

***“I Choose....”***  
**Baptism Service**  
**June 10, 2012**

As I begin would you pray with me?

*God, I just ask You speak to hearts through this service. Let my communication be clear and honoring to You. In Jesus' name, Amen*

I have searched to find  
The meaning of this life  
Something that would  
Fill my empty soul  
I choose Jesus  
The One Who first chose me

Some believe a lie  
Choose darkness over light  
But I will stand  
And let the whole world know  
I choose Jesus  
The One Who first chose me

Those words summarize exactly what we're going to be talking about this morning.

As a pastor, one of the comments I often hear is “I just don't understand what the Bible means or how

it applies to me.” Hopefully after our 40 Days in the Word series, we'll hear those less! But I think it's interesting that even in the Bible, there are stories of people who didn't understand what God's Word meant.

One of my favorite stories of this happening is in the book of Acts. Here we read about a man who was traveling by chariot between Jerusalem and Ethiopia. He was a high ranking government official, but he was also interested in spiritual things.

He had a copy of the scroll of Isaiah – which tells us he was a very wealthy man because ordinary people did have scrolls like this. He was reading aloud from the scroll and trying to understand what it meant.

Let's stop and make sure we've got the picture of what was happening. Here's a guy with money and intellect and position – but he knew something was missing in his life – much like the words in the song we heard just before the message....

I have searched to find  
The meaning of this life  
Something that would  
Fill my empty soul

OK, now back to the story... At the same time the government official was riding in his chariot, a follower of Jesus named Philip was walking down the same road. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit spoke to Philip and told him to go to the chariot and help the guy who was reading from the scroll.

So Philip approached the chariot and asked the government official, "Do you understand what you're reading?" The answer was "No, can you help me?" Philip said, "Yes" and he joined the man in the chariot.

Philip began reading from the scroll and shared the Good News of Jesus with the government official. As they rode along, they came to some water and the official asked Philip, "What prevents me from being baptized? I understand what Jesus came to do and I believe it. And I want to follow Him. And I want to be baptized right now to show that I've made that decision."

Philip's response was to stop the chariot and baptize the government official on the spot.  
(drawn from Acts 8:26-38)

One reason I love this story is because the government official didn't waste time arguing or questioning. He accepted the help of a stranger because he was so eager to learn. He also did what was probably a really undignified thing by deciding

to be baptized right then and there. And I think we can learn from his example.

First, we have to believe and trust some foundational truths. You may remember last week that Irving made a clear distinction between simply knowing and believing as opposed to actually putting our trust in Christ. You may remember his analogy of the chair – we can mentally assent to its existence – but it does us no good until we trust in it and use it for the purpose it was intended.

So the first foundational truth we have to trust is----

1. Every one has sinned.

In the Bible in Romans 3:23 we read:

*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

In some way or another, we have all gone against God. We may have lied, cheated, gossiped, lashed out in anger... the list goes on.

The Bible also teaches us....

2. The consequence of sin is death (eternal separation from God in a place called "hell"). This is a harsh truth, but it's not something we should ignore just because we don't like it.

In Romans 6:23 we read:

*The wages of sin is death....*

And in Romans 5:12 we read:

*Sin entered the world through one man (Adam), and also death through sin. And in this way death came to all men because all have sinned....*

The Bible makes it clear there is a penalty for sin. And someone had to pay the penalty for our unrighteousness, disobedience and guilt.

Which leads us to the third foundational truth ....

3. God Himself loved us enough to make a way for us to be set right with Him.

The Bible says:

*When we were utterly helpless [in other words, we couldn't do anything to pay for our sins], Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.*

*God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*

*Romans 5:6, 8 (NLT)*

God saw what a mess we were in and he made a way for us because He loves us.

And once we know that truth, we're no longer tricked into thinking we can be good enough on our own or that our good deeds will outweigh the bad ones. And that takes us to the fourth foundational truth:

4. We are not saved from (the penalty and power of) sin by what we do but only by what Jesus Christ has done (on the cross for us).

