

Today I want to talk to you about believer's baptism. There are **four reasons**: 1) we haven't talked about it for a while - not an entire message and with a baptism next week, it seems like a good time to. 2) Some haven't been baptized since trusting in Jesus and I want to convince you from the bible that you should be. 3) Some need to trust in Jesus and then be baptized and finally, 4) the rest need to be reminded of these things. And reminders are good. It was when the people of Israel forgot God and what he had done for them, that they murmured, dishonored God, and wandered into idolatry - bringing God's judgment upon them. So, for many, I want to do what Peter did in his second letter: "stir you up by way of reminder," (2 Peter 1:13).

There are basically **three dominant views on baptism**. One is baptismal regeneration, held most notably by the Roman catholic church. This view says that one is infused with the grace of regeneration (new birth) through baptism. In other words, baptism saves - there is something saving about sprinkling water on someone. Now, they believe you can lose salvation, but nevertheless baptism in the catholic system is a saving act. There is nothing in the bible to support this view, but sadly many bank on the fact that they are good with God, because they were baptized as a child in the catholic church. The second view of baptism is a Protestant version of infant baptism called paedobaptism - paedobaptism coming from the Greek word for infant. Luth, Pres, Meth, Reformed. It doesn't save, but rather is performed on children of believing parents as a covenantal sign, much like circumcision was for Jews under the Old Covenant. This is done in hopes that the child will grow and trust in Christ at a later time. I think a straightforward reading of the New Testament instructs us differently.

The third dominant view is the one I want to make a case for this morning - believer's baptism. That's what we believe at Real Life Church. So I want to make a statement about baptism and then I want to unpack each of the constituent parts.

Baptism is an ordinance given by the the Lord Jesus Christ by which those who have repented and come to faith symbolically show their union with Christ in his death and resurrection, by immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism is a sign of belonging to the people of God, the church, and a public identification with the Lord Jesus Christ.

1) Baptism is commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus gave two ceremonial ordinances for the church. An ordinance is an authoritative order (snow ordinance). Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper and baptism. The Lord's Supper was instituted on the night before Jesus was crucified. The Lord's Supper is a reenactment of the last supper Jesus had with his disciples in remembrance of his death as he commanded. Baptism is the other ordinance given by Jesus. Upon his resurrection, he called his disciples to himself and prior to ascending into heaven, he ordained that they make disciples and then baptize them (Matthew 28:19-20).

So, the reason Christians have always baptized converts is because Jesus commands us to. And the early church took this command seriously as they went preaching the gospel and baptizing converts everywhere! The first sermon Peter preached ended with the call to repent and be baptized. So baptism is an ordinance given by command of Christ.

2) Baptism is for believers in Christ or followers of Christ or disciples of Christ

This is the constant testimony in the New Testament. It is a great irony in our day that many unbelievers have been baptized - as infants. And many true Christians, true believers, have not been baptized since they have believed. The place to start is with the words of Jesus in what is known as the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Listen to the words of Jesus and notice who Jesus says is to be baptized.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Baptize who? The disciples who are being made. Preach the gospel, call people to follow Jesus and then baptize them. We see this pattern of baptizing those who believed the message of the gospel was followed by the church from the beginning of their ministry. I want you to see the connection between believing and baptism. It's important! Acts 2:37-38 (context). Then notice what happens. Verse 41 says, "*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*" I think to receive means to believe in this context.

Those who who received with faith the message Peter preached were baptized. We see this pattern over and over in the NT. Listen to the consistent witness of the book of Acts:

- Acts 8 - Philip preached the gospel to an Ethiopian man. After hearing he says, "*Look! Water! What prevents me from...*"
- Acts 9 - Saul, three days after his conversion on the Damascus road was baptized.
- Acts 10 - After being converted, Peter ordered the new gentile believers to be baptized.
- Acts 16 - Two households, Lydia and the jailer, heard the gospel and were baptized.
- Acts 18 - "*many Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.*"

On the other hand, there is no example at all of babies or anyone who didn't have conscious faith being baptized in the NT. With this uniform testimony, someone may ask, "Is baptism necessary?" Well, no and yes. Not for salvation. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Baptism is a ceremony that a saved person participates in. But baptism is necessary to be obedient to Christ. So have you been baptized since you believed?

Perhaps another question that may come up is what about kids. Well, of course, kids can repent and believe in Jesus. And the plan is to baptize some kids next week. But how should a parent wisely navigate that? Well, I don't think it has to be so mysterious. Two things: 1) Do they have an understanding and believable trust in the basics of the gospel? Not a sophisticated treatise (predestination, justification). I think of what Paul called "**of first importance**":

*For I delivered to you as **of first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised in the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)*

Do they understand and believe this? 2) Do they show evidence of new life. Not perfection, of course! Your kids won't be perfect until they are probably 15 (right Olivia?). Is there a true desire to follow Jesus as a disciple. Use wisdom. So baptism is for those who have repented and believed in Jesus Christ.

3) Baptism is by immersion, in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Again, we go to the words of Christ in Matthew 28: "*Baptizing [disciples] in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" The mode of baptism is by immersion in water. I get that from what the word baptize means. The Greek word "baptizo" means to "immerse or dip or submerge." The idea of baptizing by sprinkling water on someone or pouring from a pitcher onto someone's head is foreign to what the word means and also foreign to the biblical record. Baptism is by immersion in water.

