

Baptism

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening. It is wonderful to be here with you all. Tonight, my name is Dan, and I am married to a beautiful woman named Rachel.

She is my high school sweetheart. We've been married for eight years. We've actually been keen on each other more like 16 years. And together we have two lovely little daughters named June and Selah Rose, and a boy on the way. So the Marotta name lives on.

And, you know, I've been told by your leadership that you are in the midst of a sermon series titled Foundations, and that you've been exploring some of the largest and most meaningful questions that any of us can ask in life.

Questions whose answers are essential to making sense of our lives. Who are we? For what purpose are we here? What should I do with all these desires inside of me, and how should I live?

And because you've found your way into a Christian church, you've found your way into a place filled with people who are convinced that the answers to all of these essential, most meaningful questions can be found in the Bible.

[1 : 0 7] Now, this evening, we're going to look at the words of 1 Peter 3, verses 18-22. It was the second reading that was up on the screen here. And we're going to explore the theme of confidence.

In particular, what reason or reasons are there for Christians today to have confidence in their faith? In the face of a culture that is increasingly in opposition to the historic Christian faith, what reason is there for a Christian to live confidently today?

And as we explore this theme of confidence, we're going to see that it's actually Christian baptism as a reason, a good reason, for Christians to have confidence. Now, before we read this text, and we're going to read it again because I want to focus our attention here, before we do, just a quick background to orient us.

What we have here are some words written by a man named Peter, who was a follower and close friend of Jesus. Peter experienced many of the same struggles and joys that you and I do.

Peter was, at varying times, brave and cowardly. He was generous, and he was also selfish. He was enthusiastic, and he was depressed.

[2 : 1 9] He was committed at times, and other times he was faltering. Peter was a real human being, and he empathized with the real human need to sometimes require encouragement and reassurance.

He didn't always have it together. Sometimes he needed someone to tell him that things were going to be okay. He needed reassurance. And so the letter that he writes, the one that we're about to reread, is a letter that he wrote to a group of Christians who were living in what is today modern Turkey.

Then it was known as a series of towns in Asia Minor. And this is a group of Christians living in these towns as a cultural minority. Mind you, not an ethnic minority per se, a cultural minority.

Their Christian faith put them in a minority position in regards to the culture. And they were struggling. They were struggling in particular with confidence. The cities in which they lived were not altogether different than the district.

They were at times cynical, mocking, even hostile to the Christian faith. And these Christians were struggling. Some of them were losing confidence in their faith in the face of political and social opposition.

[3 : 27] So Peter writes them a letter to reassure them because they're like him. So, if you will, if you have a Bible with you, you can give your attention to it. If you don't, that's okay.

Just tune your ears to this. Let's give our attention to God's Word one more time. 1 Peter 3, verse 18. 1 Peter 3, verse 18.

One more time.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Now, as we explore this text, we'll see that because of baptism, a Christian really can have good reason for confidence.

And we're going to see this in three ways. A Christian can have good reason for confidence in baptism by, first, remembering God's provision. Second, by receiving a clear conscience.

[5 : 06] And third, by trusting in Christ's victory. Okay, one more time. Remembering God's provision. Receiving a clear conscience. Trusting in Christ's victory.

Remembering, receiving, and trusting. That's what we're going to talk about. Okay, but first, come with me to Germany. We're in the 14 and 1500s. And we're going to visit a young man named Martin Luther.

Now, most of you will recognize that name. Martin Luther was one of the lead reformers in the Protestant Reformation in Europe during that time. Now, something you need to know about Europe during this time in history is that this is a time of great political and social and religious unrest and upheaval.

And at the center of all of this conflict is Martin Luther. And he's not an old guy. He's not seasoned. He's not experienced. He's not a wise, competent religious leader.

He's a young man. Now, you'll see Luther, during this time in history, was wrestling through some deep convictions. And his deep convictions were these.

[6 : 12] He believed the Bible to be the authoritative word of God. He really believed that. And he was convinced that Jesus alone was to rule his life. And he was committed to living for Jesus under the authority of the Bible in every aspect of his life.

But these convictions put him at odds with the political, social, and religious authority of the day. And as you can imagine, being branded an enemy of society and experiencing social ostracism and persecution, this often left Luther, the young man, feeling very discouraged.

