

Here / There - Baptism

Baptisms are one of my favorite things as a minister. I love it when someone is baptized into Christ. However, baptisms don't always go as planned. Top 10 Signs Your Baptism service is not going as it should....

10. The Coast Guard has to become involved in any way.
9. The service is held at "Splash Mountain Water Park."
8. The minister is wearing full scuba gear.
7. The praise band accompanies the baptism with the theme from JAWS.
6. The preacher uses plastic animated 'Billy the Bass' singing *Take Me Down to the River* instead of the traditional *Shall We Gather at the River*.
5. You hear the minister say, "Oops! Honestly, I didn't know about that drop-off"
4. The preacher can't get the person being baptized back up out of the water and has to call for "Help!"
3. The elders show up with fishing gear and packing a cooler.
2. You have to wait for the cottonmouths to clear the area before getting in.

And the Number 1 Sign Your Baptism service is not going as it should....

1. Video of kid doing a cannonball into baptistery.

Baptism is to your relationship with Jesus as a wedding is to a marriage. Being baptized is one of the most important things you will ever do in life.

For some of you, this message will be a refreshing reminder of precious truths you have held dear for years. For others, it will give you a new appreciation for something you knew was important, but you weren't really sure why. Still, for others, we will be taking baptism off the shelf and blowing off the dust for the first time. And for some of you, I hope and I pray that you may hear God's call this morning, and receive His promises in the water of baptism.

In 1 Peter 3:18-22 we find one of the most important passages in the NT on baptism, *18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*

Peter has been talking about suffering as a Christian, and in this part of 1 Peter 3 he has held up Jesus' example for us in his own suffering. How was Jesus able to endure all

that He suffered? It was because His life had a singular focus and purpose. His mission? In vs. 18, Peter says it was “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous,*” ...why? “*that he might bring us to God.*” God wants to have a relationship with you. Your Creator loves you, and Jesus was willing to go to the greatest lengths to bring you to God.

God's heart for you isn't to ruin your good time. It isn't to punish you or condemn you. It isn't to impose a whole bunch of rules. His greatest desire is to love you and be loved by you. And Jesus was willing to suffer so that relationship could happen. What this means for us is this: because of what Jesus suffered for us, we have the confidence that we will be made alive too, no matter what life throws at us.

No matter what hardships, no matter what trials, no matter what struggles, no matter what heartaches, we can have assurance that our souls will live in an eternal relationship with our Creator. How can we have this confidence? Because God has given us these amazing spiritual promises in the very physical, tangible form of baptism.

Every time I look at my wedding ring I remember my wife's promise of love and commitment. I remember our wedding that sealed our relationship with vows. In the same way baptism is the promise of God's love and commitment to us. It seals our relationship with Him. Every one baptized into Christ can rest in the assurance that at a specific time and a specific place you received the promises of God.

I have here a baptismal certificate for someone we baptized here. They can look at this and know that on this date at Son-Rise Christian Church, I received the promises of God.

Let's take a closer look at these verses and consider three important truths we learn about baptism.

I. Baptism Saves You

The first thing that jumps out and grabs you is this, “*baptism . . . now saves you.*” Peter says that baptism saves you. What makes this statement stand out so much is the fact it is so contrary to what so many churches preach and teach. In fact, I've heard a lot of preachers say Baptism has nothing to do with salvation. How do you square that with what Peter says?

I have done some very in depth research on this statement. I've studied the original Greek, the meaning of the words, how they are used in other passages, and how they would have been understood by Peter's 1st Century audience. After all of this intensive study I've concluded that what Peter really says in this phrase, “*baptism now saves you,*” is literally

this, “*baptism now saves you.*” His statement is clear. It is concise. It is unequivocal.

