank you for this food and water, and I would eat and drink and be merry. Let's do the baptism after dinner. But he does not do that. He does it the very first thing. Why? Because it's a command of Jesus Christ and it should be a first priority for every single Christian. One of the first acts of obedience that any Christian should do. You see that in the Apostle Paul. And the other thing you see in this passage is who should be baptized, when they should be baptized, how and why.

When it comes to the question of who and when, you notice with the Apostle Paul, he was not baptized before he received Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He was baptized after. And this is not just true of Paul. You can go through every single example in the New Testament: when is a person baptized? They are always baptized after their conversion, meaning baptism is for believers, not for those who have not exercised faith. I know there are people, maybe probably even people in this room, who were baptized before you became a Christian.

You don't have to raise your hand, but that's the story of many people. Maybe you were raised in the Catholic Church. Maybe you were raised in a Methodist church and actually I don't think Methodist church baptizes people before they believe.[1] But many Catholic churches, Presbyterian churches, my Reformed brothers and sisters who approach baptism in that way, the reason that they do that is because they believe theologically baptism is a sign of the new covenant. The new covenant Jesus saves us from our sins. And the sign of salvation is baptism. And in the Old Testament, the sign of the covenant was circumcision.

Aren't you glad we got a new sign? But in the Old Covenant circumcision, they circumcised babies as a way of saying they belong to God, they are of the Jewish people. So Presbyterians and other traditions say just like the babies received the old covenant sign, babies should

receive the new covenant sign. My only issue with that is that a sign is supposed to point to something. And why would you point to something that is not yet there? The covenant is not there. The covenant is received by grace through faith. It's by believing in the Lord Jesus that you are saved and experience the blessings of the new covenant.

And you cannot do that as an infant. And so why would— at best it's confusing. At worst I think it's unhelpful. In the New Testament everyone who's baptized has exercised faith in Jesus Christ. It's for those who believe. Now, you may have been raised in a faith tradition that believes otherwise, and they have their theological reasons for believing that. But I think if you just took the New Testament at face value, you will see that baptism always happens after a person's conversion. Acts chapter 2, Peter is preaching the gospel. He, in preaching the gospel, tells people to repent and be baptized.

Baptism comes after repentance, after someone's put their faith in Jesus as Lord. In Acts chapter 8, you've got the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip sees the Ethiopian driving down the road, he gets in the chariot, he shares the gospel with him, the eunuch hears the gospel, is converted, repents, and believes. And it's at that point, it's after that point that he sees the water and says, Hey, stop the chariot. There's water; what keeps me from being baptized? You see the same thing a little bit later in Acts chapter 16 with Lydia.

In fact I want to show you this one. This is textbook example. Lydia, rich lady, sells purple garments, which was a— what do they call it when you get a niche little thing? Anyway, it was lucrative. There it is. It was a lucrative business, very, very wealthy. Anyway, she's listening to Paul preach the gospel, and it says that the Lord opened Lydia's heart to respond to what Paul was saying. In other words, she heard the gospel, she repented, she exercised faith in Jesus Christ, and after that, she and her household were baptized.

You see the same thing with the Philippian jailer, a little bit later in Acts chapter 16. Paul evangelizes this prison guard. He asks Paul, What do I got to do to be saved? And Paul says, You got to believe, not be baptized, you got to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household. And so he talks a little bit longer about the gospel. They spoke the word of the Lord to him along with everybody in his house. The Philippian jailer goes and tends to his wounds, if you go to the next verse, and after he tends to their wounds, verse 33 at the end, "right away he and all his family were baptized.

He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had come to believe in God with his entire household." So salvation, repentance, faith in Jesus, then baptism. Example after example after example. Now there will be those who say, well, look, his whole household was baptized. So that means they baptized the babies. Number one, it doesn't say they were infants. It says it was his household. Number two, it says his whole household had come to believe, which implies that whoever was baptized in that household exercised faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

And so I don't think you have a case for infant baptism in the book of Acts or anywhere else in the New Testament. Baptism is after salvation and it's for believers only, because it is a sign of the covenant that points to faith. And if the faith is not there, then the sign shouldn't point to it. So it's after conversion, it's for believers only. That's the who and the when. The how and the why is answered a little bit later. And that is baptism is in the New Testament, whether it's Acts 9 or anywhere else, baptism is by— now this is a sticking point.

