

Dave Erickson, of Academy Christian Church of Colorado Springs tells the story of two preacher's sons who were wiling away the Saturday afternoon hours at the church while their father worked on his sermon for the next morning. If you've ever explored an empty church alone as a bored kid, you know that that there are plenty of tantalizing distractions to entertain young minds.

You can go to the nursery and eat the Nilla Wafers meant for babies. You can go to the kitchen and sample what 20 servings of communion taste like. You can raid the craft closet and create a disaster area of crayon, glue, pipe cleaners, and construction paper. These two young preacher's kids discovered that the baptistery could be fun.

While splashing each other with water, one of the boys accidentally knocked a stray thumbtack into the water where they made the most amazing discovery. The thumbtack became a torpedo, and made an interesting whirling motion to its imaginary target below.

Armed with this vital information, the boys began to scour every bulletin board in the church for every unclaimed thumbtack. They lined them all up on the baptistery sill; one by one flicking them into the water. They spiraled to the bottom with their imaginary explosions below.

Soon enough the thumbtacks were gone; out of sight, out of mind until about 10:55 the next morning. Their father had wound up to his invitation, to which elderly Mr. Johnson walked down the aisle and responded. The church had been praying for his salvation for years, and now he had finally come.

Mr. Johnson announced his decision to receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior and to be baptized. It was at this point that two young boys sitting in the front row began to sweat great drops of blood. The big moment arrived. Their father was the first to step down into the baptistery, and the boys began to breathe easy when their dad showed no sign of distress.

What they failed to realize was that their dad was wearing waders with thick rubber soles. Next was Mr. Johnson with bad hips and arthritic knees. Upon stepping from the bottom step, elderly Mr. Johnson engaged in a Holy Spirit inspired prebaptismal dance the likes of which hadn't been seen since the 1st Century. Mr. Johnson was immersed...several times, and the first three rows were thoroughly sprinkled.

When we talk about the power of baptism, that is not what we're talking about. But we do want to talk about the power and importance of baptism this morning. God intended baptism to be a powerful, life changing experience.

God also intended baptism to be a unifying experience, a common glue that holds us all together— that every Christian could look back to their baptism and remember who they are, and whose they are. In Ephesians 4, Paul urges the church to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. He says,

4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs

to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism" that joins us all together. Somehow though we have managed to splinter this idea of baptism into a hundred different pieces, so that more often than not, it's become something that divides us; something that confuses us.

Do we baptize infants or only those old enough to understand, and just how old is that? Do you immerse, sprinkle or pour? Then there's water baptism and baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the list goes on.

Did you hear about the Baptist kid, who had a cat that got sprayed by a skunk? The Baptist kid's mom said he had to give the cat a bath before it could come back into the house. He tried to immerse the cat in a bucket of soapy water, but the cat clawed the kid's arms to ribbons. He tried to pour the bucket of water on the cat, but the cat kept escaping. Frustrated and bleeding, the Baptist kid finally grabbed a spray bottle of Febreze and said, "Cat, you stink so much, that I will make a Presbyterian out of you, and just sprinkle you, and you can go to hell!"

Despite all these differences though, we need to see one crucial fact, that baptism of some variety is universally practiced in the church. As Mark Moore points out in Core 52, "Baptism is a big deal. Every church throughout Christian history has practiced it in some form." We can agree on that.

So, if you're going to cover 52 of the most important teachings of the Bible, Baptism is certainly going to make the list. And our Core Verse this week is that verse. It comes from Acts 2:38. Here's the scene.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit before going into all the world to be His witnesses. That happened 40 days after Jesus' death which was Passover week for the Jews.

10 days later, or 50 days after Passover came another Jewish feast. This was known as the feast of weeks. It was to celebrate the first fruits of the harvest. It was also known as Pentecost, which means 50, so there's the 50 days past Passover.

Just like with Passover, Jews from all over the empire came to Jerusalem to worship and offer sacrifices. The temple is once again filled with crowds. It was during this festival that the promised Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples as they were waiting in the upper room in Jerusalem. When the Holy Spirit came upon them, the disciples were empowered to miraculously speak in different languages.

So, you had these people who came from different nations all over the empire, and you have the apostles filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking all these different languages. Acts 2:6 says, *"each one heard them speaking in his own language."*

At this point, Peter stands up and addresses the crowd and this becomes the very first sermon in the history of the church. His whole sermon is about Jesus. How God used the Jewish people to prepare the way for Him. He talked about the life and ministry of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, and the ascension of Jesus. He then points out that it was this very Lord and Messiah that they and their fellow Jews only 50 days earlier had conspired to murder. But it was all a part of God's plan.

