

THE SIGN OF BAPTISM

Open your bible with me to Acts 2. The rhythm of life in Collin County is people moving here and moving away. Ours is a transient culture. One of the ways we see this is by observing the bustling housing market. When someone is getting ready to move, there are signs that appear, and I'm not only referring to the 'for sale' sign in the front yard. There are other signs as well: delayed projects finally being completed, strangers coming to walk through the place, finally a moving truck arrives that hauls off boxes of belongings until all that stands is an empty house. Then another moving truck arrives with other people's possessions that fill the home, different automobiles are parked in the driveway, and new neighbors make that place their home. We are familiar with the signs that a house has been bought and sold, but what we don't see is what has gone on behind the scenes. Invisible to us, a presentation was made of the house, a price was agreed upon, a transaction occurred, and a new owner was named.

One of the rhythms of our outdoor service at The Trails Church is the observance of baptism. It would be correct to also think of baptism as a sign. The person being baptized stands and tells about the person and work of Jesus, they are plunged down into the water, and then come up again hearing the announcement that they have been, "raised to walk in newness of life." Yet, these are just the signs we can detect. Invisible to us, a presentation was made - someone shared with them the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. A price was agreed upon: a life for a life. Jesus died on a sinner's cross so this sinner might truly live. A transaction occurred: the person was declared righteous and fully forgiven through faith in Jesus. A new owner was named and moved in - now it is the Spirit of Christ himself who dwells in the heart of the person. The visible act of baptism is full of invisible realities of things that God has done.

Today is a day of true joy. The reason why we are gathered in this field is to circle our hearts around Christ and to be reminded once again of the good news of the gospel. That is one

of the things baptism is meant to do: reorient both the person being baptized and each witness present around the salvation, the forgiveness, the cleansing, the life that comes through Christ alone.

Sermon Summary

In Acts 2:37–41 we find that when someone believes in Jesus Christ as their Savior, what naturally follows are repentance and baptism. The act of baptism is rich with layers of meaning and significance in the Christian life. Behind each of the aspects we observe with our physical eyes are spiritual realities that have occurred in the heart. From these verses we will show that baptism is *1. A Sign of Belief, and 2. A Sign of Repentance.*

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

A Sign of Belief

The first truth we will highlight about baptism is that it is *A Sign of Belief*. Since we jumped into the middle of a critical moment of Scripture, let’s think back to how this scene began. Acts 2 opened with the disciples waiting in Jerusalem just as Jesus had instructed, when all of the sudden the Risen Christ sent his Spirit just like he promised. There was the rush of a mighty wind, fire hovering over each head, people telling the mighty works of God in languages they didn’t know! Then Peter stood up in a crowd and preached the good news of Jesus. When the crowd heard that Jesus truly was the promised Messiah that they had sentenced to death, they were cut to the heart with deep conviction. They came to realize that they were sinners in need a Savior. So, they asked Peter, “What do we do?” This question is even deeper than it might seem.

They are actually asking is, “What is required for salvation?”¹ Have you asked that question? Of course, what is required for salvation is simply placing your faith in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul explains in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

The baptisms recorded on that day point to multiple realities at the same time. First, the act of baptism was their profession of faith in *The Person and Work of Christ*. Verse 41 tells us that the ones being baptized were those who “received his word.” The word being referred to is the message Peter had preached: the news of who Jesus is and what he had come to accomplish with his life and death. Baptism was how they confessed belief that Jesus was the very Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah, the Lord of all. 2. *Baptism was also a Pledge of Allegiance to Christ*. Verse 38 details how these believers were baptized “in the name of Jesus.” These new converts were not baptized in the name of the apostles, or in the name of a tradition, but in the name of a person: Jesus. To be baptized as a Jew, or into a religious movement was not unheard of in that day as people were initiated into various communities of belief. The important thing here is that to be baptized in the name of Jesus was to pledge the rest of your life to worship and follow him as Lord. 3. Finally, baptism was a mark of *Identification with the People of God*. We learn from verse 41 that there were “added that day about three thousand souls.” What they were added to was the visible group of people who had already professed faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism identifies believers not only with Christ, but also with his church, “publicly committing... to Christ and his people.”² Three thousand people were baptized not only into the Christian faith but also into the Christian church. We will see beginning next week what this new community looked like and their radical devotion to Christ and their radical devotion to one another.

¹ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 971.