A lot of people when they come to a church like ours, they say, why are you guys so much of a stickler on baptism by immersion? Because I was baptized after I got saved, but I was baptized by sprinkling or wiping or different means or different methods. And you guys won't let me join the church unless I'm baptized by immersion. Why are you so uptight about this? And the reason is because the New Testament teaches that baptism is supposed to be done by immersion. And you say, how do you know that?

Well, if you just take the word baptizo, which is pretty fun to say, by the way. Baptizo. If you look at that word lexically, whether you look in the New Testament or anywhere else in Greek literature, it always means by immersion. It always means to be submerged. It's interesting, Josephus, who was a Jewish historian, he uses this word to talk about sinking ships. Sinking ships don't get sprinkled, they get submerged into the water. Plutarch, who was also an ancient Jewish writer— no, Roman writer— a Greek writer, he talked about baptizo in terms of someone drowning in debt.

If you've ever drowned in debt, we're not talking about paying off your credit card at the end of the month to get your credit card points. We're talking about big time underwater can't survive debt. You're drowning in debt. That's what this word was used to communicate. Plato, all the way back, ancient Greek literature, Plato used this word baptizo to talk about taking a piece of cloth and submerging it into wine in order to stain the cloth and make it a different color. Every time this word is used, New Testament, outside of the New Testament, it's always by immersion.

And if you don't take the lexical evidence, you can just look at the Bible itself. Every time someone is baptized in the Bible, it's by immersion. You see this with the baptism of Jesus in the Gospels. John the Baptist baptizes him by immersion. So how do you know he did it by immersion? Well, John chapter 3, verse 23,[2] John's baptizing. It says he's baptizing "in Aenon near Salim." Why is he doing it there? Because there was plenty of water there. Why would you need plenty of water if you're going to do a sprinkling job or a wiping job?

No, he had to have plenty of water because he was submerging them underwater. It's by immersion. Same thing with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts chapter 8. Philip evangelizes him,[3] he shares the gospel, and then they say, look, there's water. Why would they say, look, there's water if it was sprinkling? They could have had water in the chariot to, you know, do the sprinkling or the whatever the case may be, but they stop and they wait till they find a

large pool of water. In fact, if you look at the passage, it says they go down into the water and baptized him, and then they come up out of the water.

And so that communicates baptism by immersion. It wasn't a shallow pool. It was deep enough to do a proper baptism. And so baptism in the New Testament, the biblical testimony, it's after conversion for believers only, not for infants. After conversion and it's by immersion, it's by dunking someone into water. Now the big question, or the big reason why the New Testament prescribes baptism in that way in particular is because baptism has a why. There's a reason why we get baptized. And if you throw that definition back up on the screen, the purpose for baptism is to affirm and portray a person's union with Christ and their commitment to his lordship.

Baptism is a way to powerfully symbolize salvation. It is a powerful, symbolic representation of our salvation as Christian people. And it doesn't just symbolize Jesus securing our salvation on the cross. It also symbolizes our conversion. What happens when you repent of your sin and put your faith in Jesus? Baptism is a beautiful picture of the spiritual transformation that takes place. If you go to Jesus dying on the cross, what do you see? Jesus is crucified, he dies, and is what? He's buried. He's buried in a tomb. And so baptism, you go under the water, that's symbolizing you die.

Jesus died and was buried, but then you come up out of the water. What do you think that symbolizes? It symbolizes that three days later God raised Jesus from the dead. Well, in our salvation, what happens when you become a Christian? You repent of your sin, you put your faith in Jesus as Lord. What's happening spiritually when you do that? You are dying to sin. You are dying to an old way of life. You are dying to a life without God, without hope, and you are being buried. The old man is dead.

The old woman is dead. That life is gone. Just like Jesus died and was buried, you're dying to self, you're dying to your old way of life, and then burying that person. And what's going to happen afterwards? You come up out of the water. And that's communicating or symbolizing the new life you have in Jesus Christ, filled with the Spirit, filled with power, released from the bondage of sin, a new creation, and just as God raised Jesus from the dead. Same thing's going to happen to you. He's going to give life to your mortal body after you die and go on to be with the Lord.