In verse 37, it says, *"they were cut to the heart,"* heartbroken with the horrific realization that they were co-conspirators in the execution of their own Savior sent from God. It sent them reeling. In desperation, they cry out, *"What shall we do?"* Is there any way to avoid the inevitable wrath of God?

And Acts 2:38, our Core Verse, is Peter's answer.

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."

Peter specifically calls them to do two things: repent and be baptized. Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of direction. In this case, it means to turn away from sin and turn toward God.

Let's talk about baptism for a moment, because it's a word that means different things to different people. Baptism comes to us right out of the Greek. It is based on the Greek words *bapto*, or *baptizo* which means to plunge, to dip or immerse. In the 1st Century it was used to describe the sinking of a ship, dyeing fabric, or dropping something in the water, as well as ceremonial religious washings. All of these things were said to be *baptized*.

Just from this language alone, it seems that immersion was the original intent of baptism in the New Testament. This is apparent in the Biblical accounts as well. John the Baptist baptized in the Jordan River where, according to John 3:23 the *"water was plentiful."* In Acts 8, Philip took the Ethiopian Eunuch *"down into the water"* to baptize him.

Moreover, immersion best fits with the symbolism of baptism which Paul says in Romans 6:4-5 is a portrayal of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

There's no verse that says you can't sprinkle or you can't pour, but if you tell someone to do A, you shouldn't have to say, "Don't do B." It seems best to do Bible things in Bible ways. If the word means to plunge, dip or immerse, and that's how they did it, then that's what we should do. I do not say this to judge what anyone else does, but to explain why we do what we do.

As far as who should be baptized, the Bible never gives a minimum age. However, every Baptism we see in the Bible is someone old enough to know what they are doing. It is someone who is responding in faith, someone able to accept who Jesus is. Even here in our Core Verse, the person being baptized is someone capable of repenting. An infant simply cannot do that.

Baptism is not a decision you can make for someone else.

All right, with those two questions out of the way, let's dive into our Core Verse and see what it has to teach us about baptism.

Baptism Expresses What God is Doing Inside of You

The first thing is that baptism expresses what God is doing inside of you. Baptism doesn't work by itself. There's nothing special about the water. Throw it on a vampire and it'll just get wet. It is not some sort of magical "Get Out of Hell Free" card.

Baptism becomes meaningful as an expression of spiritual realities that are happening inside of you. Here, in Acts 2:38, It is an expression of repentance. "Repent AND be baptized." No promise is given to the person who is only baptized. Repentance and baptism work together. Suddenly, baptism becomes a powerful expression of the fact that you are turning away from sin and seeking Jesus.

If you are getting baptized just because it's expected. Just to make sure all the bases are covered, just to make your parents happy, your girlfriend happy, your spouse happy, I've got some bad news for you. You're just taking a bath in front of people. It means nothing. It does nothing.

In 1 Peter 3:21 the apostle says, *"Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body (There's nothing special about the water) but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."*

It is not the outward act of Baptism that does the saving. The only thing we do in baptism is make an *"appeal to God for a good conscience."* It is God who meets our faith and *"saves us by the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* Baptism is an expression of your desire for spiritual change. God gave us baptism as a way to cry out to Him, and say, "Change me. Make me yours. Forgive me. Make me whole again." Baptism is the way to throw yourself upon the grace and mercy of God. In this way, baptism is an expression of what God is doing inside you.

Baptism Connects You to Salvation

Secondly, Baptism connects you to salvation. Acts 2:38 asks these people who are responding to Peter's gospel message to do two things: They are to repent, and they are to be baptized.

Then he gives them two specific promises that will be theirs if they repent and are baptized. The first is the forgiveness of their sins. All their guilt wiped clean. Every bad thing wiped away. You turn from your sin and get baptized into the name of Jesus, He will take all that sin and get rid of it.

The second is they will they receive the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit will come and dwell within them. And from the Scriptures we looked at two weeks ago, this is how God seals us in our salvation.

This is how God begins to change us from the inside out to make us more like Jesus.

This tells us something very important– baptism connects you to salvation. Both of these things: the gift of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness of sins are integrally tied to salvation. Baptism isn't the cause of your salvation. It isn't the source, but baptism is a part of the salvation process. Baptism is something that happens as a part of being saved.

Many people have a problem with this, even though it is a clear teaching of Scripture. They are very reluctant to accept that baptism has anything to do with salvation. They say that baptism is just something you do sometime after salvation.

Here's the problem with that, something inside of us when we are convicted of our sin, when we desire forgiveness, when we want to follow Jesus, something inside of longs to express that in some way. We need respond in some way. And so we have people raise their hands. We have people fill out cards. We have people come forward and express their desire. We have people pray a sinner's prayer, even though it doesn't exist in Scripture. There is not one example of someone in the Bible becoming a Christian by saying a prayer. Guess what they do in the Bible to become a Christian? They are baptized. Baptism is the response God has given us when we want to follow Jesus. If Jesus is the bridegroom and we are the bride, baptism is the wedding.