² Bobby Jameson, *Understanding Baptism* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 6.

Consider Your Baptism

As we witness these baptisms today, let me encourage each of us who are believers in Jesus to consider all that God has done for us in Jesus. Reflect on your own baptism and what it signifies. Perhaps each of us might leave today with a renewed sense of belief, of allegiance to Jesus, and our identity as belonging to the people of God. Baptism is *A Sign of Belief*.

A Sign of Repentance

The second truth about baptism is that it is *A Sign of Repentance*. The baptisms in Jerusalem were not only to recognize that they had believed the message, but also were repenting of sin. The word repentance indicates more than a change in thought or a redirection of feeling, it is, “a turning away from a sinful and godless way of life” now to follow the teaching of Jesus.³ The crowd was called to change their way of living in the world. Repentance is a vital part of coming to believe in Christ. As a matter of fact, you cannot come to him without repentance of sin. The heartbeat of the Old Testament biblical prophets was a call for Israel to “turn” or “return” to the Lord. The preaching of John the Baptist was a call to repentance evidenced by the act of baptism. Jesus himself proclaimed the good news of forgiveness while calling people to repent of their sin. Jesus said in Luke 13:3, “I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” He goes on to say in Luke 24:47 that, “repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed.” The New Testament church echoes that same call even to this day. In fact, one of the things baptism does is proclaim the good news that sins can in fact be forgiven! Now let us be clear, it is not baptism that brings forgiveness, it is not even our repentance that brings forgiveness, it is Jesus alone who forgives sin. Alistair Begg explains how forgiveness is, “Provided in Jesus, and portrayed in baptism.”⁴ So, let’s think of a few related realities that are portrayed in baptism.

³ I. Howard Marshall and I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Reprinted in this format, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, v. 5 (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 86.

⁴ Alistair Begg, *The Biblical Basis for Baptism* (Cleveland, OH, 1993).

Baptism portrays that a person has *1. Called on God for Salvation*. One of the Old Testament passages Peter explained in his sermon was Joel 2 which contains this glorious promise, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” The goal of Peter’s sermon was not for the people solely to just feel sorry for their sin, but that they might cry out to God to save them from their sin. Baptism also portrays that a person has *2. Been Cleansed of Sin*. The cleansing nature of baptism is a symbol that God had completely washed away the stain of sin. Christians have been completely cleansed. The act of cleansing has been an important external sign from the early days of our faith. In the Tabernacle and Temple system, people would ceremonially cleanse themselves as an outward show of holiness before God. In the act of baptism, a person is buried in the water identifying with the death of Christ that was paid for sin. As they are resurrected from the water they identify with the resurrection of Christ that proved the payment for sin had been made so that now the believer’s sins have been paid for in full and they are truly raised to walk in newness of life.

Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow

An Invitation

Last week we noted that even before an invitation was offered, people were asking what they should do about Jesus. I invited each of us to answer, “What have you done with Jesus Christ?” *If* Jesus Christ truly is the Son of God who lived a perfect sinless life, died in the stead of ruined sinners, was raised victoriously to life on the third day, each of us must decide what we will do about it. Either its true or it isn’t. Yet, we stand in a long line of witnesses who testify to the truthfulness of who Jesus was and what he accomplished for sinners. If you have been asking in your heart, “What must I do?” like those people from so long ago, you now clearly know the answer: believe, repent, and be baptized. If you would like to talk about that after the service, it would be my privilege to speak with you.

As we witness these baptisms today, we are reminded that something has happened to of each of us who have trusted in Jesus as our salvation: we heard the news of what he had done,

believed, and repented of our sin. And in that moment, God fully forgave us, completely cleansed us of our sin, and warmly welcomed us through the finished work of Christ. You didn't see all that – but the signs are there.

Conclusion

As the Gospel of Luke comes to an end, he records the last words of Christ during his earthly ministry spoken to his disciples. They were commanded to go and preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. As Peter's sermon comes to an end, this command is fulfilled for the first of many times – and a legacy of Christians calling people to believe, repent, and be baptized continues to this very day. On Lord's Day mornings over the last two thousand years, Christians have gathered to worship Christ – and as a central act of worship they have practiced baptism. Behind the sign of baptism in the case of each person is an invisible reality – a transaction has taken place, the price of forgiveness has been paid in full, and now they are under new ownership – raised to walk in newness of life.

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