That's salvation. And baptism powerfully symbolizes that saving grace. Now some people take this too far and they say baptism is more than a symbol. They'll say baptism saves you. In fact, I don't know if this is still the case, but classically Roman Catholic doctrine was that baptism was a means of grace. It would wash away your sins. And so people needed to get baptized and sometimes get baptized over and over again so they could get their new sins washed off. That is not biblical. Ephesians chapter 2, verse 8: We are saved by grace through faith.

Then he explicitly says, not of works, so that nobody could boast. So you can't have your sins washed away through the work of baptism. Others teach what's called baptismal regeneration, which says you're saved by grace through faith, but God won't fully do it until you get baptized. It's only after your baptism that you're truly saved. And so in a way you kind of contribute to your salvation through the work of baptism. That is not what the New Testament teaches whatsoever. You are saved by grace through faith. Jesus saves you, not your baptism.

It's very important you understand that. Jesus is the Savior. Baptism doesn't wash away your sins. Jesus washes away your sins. Baptism is not the gospel. Jesus is the gospel. Jesus died. Jesus was buried. Jesus was raised. Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. Jesus is going to come again. That's the gospel message. Jesus is at the center of that message, not baptism. So it's a symbol, it is not itself the reality, it is not itself the grace that saves you. That's from Christ and Christ alone. And this I think Paul makes very evident in his teaching to the Corinthian church because they were getting all wrapped up about their baptism.

And he says in First Corinthians chapter 1, verse 17— I'm glad I didn't baptize some of you, he says— "Christ did not send me to baptize, but" what? "To preach the gospel." you notice how he separates the two. You got baptism and the gospel. Two totally different things. Baptism doesn't save you, Jesus saves you. Baptism isn't the gospel, Jesus is the gospel. Baptism communicates, it symbolizes the gospel, but the gospel is the power of God unto salvation because the gospel is the good news message that we were dead in our trespasses and sins, that God, our Creator, made us in His image.

He made us to submit to Him and to live according to His designs. But instead of submitting to God and living according to His designs, our heart was bent towards evil. And instead of loving God and pursuing God, we sinned against God and we rebel against God and we deliver our life outside of his good designs. And so even though God loves us, we blew it. And God, our Heavenly Father, had every reason whatsoever to leave us dead in our trespasses and sins. He would have been just. Our creator and rebelled against his designs, but God so loved the world.

He loved you enough. He loved me enough that he didn't leave us dead. He didn't leave us helpless and hopeless. He sent Jesus, his one and only Son, into the world. Jesus was God in the flesh. He took on flesh. And Jesus lived the life we were supposed to live. Jesus lived a sinless life of loving obedience to his heavenly father in every single way. He was tempted, he was tested just like us, but he never sinned. He never disobeyed God. In fact, that obedience took him all the way to the cross.

He willingly laid down his life on a Roman cross, was crucified by the Romans, not just to show us how to suffer, not just to show us a good man dying. But to actually pay the penalty for our sins, to take his sins onto our flesh, so that when he was suffering, it wasn't just

physical suffering, it was spiritual suffering. And he was crying out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? I was sinless. I loved you. I obeyed you. And you're crediting me with the sins of the world.

That's how much God loved you. He sent his son to pay the debt that you and I owed to him. And you know that debt was paid because three days later, after Jesus was crucified and buried, three days later God raised him from the dead, stamping the receipt, paid in full. Your sin is no longer a problem for you. Your sin has been atoned for. The power of sin, the penalty of sin has been broken in your life. You are free in Jesus Christ. You can be forgiven and go to heaven when you die.

All you must do is own your sin, repent of it, and put your faith in Jesus. Don't hope in your good efforts. Don't hope in your church attendance or all the other things that people hope in. Don't hope your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds. Put your hope in Christ and Christ alone and you will be saved. That's the gospel. Baptism is just pointing people to that gospel that we can die to sin and be raised to walk in newness of life. That's exactly what Paul says in Romans chapter 6.

This is the symbol of baptism. This is the theology of it. When you trust in Jesus, you are "buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life." In just a few moments, we're going to do some baptisms, and when we put people under the water, that's what we say. We say, Buried with him in baptism unto death, raised to walk in newness of life, because it's communicating the gospel message that saves.