And I understand people's reluctance to accept this. How can baptism be connected to salvation if we are saved by faith through grace, and not by works? Wouldn't baptism be a work done to earn salvation?

If you look at baptism as human work, then they are absolutely right. If baptism is a human work done to earn salvation, then by all means, it would be quite inappropriate to connect it to salvation.

However, nowhere in Scripture is baptism portrayed as a work that we do to earn salvation. Although the believer makes an appeal to God in salvation, it is God who does the work within baptism. We do not cleanse our conscience, nor are we capable of erasing our own sins. Baptism is not a human work. 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.

Let me take you on a little detour here. The Bible speaks to a number of different things which, quote, unquote, "save you."

- Acts 11:14 *he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.*
- Acts 16:31 *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.*
- James 1:21 *Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

- Romans 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.*
- Romans 10:9 *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
- Ephesians 2:8 *For by grace you have been saved through faith.*
- 2 Corinthians 7:10 *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret*
- 2 Thes. 2:10; 1 Tim 2:4 *it is a knowledge and love of the truth that saves you.*
- Romans 10:13-17 *For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?[c] . . . 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

The Gospel message from the Word of God will save you. Belief and faith in Jesus will save you. Confessing that Jesus is Lord will save you. Repentance saves you. Knowing the truth will save you. Hearing the good news will save you. Calling on the Lord will save you.

What does all of this tell us? It's not a single thing that saves you all by itself. Salvation is a process. It is a journey that involves multiple stages. It is a group of things working together to bring about salvation in your life.

Here's how this connects to baptism. Baptism is a part of that process. It's one of the ingredients in the package.

Mark 16:16 says, *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."* Here baptism is working hand in hand with belief. It is an expression of saving faith, just like in Acts 2:38 it works hand in hand with repentance.

We've already looked at 1 Peter 3:21, *"Baptism...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."*

When baptism expresses your desire to turn from sin, your desire to follow Jesus, it connects you to everything Jesus has done for you. But number 3, and this is the most important of all

Baptism joins You with Jesus.

Baptism joins you with Jesus. Baptism doesn't just connect you with all the benefits and blessings of Jesus. It joins you to Jesus Himself. It makes you His brother or His sister. It makes you a child of God.

Look back at Acts 2:38. How are we to be baptized? *"In the name of Jesus Christ."* What does it mean to be baptized in Jesus' name? It's not a magic formula, like abracadabra or open sesame, as if merely saying those words is a powerful incantation.

It also doesn't mean that if those exact words aren't spoken at your baptism, then all the

sudden it's no good. Do it again! Illegitimate baptism. Remember, in the Great Commission Jesus said we were to go into all the world baptizing people in the name of the Father, and the name of the Son, and the name of the Holy Spirit. But 3 times in Acts we see people baptized in the name of Jesus. People and churches actually fight about what is the correct formula. I even read one guy who said that any church that baptizes only in the name of Jesus and not the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a cult. Come on! That is entirely missing the point. What if a deaf person was baptized by a mute pastor? Would it not count?

In the 1st Century names were incredibly important. Names weren't picked because they sounded good, but they were chosen because they were to represent that person's identity. In fact, a name could be changed to reflect a change in their life. Names were descriptive. Names were to be defining. Names were something to be lived up to.

To do something in someone's name was to do it by their authority, or power, or according to their identity, their intention, their purpose. In weddings, preacher's will sometimes say, "By the authority invested in me by the state of Missouri." The idea is that our power to pronounce someone husband and wife, isn't our own, but comes from the state. I no longer say that, because the state does not define marriage, God does. My authority to marry doesn't come from the state, but God himself.

To be baptized in Jesus' name is to be baptized according to his power, his will, his identity. You are identifying yourself with Jesus, as one of his own. You take on His name. Married ladies, how many of you, before you were married, practiced writing what would become your married name? You were taking on a new name, a new identity. Two were becoming one. We won't ask the single ladies what names they've practiced writing.

When you are baptized, you are taking on a new name, and a new identity, and that is the name and identity of your Savior, Jesus. You take on His holiness. You receive His forgiveness. You receive His Spirit. You receive His life. You become a Christ-follower, a CHRISTian.

Wherever you are on your spiritual journey, whether you've done everything else, just not baptism, or you are ready to take your very first step toward God, it is never too late; it is never too early to call out to God in the waters of baptism. If you are willing to turn from your sin. If you are ready to follow Jesus, then right now...today...is the perfect time to be baptized.

More than a command to be obeyed, baptism is a promise to be received. When you are baptized you are not merely obeying a command. You are receiving 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.