It makes me wonder why so many feel so free to ignore, deny, or explain away what the Bible so clearly teaches about baptism. I have a commentary on 1 Peter in my office that skips this verse completely. It just ignores it, but in the footnotes includes this statement, *What is fundamental to understanding the early church's attitude toward baptism is (1) that early Christians were much more ritualistic than most moderns, and (2) that all early Christians were baptized. Thus, there was no such thing as an “unbaptized believer” in Peter's day. This approach to the rite permits Peter to say things about baptism that many modern Christians would not want to say.*

Did you catch all that? He admits that the New Testaments knows nothing of an unbaptized believer. He says that both Peter, as an apostle and inspired author of the N.T., and the N.T. church were comfortable saying things about baptism, that many today are not. Maybe the problem isn't with what Peter and the Bible teach. It's what we teach.

Peter says that baptism saves us. Maybe the reason so many today have a problem with that statement is they don't really understand what the Bible says about baptism. Here's what scares people when it comes to talking about baptism in the same context with salvation. Two things. 1.) They are concerned that baptism is something we do to get saved. It becomes a work to earn salvation and therefore goes against being saved by grace through faith. 2.) There have been some who overemphasize baptism and act like the only thing that matters is getting people dunked in water.

So, let's take a look at the bigger picture of what the bible says about baptism and salvation. There are a number of things the Bible says save us:

- Calling on the name of the Lord (Ac. 2:21; Rom. 10:13).
- Message of the gospel (Ac. 11:14; Rom. 10:14-17).
- Faith through grace (Ac. 15:11; Eph. 2:8).
- Resurrected life of Christ (Rom. 5:10).
- Confession (Publically acknowledge Jesus before others) (Mat. 10:32; Rm. 10:9).
- Repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).
- Belief in the truth (2 Thes. 2:13; Heb. 10:39)
- Washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. - Baptism? (Titus)
- Baptism (1 Peter 3:21; Mk. 16:16; Ac. 2:38)

Now either the N.T. writers were idiots and these Scriptures contradict each other, or they complement each other, and we must understand all of this is a part of a bigger picture. To emphasize any of them over the others is to skew that picture.

What we see here is that salvation is a process, not just a singular event. Peter said earlier that we grow in our salvation (2:2). The author of Hebrews speaks of growing in those things that accompany salvation (6:9). Salvation is a process involving many ingredients. It begins when the seed of God's message of salvation falls on the fertile soil of our hearts and begins to take root. It reaches its full culmination when we are taken to spend eternity with Christ in heaven. There are many steps in the process between these two points. We must believe the message. We must repent of our sins. We must confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We must be baptized into Christ. We must obey Him. We must continue in our growth in our relationship with Jesus.

The scriptures tell us that all who go through this process will be saved. This process may not always work the same way and the same order for everyone, but all the steps are there. It's like baking a cake. You may vary the order in which the ingredients are added, but all the ingredients are needed to make the cake. Baptism is one of those important ingredients.

The inevitable question that comes up is this: can any of these ingredients be left out or substituted? Or more directly, can someone be saved without being baptized? Honestly, I don't know. But I do know this. God promises salvation to all who fulfill these steps. If some are saved who haven't done all of them, then praise be to God, for they have been saved by God's grace just as I have.

Scripture does promise salvation to all who do these things. That same promise is not assured to those who don't. Those who teach salvation apart from baptism, or apart from repentance, or apart from confession, or apart from any part of this process are teaching something the Bible does not. The biblical assurance of God's promises are given to baptized believers. As a preacher I am required to preach all of the word, and God's Word includes all of these ingredients in salvation. For me to leave one out would be presumptuous at best, and damning at worst. For Peter faith without baptism is unthinkable.

Some say baptism is merely symbolic. But Peter says that the flood in the O.T. is the symbol, and that N.T. baptism is the reality. Certainly, there are symbolic elements in baptism, but something very real happens in baptism

So these verses clearly include baptism in the salvation process, but we have to be careful that we don't make it the whole process. Peter makes a very deliberate point about baptism's role in salvation and here it is.

II. Baptism Doesn't Automagically Save You

Baptism saves you, but baptism doesn't automatically save you. Some have this idea that baptism has some sort of magical or mystical power. They think that the mere act itself automatically generates some spiritual reward. They see it as their "Get Out of Hell Free Card).