Now if you're here this morning and you've never believed the gospel, if you've never repented of your sin and put your faith in Jesus as Lord, then today is the day of salvation. And when you believe on Jesus in that way, through your baptism, you're declaring to the world I am new. I am free from sin and Jesus is the Lord of my life. It's an outward change—I'm sorry, it's an outward sign of an inward change that only Jesus can bring. And so my question as we close is, Have you been biblically baptized?

And this morning, is it the case that maybe in your particular situation you need to be baptized? And if the answer to that question is yes, then don't let anything keep you from being obedient to what God's calling you to do. Some people allow anxiety, the fear of what people are going to think, to keep them from doing what they know Jesus has commanded them to do. They say to themselves, I was one of them. Well, I don't want to go down there. I don't want to be in front of everybody.

I don't want everybody looking at me. You know, your salvation is a personal decision. It's kind of a private thing. Surely Jesus can just kind of keep it private. He knows I'm inwardly folk. He knows I'm an introvert. He knows I'm shy. He'll be fine if I don't get baptized. No,

he's not. Every time someone responded to Christ in the Gospels, it was always publicly. He called for a public response. That kind of attitude, well I'll just worship Jesus personally. What happens when the going gets tough? What happens when someone questions you, do you really believe in Jesus?

Well, I do privately, but not publicly. That's not true commitment. That's not submission to Jesus as the king and the Lord. It requires a public response. Jesus makes this very clear in Matthew chapter 10, verse 32: "Everyone who will acknowledge me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven." Luke 9:26: "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and that of the Father and the holy angels."

So if that's your excuse, I would just put a rock in your shoe and say, is that really what you want to say to Jesus when you stand before him? I believed you for salvation, but I wouldn't be obedient in this area of my life because I'm shy. I know what it's like to be shy. I know what it's like to be an introvert. The Holy Spirit can help you overcome that fear to be obedient to Jesus Christ. And today's the day for you to make the decision. No more excuses.

No more anxiety. Don't allow fear of what people think to keep you. Some of you maybe this morning say it's just been so long. You know, I got baptized when I was young. I thought I was saved, but I really wasn't. I didn't get saved until 10, 15 years later as an adult. It finally kind of clicked for me. But I never got baptized because I was already so grown and I'd already kind of been baptized and I just kind of wanted to apply that baptism to my new salvation. That's not a biblical baptism.

Because the reality of faith wasn't there. The sign you received wasn't pointing to any substance. The substance came later, so the sign needs to come later. You say, well, it's not going to mean as much if I do it now. Who cares if it doesn't mean as much? Who cares what it feels like? It's a question of obedience or disobedience to the command of Jesus. And your feelings don't always have to matter when it comes to being obedient to Jesus. There are a lot of times Jesus asked me to do something I didn't feel like doing, but you do it anyway because it's a command of your Lord and king.

The feelings can come after the fact. Don't allow a lack of feelings to keep you from doing what you know Jesus wants you to do. I think maybe for us a lot of us in this room, your excuse is I've already been baptized. I was baptized as an infant, and if I get baptized now, I'm going to dishonor my parents. Because they baptized me so that I would come to know Christ and believe in him and walk in his ways. And I am, and I have, and I want to honor my parents by honoring that baptism.

And my answer to that is you're not dishonoring or discrediting that baptism. If anything, you're completing it. You're honoring your parents by completing the very thing they wanted for you, which was to trust Christ and obey Him in all of your ways. And if now in your adult life you would say, theologically, I think my parents were in error, I've got to allow what Jesus says to be more important than what my past experiences are. And I think it would be a way to honor your parents to allow your true, genuine faith in Jesus to drive you to obedience and being biblically baptized.

It doesn't discredit them. In fact, I've seen this happen a lot of different times. And every time someone who is baptized as an infant gets baptized as an adult, I've never not once seen parents be unsupportive or angry about it. I'm not saying it can't happen. I'm just saying it hasn't happened in my experience, and I don't think it will happen for you. Maybe you say, Well, my parents aren't here and I'm not ready. I don't have any clothes. Look, we have clothes. We have shirts. We have shorts. We have towels.

We even have blow dryers, for goodness sake. And it's being filmed, and so you can show your parents. Sometimes it's easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to ask for permission. And so you can show them after the fact. If you need to be baptized this morning, let today be the day. Listen, there's already people in this room who've made the decision. They're going to be baptized today. So if you decide to stand up in just a few minutes and go and be obedient to the command of Christ, you're not going to be alone.