The NT also shows that baptism was done by immersion in water. Let's look at three examples: John the Baptist baptized at "Aenon, near Salim, because **water was plentiful there**" (John 3:23). It was as Jesus **came up** out of the waters of baptism that the Holy Spirit descended upon him (Matthew 4:16). Philip and Ethiopian in Acts 8:38-39 - the both went down into the water and came up out of the water. Philip didn't take the water jug that was most certain to have been in the chariot to sprinkle or pour on the newly converted man.

So baptism is by immersion. And it is also it is "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"? Remember, God is trinity. One God, three Persons, and so baptism naturally would be in the Triune name of God - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is a declaration that we now belong to God and that our salvation is according to the will of each of the Persons of the Trinity. The Father sent the Son on a redeeming mission. The Son came to redeem. The Holy Spirit applies redemption to us. Glorious! So the mode of baptism is immersion in water, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

4) Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ by faith

Baptism is a external ceremony - a symbol that points to a spiritual reality. It's a dramatization of what happens when you are born again. Specifically it is a sign of our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. The sign is important, but what it points to is more important. Like a wedding ring. A wedding ring doesn't make a husband and wife married - it symbolizes the covenant of marriage. Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross in our place for our sins and then rose again. This is true, and gloriously so! But the bible also teaches that he not only died for us, but we (that is Christians) have died with him. Galatians 2:20. And we have been raised with him (Colossians 3:1). When does this happen? Not when we are dunked under water in baptism, but when we are initially saved through faith in Jesus. And it is dramatized in the ceremony of baptism. We see this in Romans 6:3-4:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him in baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

These verses are not talking about the external act of baptism, but rather the spiritual reality behind and underneath baptism. When you come to faith in Christ, you are spiritually united to Him in his death and resurrection. Here is why this is important. The old nature you got from Adam which is full of unbelief and loves sin needs to die. And you need new, resurrection life. Charles Spurgeon said,

You are so one with Jesus, that you must regard his death as your death, his sufferings as the chastisement of your peace. You have died in the death of Jesus, and now by strange, mysterious grace you are brought up again from the pit of corruption unto newness of life.”

His death means your death - death to sin. And his resurrection means your resurrection to a new life with new desires for God and holiness and new capacities to love and live for him. Salvation is not adding Jesus to your life. Salvation is being immersed into Christ by faith. And baptism by immersion in water is a symbol of immersion in Christ. Someone goes down into the water symbolizing union with Christ in his death and burial. Then one comes up out of the water, symbolizing union with Christ in his resurrection. The old man has been crucified and buried with Christ and we have been raised to newness of life.

Which is why it is astonishing to Paul even the thought of continuing to live in sin like before. “Shall we continue to sin so grace may abound?”, he asks. “No way, God forbid! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” So baptism emblem or sign of this union with Christ in his death and resurrection that we have by faith.

Baptism is publicly identifying with Christ and his people

When we realize the meaning of baptism, then the reason why we are told to be baptized becomes clear. If we have been so united with Christ, so that our old life of unbelief is put in the grave and we are raised to newness of life in Christ, then baptism is how one goes public with the confession: “***I am done with my old life. I am with him now. And I am with them.***” Not in order to save, but in loving obedience to Christ, because he has saved us. In this way, baptism is a public act stating that you are leaving the old life in the grave and committed to living under the lordship of Jesus. “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.” The story behind this hymn is powerful.

In a small village in India, there was a family who had come to put their faith in Christ. And this caused quite a stir in the village. So much so, that the village chief of much of the community brought this family into the village square. The man was told to renounce this new faith or they would surely die. The man was shaken and unsure of what to say. The only thing that came to mind were the words of song he composed since becoming a Christian: He started to sing the words, “*I have decided to follow Jesus.*” His two children were killed. The man was given another chance. This time, his wife’s life was at stake. He continued to sing, “*Though none go with me, still I will follow.*” His wife, executed. He was given one final chance to recant and save his own life. He didn’t, and was executed while singing, “*The cross before me, the world behind me.*” The rest of the story...

You won’t face a firing squad for publicly identifying with Christ in baptism. But each and every one of us who name the name of Christ must say, “*I have decided to follow Jesus. Though none go with me, still I will follow. The cross before me, the world behind me. No turning back, no turning back.*”

Baptism communicates, “Christ has saved me and I am with Him all the way!” I’m following Christ, not my own heart. I’m following Christ, even if it seems like nobody else is. I’m turning my back on the world with all eye-candy and desires, to following the One who bled and died for me on the cross. This is important! Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 10:32-33:

Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Baptism is publicly identifying with Jesus Christ and his people. It proclaims, "I am with him and them!"

Conclusion

Have you been baptized since you have believed in Christ? If you have, remember what it means - the reality it points to! Your union with Christ in his death and resurrection and your identification as a follower of Christ.

If you haven't and aren't planning to next week, why? People who have believed for a while... you may have been growing for 5 years and now you are realizing that Christ is calling you to be baptized - that's good. Don't delay any longer. I urge you, out of loving obedience to Jesus Christ, to be baptized. And those who have been baptized, remember the reality of baptism the symbol of your union with Christ, and let your heart be stirred to a renewed zeal for him. And let your zeal be stirred to publicly identify with him.