His confidence waned. And, you know, Luther is not strange in this. He's actually quite normal. He's extraordinarily normal. And I've just got to say, one of the things that you will notice if you spend much time reading the Bible, and I mean reading it all the way through, if you spend much time reading the Scriptures, one thing you'll notice is that the people of God, no matter what time you are in history, tend to be fairly forgetful.

This is actually some comfort to me. I tend to be fairly forgetful. But this is not a kind of forgetfulness that can be solved with, you know, with Google Apps and Calendar reminders. By forgetfulness, we mean a deep amnesia, a tendency to forget the big things.

The people of God, all throughout the Bible, have this kind of deep amnesia. You know, if you know the story of Scripture, time and time again, God provides for his people.

[7 : 48] And time and time again, they forget that, and in forgetting, they lose confidence. They stop living confidently as the people of God, and they begin to capitulate, to give in to the hostile culture around them.

So what does God do? Well, he's a loving God. He's a good God. And so he reminds them. He says to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, he says, Remember what I've done for you.

I've created you. I gave you life. I gathered you into a unified people. I set you free from slavery in Egypt. If you remember the story of the Exodus.

I've fed you in the wilderness. I led you to good land. I helped you conquer it. And whenever you've disobeyed me, I've forgiven you. I love you. I will keep providing for you.

God says to his people all throughout history, You can be confident, but not in yourself. You can be confident in my provision. I will take care of you.

[8 : 47] We actually see this same reason for confidence, this remembering God's provision. We actually see it in this text. If you look with me at the end of verse 20, if you have a Bible, what it says is that God's patience, when it waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which, that is, eight persons were brought safely through water.

What on earth is that talking about? Here's what Peter is doing. He's trying to help people remember. He's giving them a little poke to jog their memory. He's saying, remember the story. Remember the way God takes care of his people.

And take, for example, remember Noah. Noah, now, if you're anything like me, and that is, if you are a young parent, and if you do the sorts of things that I do, one of which is read Bible stories to my children, then you'll have had this experience at some point.

You'll have sat down with your kids, perhaps on the sofa. If you're in the Marata family house, you're sitting right in the middle. There's a little daughter on this side. There's a little daughter on this side. And you're beginning to read a little Bible story.

And perhaps you've opened the story of Noah. And as you begin to read, your daughters ask very troubling and perplexing questions about this story. This is not a children's story. Why on earth is it in children's Bibles?

[10 : 02] I don't understand. The story of Noah is not a children's story. The story of Noah depicts one of the darkest times in the history of the world.

A time in the world when human corruption had reached a tipping point, and God rightly judged the world by flooding it.

But out of his goodness and out of his mercy, he didn't totally obliterate humanity. That would have been the deserving thing to do, but he did not do it because he is a loving God. And because he is a loving God, he saves Noah and his family.

God provided for Noah and his family by putting them on a boat and letting them safely pass through the waters of his judgment. And they were saved.

And that story, while a true one, is actually only a foretaste. That story actually serves as an appetizer for a bigger story. Because even as God provided for his people over and over again all throughout history, and even as they continued to live in corruption and in rebellion, and, you know, at this point it's worth noting, in case you're unfamiliar with this, the story of the Bible in regards to humanity actually teaches us that we, that is humanity, are not in good standing with God.

[11 : 28] That's part of the story. In fact, we are separated from him by our own choosing, by our own desire to rule our own lives. We have estranged ourselves from God and corrupted the world.

And God's just anger against the wickedness of humanity, which is what the Bible calls sin, must be poured out just as the waters of the flood were poured out.

And here we actually get a glimpse of the culmination, the consummation of God's provision, God's care, God's love for his people. It's a story, if you've been in church for any length of time, you might be familiar with.

If this is your first time here this evening, this is the story. That God, in his love, does not direct his judgment, which is rightly deserved, towards humanity.

Instead, where does he direct his judgment? Not towards humanity, but towards himself. God directs the judgment towards himself. And this is the image of Jesus on the cross.

[12 : 28] It's God's judgment towards humanity, or excuse me, for humanity, but directed towards himself. It's the ultimate example of God's provision.

The cross of Jesus is God providing a way for corrupt human beings to come to him so that he can continue to provide for them. And this, this is one of the things that baptism celebrates.

In Christian baptism, we remember God's provision. The symbolism of the water helps us remember how God provided for Noah and brought him and his family safely through the judgment waters of the flood.