You don't have to be afraid. You don't have to be singled out. If God is calling you through the Holy Spirit, if He's wrestling with you, then let today be the day you be obedient to Christ. The only reason you shouldn't be baptized is if you're not a Christian. And that excuse isn't going to last very long, because I'm about to lead you in a prayer that if you this morning say, I need to trust in Jesus, I need forgiveness of sin. I've been delaying it long enough. Today's the day of salvation.

I'm going to lead you through a prayer. And if you pray this prayer, I'm going to ask you in just a few minutes to raise your hand. And if you raise your hand, I want you to stand up and follow the rest of these people in being biblically baptized. So here's what's going to happen. Bonnie, who's right over here in this black dress, she's going to go stand over there by that door and she's going to receive all of the people who've already made the decision to be baptized and anybody else this morning who senses God calling them to be biblically baptized.

So in just a few moments, I'm going to pray. And those people who've already made the decision and you this morning, if you're making the decision to be baptized, you're all going to stand up together. And you're going to go meet Bonnie right over there at that door. Whether you're praying to receive Christ for the first time, or whether you've been a Christian for 40 years, but you've never been biblically baptized, today's the day for you to be

obedient to the command of Christ. So I want us to all bow our heads and close our eyes and give you an opportunity to make that decision.

With every head bowed and every eye closed, I'm going to pray a prayer. If you've never received Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, I want you to repeat this prayer after me. There's nothing magic about the words. It's not a supernatural prayer. It's the faith that will save you. But the way to express that faith is through prayer. And so if you just pray, Lord Jesus, I admit that I'm a sinner. Father, I admit my sins have separated me from you. And I believe the wages of sin is death and eternal separation from God.

But I also believe you loved me enough to send your son into the world to die on the cross for my sins. I thank you that Jesus paid my debt. I believe that he died for my sins. And I believe in my heart that three days later he was raised from the dead. And so Jesus, would you come into my heart? Would you save me from my sin? Forgive me and cleanse me. I confess you as my Savior and my Lord. I surrender my life to you today and forever. In Jesus' name, amen.

Now you can just keep your heads bowed and keep your eyes closed because I don't want anyone to feel insecure. But if you prayed that prayer this morning and you received salvation, I just want you to raise your hand high so I can see it. And if I see it, I'll say I see it. Raise your hand high enough so I can see it. I'll give you just a few more moments. Alright, if you're here this morning and you'd say, you know what, I've prayed to receive Christ and it's been several years, but if I'm honest, my baptism wasn't the way the Bible prescribes it to be.

And I'm sensing that the Lord wants me to be biblically baptized. Whatever the unique situation, some of that's irrelevant. But if that's you this morning and you want to make a decision to be biblically baptized, would you raise your hand just so I can see it? Alright, I see that hand. Thank you. Anyone else? Raise them up high so I can see them. Alright, you can go ahead and put your hands down. Here's what's going to happen in just a few minutes. I'm going to pray. And when I pray, those of you who've just raised your hands and all of you who've already made that decision and you've already scheduled your baptism, you're going to stand up with everybody else when they stand; you're going to stand up and you're going to go and meet Bonnie right over here at the door.

She's in black. And then we're going to sing a song together. We're going to make our way to the back and we're going to be obedient to the command of Christ to be baptized. So let me pray and then you do that. You stand up and follow her. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the special work of grace you're doing this morning. And whether it's baptism or any other thing, I pray as we respond to you now, we wouldn't leave anything on the table. We would be absolutely fully surrendered and obedient to what you're calling us to do.

Whether it's related to baptism or relationships or finances or any other thing, would you grant us the joy of total surrender and we pray it in Jesus' name.

1. Transcript note: spoken as "I don't think Methodist church baptizes people before they believe"; left as spoken, but the United Methodist Church does baptize infants. Source: United Methodist Church, "By Water and the Spirit" (umc.org). ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "John chapter 3 verse 33"; the verse about John baptizing "in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there" is John 3:23. Source: John 3:23 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩
3. Transcript note: spoken as "Paul evangelizes him"; in Acts 8:26–39 it is Philip who shares the gospel with and baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch (as Wes says earlier in the sermon). Source: Acts 8:35–38 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