But Peter clearly says here that it is not the outward act of baptism by itself that saves you. Vs. 21 says it is "*not as a removal of dirt from the body.*" The fact that your body is immersed into a tub, a pool, a pond, or a river of water accomplishes nothing in and of itself.

And it isn't the fact that you do it in a church or a religious ceremony. It isn't who baptizes you. I truly believe that there are a lot of people who've done nothing more than take a quick bath in church. God's not a genie in a bottle, who is obligated to save you if you rub the bottle of baptism. He is your Creator who desires to have a relationship with you, and He has given us a way to accept His offer of a relationship. Christ died for us to bring us to God. That was His vision, His purpose, His mission. Baptism is how we come to Him, but it is not some magical ritual that gives us free fire insurance against the flames of hell.

This does not mean that the outward act of baptism is unimportant, and we can just ignore it. It just means that it does nothing by itself. So, if it is not the outward act of baptism that saves, then what is it? Well, Peter tells us.

III. Baptism Requires A Response of Faith

Peter says it is, "*Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience.*" There is more than meets the eye when it comes to baptism. The true working power of baptism is when the obedience on the outside is moved by true faith on the inside. True baptism is a response of faith. Just as faith without baptism was unthinkable to Peter, so baptism without faith was equally unthinkable.

This act of baptism has power when it is an outward expression of an inner reality. Even though baptism does not save through the physical action, it is still baptism that saves. Baptism accomplishes something real in conjunction with certain inner realities. Some try to separate these realities into two distinct things, but Scripture never does.

What is this inner response of faith? The ESV says that baptism is *an appeal to God for a good conscience*. The word used here refers to an inquiry or an appeal. It is to ask with the expectation of a positive reply. In baptism we are asking God, we are appealing to him, pleading with him to clear our conscience. To cleanse us of our guilt. To wipe our shame away.

I know a lot of us use the NIV and I do too, but it has a very unfortunate translation here. It says “*the pledge of a good conscience toward God.*” This makes it sound like baptism is something we do for God. It makes it sound like baptism saves us because we promise God to live a clean life. This would mean that we can save ourselves, or in some way earn our own salvation. This is not what Peter means here. The ESV has it right. It is an appeal to God.

The word used here refers to an inquiry or an appeal. It is to ask with the expectation of a positive reply. The inner reality of baptism is this– In faith we are throwing ourselves at God’s mercy, crying out to Him to cleanse our hearts. And because of the resurrection of Jesus we have full expectation of God's positive reply. As we go down into the water in baptism we make an appeal to God, as we come up we have the assurance that we have received the promises of God.

In baptism, we receive a whole host of promises connected with salvation.

- We are born again (John 3:3-5; Titus 3:5).
- We receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ac. 2:38).
- Our sins are washed away (Ac 22:16).
- We are joined to Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-6)
- Our sinful nature is done away with (Rom 6:3-6).

More than a command, baptism is a promise. When you are baptized you are not merely obeying a command. You are accepting a promise from a gracious God that longs to have a relationship with you. Think of a doctor who tells a patient, “Do you want to get well? Then take this medicine.” Though the instruction is in the form of a command, the sick patient takes a hold of the doctor's word as a promise of hope.

In this way, baptism does not contradict salvation by faith through grace.

Although the believer makes an appeal to God in salvation, it is God who responds and does the work within baptism. We cannot cleanse our own conscience. Baptism is not a work of man. It is a work of God. Whenever the N.T. talks about what is accomplished in baptism, it is God who does the work. Baptism is not something we do for God. It is something He does for us and in us

We see the power of God that's at work in baptism in the last part of vs. 21. Peter has told us that baptism saves us. But he is quick to point out that it’s not the outward act that does the saving. The only thing we do in baptism is make an appeal to God. It is God who responds to our appeal of faith, and “*saves us by the power of the resurrection of Jesus*

Christ.” This is the true power of baptism. It is in baptism that we come in contact with the resurrection of Jesus. Baptism has power because God works in it, and it carries His promises.