When we accept this truth, then scriptures like Ephesians 2:8-9 make sense:

*It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this **not from yourselves**, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.*

So let's recap – when we believe, we trust four foundational truths that will change our lives:

1. Everyone has sinned.
2. The consequence for sin is never-ending death.
3. God loves us so much He made a way for us to be set right with Him through Jesus.
4. We are not saved by what we do, but what Jesus has done.

The Bible also teaches when we trust in Jesus,

we need to repent, which quite literally means a change takes place in our minds.

When we repent for our sins, we completely change our minds about ourselves and God and about how life should be lived.

Our first choice is to trust in Jesus; our second choice is to repent.

In Romans 10 the Bible says:

*If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

*Romans 10:8-10*

People usually take those two steps of trust and repentance by praying a prayer. You may be thinking, "I've already done that". And if that's a case, let me ask a favor of you – right now, pray for those who haven't. Pray that God will use this moment to speak to those who need to hear from Him.

Praying isn't about special words. It's simply telling God what's on our hearts. In fact, I want to

ask you to bow your heads or close your eyes and just listen as I pray a prayer of trust and repentance

....

Jesus, I understand that I'm a mess. I've sinned against you, against others and against myself. I've depended on myself instead of You. I repent of that way of thinking and living.

I know I have no hope but You. I am a sinner and I need a savior. I know that you died on a cross to set me free from my sin and the penalty I should pay for my disobedience to God's way. I believe that you rose from the dead and that you are Lord.

So, I put my hope and my trust in you to save me from myself and from my sin. Jesus I put my faith in you and I ask you to be my Forgiver, my Leader and my Lord. Have your way in me. Amen.

Let me pause right here – if you feel something stirring inside you, that's not an "emotional" response. That's the same Spirit of God that Philip felt moving in him when we began talking with the Ethiopian official. Let me encourage you – don't ignore it or try to blow it off. It the most important thing that will ever happen in your life – which us to the third choice.....

The passage about Philip and the Ethiopian doesn't give us every single detail of what happened, but either Philip included Jesus' instruction to be baptized or the Ethiopian already knew about it. The point is the Ethiopian knew what to do and he did it immediately when he saw a pool of water.

First we choose to trust Jesus, then we choose to repent and finally, we choose to be baptized – to communicate to others the change that has happened in our hearts. Just to be clear – we can be saved and never be baptized. So why is baptism really important?

1. First, it's an act of obedience. We choose to be baptized because Jesus instructed us to do so. In Matthew 28, just before Jesus ascends to Heaven, He gives His followers these instructions:

*“Go and make disciples of all nations,” [he said], “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*  
*Matthew 28:19 (NIV)*

2. Baptism is also an act of worship. When we're baptized, we are publicly bowing down in submission to God and saying, “You are God and I am not. Let Your will be done in my life. I choose with all that I am to worship You.”

3. Finally, baptism is a sign of commitment. When we're baptized, we choose to make a public commitment to our relationship with Jesus.

In fact, the act of baptism is a symbolic picture of dying to our old way of life without Jesus (when a person goes under the water). And when a person comes out of the water, it signifies they are choosing a new life with Jesus just as Jesus was raised from the dead.

### **Closing**

So what's left to do? Well, if you signed up to be baptized today, I'd like for you to come down front and we'll get you lined up and ready to go. You can come right now....

Now for the rest of you – when I prayed that prayer during the message, you may have prayed it with me. It may have been the first time or the 100<sup>th</sup> time. But in your depths of your heart, you meant it. And if that's the case, there's only one thing that stands between you and being baptized today – and that's your pride.

We have extra towels and even some extra shirts. But more than that, we have water and we a church that wants to celebrate with you today. So during

the next two worship songs I want to invite you to come to this side of the stage so we can write down your name and begin that celebration!

We have one quantifier – if you’re younger than middle school and you haven’t signed up ahead of time, we want to ask you to wait until you’ve had a chance to discuss this with your parents. And yes, we’ll have another baptism soon 😊

As I said before – if you feel something stirring inside of you, don’t make the mistake of chalking it up to “just emotion”. That’s God’s Holy Spirit inviting you to choose His way and to share that decision with these folks today.

So Nathan, in a paraphrase of the Ethiopian government official – let’s do this thing!!

Worship 3 ABOJ/IAF

Worship 4 Great God Who Saves