

Baptized! 6-23-02

This afternoon we have the wonderful opportunity to join with the believers of our community and baptize some new believers and some that would like to testify to their commitment to a new life in Christ Jesus. Three women from our church will join with others in making a public declaration of their faith. This is a good opportunity to look at baptism and consider afresh all that it means to us.

Baptism is an ancient tradition. The word can apply to ceremonial washing and is used as such in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. That would put the origin back about 3500 years or more. The word comes directly from Greek without translation because of its varied uses. This broad usage has given rise to many different forms of baptism, all having their basis in the various meanings of the word.

At the time of Christ, several Greek cults baptized their new members into their sects. Some would go so far as to bury the new member alive and unbury them just at the point of suffocation, hoping to resuscitate them with an afterlife memory fresh in their minds. Then they would give them a name related to the god they were devoting themselves to. It implied that their old life was gone and they were born again to serve the god of their sect. You will find that Satan copies things of God and turns them toward himself. Another example of the cultural use of baptism is when a slave owner would baptize his slaves in public to show that the slaves had become his possession. Their life was no longer their own but was now to be lived for their new master. Baptism showed ownership.

The Jews also baptized. They had many ceremonial types of washing, some prescribed by the Law and some encouraged by overzealous Rabbi in extra-biblical writings. In front of the temple there have been discovered large ceremonial baths for this type of cleansing before worship. The Jews also had a tradition of baptizing Gentile converts to Judaism. This type of baptism was not merely a cleansing but like the Greek cults, it implied a death to the old life and birth into a new faith. They were now living for the one true God.

When John came baptizing he was implying a death of the old ways and being born again to a holy life. It was the baptism of repentance. Jesus came to John to be baptized. Let us read again that passage from Matthew 3:13-17 (NIV)¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

John knew that Jesus did not need to repent. Why was Jesus asking to be baptized? Last week we briefly contemplated stepping into others shoes and as Daniel and Nehemiah did in their intercessory prayers. Jesus as the representative of man was being baptized. He was giving us an example. He was being obedient to His Father. The Spirit descended on Him like a dove and the voice of God proclaimed Him to be the Son, the One that pleases the Father's heart. Jesus did everything we should do, even though He was not guilty of sin.

Before His ascension He commanded the disciples to baptize.

Matt 28:19 (NIV)¹⁹ *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,...*

This was one of only two ceremonial things that Jesus asked us to do. The other is communion. Communion represents what Jesus did for us in a picture form. The bread reminds us of His broken body and the cup reminds us of His blood. The ceremony focuses on what He did for us.

Baptism represents our identification with Jesus in His death and resurrection.

The focus in this sacrament is our identification with Him. Because the act of baptism is not actually a part of our salvation, many believers downplay its importance, but those same believers take communion regularly. Jesus asked us to do both. You can see the importance of both when you consider that one reminds us what He did for us and the other reminds us of our participation with Him. Jesus demonstrated the need for man to be baptized by being baptized Himself. He also had His disciples baptize others both before and after the ascension. Obviously it was an important thing to Him.

Let's examine the reality that the picture of baptism represents. Just as with the Greeks, it gave the watching world a picture of commitment. It said, "I have a new Master. I am no longer my own. I now serve another." It is a declaration to the world that things have changed in your life. Baptism was done in public places so all could see. It was a way to make this new commitment public. In the early days of the church that was a dangerous thing to do. It wasn't something you did lightly, because it could cost you your life. People would gather and watch to see who would make such a commitment.

The Apostle Paul describes the meaning of baptism in Romans 6:1-14 (NIV)¹

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.¹⁰ The death he died, he died to

sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.¹³ Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.¹⁴ For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Verse 3 tells us that we were baptized into His death. Verse 4 says we are buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too should live a new life. This gives us some insight into the mind of first century believers. What were they thinking when they went under the water? Burial! The old life was put to death with Christ. He died for our sins and that is what our old life was all about, rebellion against God. But what is this coming out of the water? A new birth! Born again! Just as you were first physically born in a sack of water, so now you are born again by water. You are raised to a new life with Jesus. If you died with Him and were buried with Him, then you are raised with Him to a new life. Your life should be totally different from your old life. New life! Life in the Spirit! Don't go back to the old patterns of living. Let God guide you daily!

⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. Verse four says your spirit is made new, a new heart that is tender toward God right now, but this verse is future tense. One day your body will physically be raised. Just as Jesus was physically raised you will be raised. Our baptism is not only a declaration of what we are by the grace and mercy of God, but a declaration of our hope in the future resurrection of our physical body. We should live today like resurrected people. We died and now we no longer live but Christ lives in us.

We are dead men walking. Our heart has changed and we submit to God and our bodies express that change, but these bodies must also be transformed to live in God's glorious presence. So these bodies are slated for the coming transformation in which they will perfectly match the new creation we have become in Jesus. So as we are baptized we come up with a new hope of living in Jesus in this life AND the hope of that our body will one day be transformed to live in His presence for eternity. We ought to come up out of that water with a shout of praise!

There is one more aspect of baptism that deserves our attention. John said he baptized with water, but One was coming after Him, One whose shoes he wasn't worthy to tie. This One will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire! The word baptized can mean to be saturated in something. John was saying, "Jesus is going to soak you in the Holy Spirit! You're going to be dripping with the Spirit of God when Jesus gets a hold of your heart."

When we received Christ as your Savior we got all of Him. We have all the Holy Spirit committed to living within us, but we don't always give Him all of us. We reserve our little areas of self, and that hinders His freedom from reigning in us. Our insistence on keeping areas of our life from His Lordship limits the Life of Christ expressed in us. We need a baptism of fire, to purge out the things that don't last. Fire consumes the temporal. Trials and struggles come into our lives as a baptism of fire to clarify in us just what is really important, worthwhile, lasting, and of genuine value. When we let go and surrender those areas to Him He fills up those places with Himself. We are being filled with the Holy Spirit, saturated and soaked in Him. His flavor is working His way into every area of our life. When the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5:18 "Don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit", he was speaking in the present passive imperative. We could express it like this, "Don't be soaked with wine, you must let the Holy Spirit saturate you now!" It is not something you do but something you allow. You give permission for Him to fill every area of your heart, your desires, and your dreams.

Do the words from your lips have the flavor of the Holy Spirit? You might need to let Him baptize you – soak you in Himself. Do the things you allow your eyes to see please the Holy Spirit? Are your desires Godly ones or destructive? Don't keep Him out of any area of your life so that you can be fully baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Are you baptized? Do you see how varied the meanings can be? I'll list the ones we have covered in the message today. Have you made public commitment that says you have a new master? Have you identified yourself with Him in His death and are you living in resurrected life with Him today? Do you have that hope that since you have died with Him you can now live with Him and that one day your body will be raised also, to live in His presence? Have you followed His example and the command to be baptized?

Have you allowed the Holy Spirit to have all of you without reserve? Many people pray to be baptized in the Holy Spirit because they want an experience, a feeling, or something special. If you give Him all of yourself without any reservation – you'll get soaked – you'll be saturated, you'll be baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will have all of you. In Luke 11:13 Jesus said, "If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those that ask."

This afternoon I hope all of you that can come will be there to witness these three ladies from our fellowship and others from other churches obey Jesus' command. There will be about 25 people being baptized. If you would like to follow Jesus' example and command, it is not too late. You can join them. And to all of us let me again say that paraphrase of the Apostle Paul – 'you must let the Holy Spirit saturate you now.' Amen?