And in baptism, God provides, in the very same way, God provides a way for us to safely pass through his judgment against our own corruption. And here we have our first reason for confidence.

Here's how it works. If you are a Christian, or perhaps even if you are exploring the Christian faith, here's what you do. In moments when your confidence falters, when the Christian faith feels weak compared to the strength of the cultural and social pressures around you, perhaps you're in conversation with coworkers and the tone of the conversation shifts towards mockery of Jesus or the church or Christianity as it often does, here's what you do.

[13 : 46] You mentally begin to think back. You begin to remember. What are you remembering? You're remembering the true story. You're remembering the story that God's people have always been opposed, but God has always provided for them.

Noah was mocked, but God provided for him. The early church was mocked, but God provided for them. Many, many followers of Jesus today are ridiculed for their faith, but God has promised to provide for us.

And baptism is a marker, a signpost, a giant arrow pointing in the direction of God's provision. And it's a good reason for confidence.

It's a reminder. It helps us remember God's provision. Okay, but we not only remember his provision, what else do we do? We receive something. We receive a clear conscience.

Okay, you know the trouble with troubled consciences is that they can be very destabilizing. And we all know this. You know, no matter what you believe, you know that when you are conflicted and troubled on the inside, it's very difficult to live confidently.

[14 : 55] And there are all sorts of pop culture remedies for this. Here are just a few that I've heard over the years. One that I've heard is this, that if you have a troubled conscience, then here's what you do. You literally do this.

You imagine a blank canvas in front of you. And all of the troubling thoughts that begin to come into your mind, you mentally just push them to either side until you are completely thoughtless.

When you have emptied your mind, you will feel better. Number two, something I've heard. And this language I've actually heard not just outside the church, but actually within the church.

And to this one, I think I would gently say, we've got to stop this. This language is not helpful. We've got to stop using it. This is pop culture psychology. It is not the Bible. But this is the language I've heard.

When your conscience is conflicted and troubled, here's what you do. You just need to forgive yourself. If you can forgive yourself, if you can let go of the burdens that are weighing you down, tell yourself that it's okay, let it go.

[16 : 07] Number three, this is, I think, popular no matter who you are. Just find the positive side. Just look for the positive side.

You know, as these troubling thoughts, as this guilt kind of works inside of you, as you feel conflicted on the inside, whatever it is, whatever you're remembering, whatever thing you're replaying in your mind, just find the positive spin to it.

If you've overeaten, just remember how good the chocolate tasted. If you've perhaps cheated on your spouse or girlfriend or boyfriend, then just remember the ecstasy of the passion.

Whatever it is you've done that is making you feel conflicted and guilty on the inside, just find the positive side. Remember that. Elevate the positive. You know, push down the negative. And you'll feel better and you'll be a healthier person.

No. If you'll notice, all of these attempts to clear your conscience are what I would call self-washing techniques. If you feel dirty and you're losing confidence, you just need to wash yourself to clean and restore your confidence.

[17 : 12] And from this perspective, get this, from this perspective, even something like Christian baptism has a certain appeal to it from that perspective.

And it goes kind of like this. In baptism, you're kind of coming up and you just feel dirty. You feel conflicted. You feel troubled. And the water is sort of a metaphor for washing you.

And after that happens, then you're better. No. That is not what Christian baptism is. Let's look at the text. What does it tell us? Chapter 3, verse 21.

Baptism, which corresponds to this. What's the this? This is the story of Noah being brought through the judgment waters of the flood, being saved by God's own provision. Baptism, which corresponds to this, God's provision, now saves you not as a removal of dirt from the body, not washing on the outside, but as what?

An appeal to God for a good conscience. What on earth does that mean? An appeal to God for a good conscience. Here's the thing.

[18 : 23] In baptism, and what you'll see later this evening, here's what is happening. In baptism, you are united to Jesus.

You are connected with Him, bound to Him, in His life, in His death, and in His glorious resurrection. And when you are united to Jesus in baptism, you actually receive something as a gift.

And what you receive, one of the things you receive, is a good conscience, a clear conscience, clean on the inside. Okay, how? Why? Why does this actually happen?

You receive a clear conscience because all of the guilt, all of the conflict within you, all of the trouble in your conscience, things you're aware of, things you are actually not aware of, all of that, what happens to it?

It actually dies with Jesus. That's what gets rid of it. All of the conflict within you, that kind of stuff, is connected to Jesus, bound with Him, and in His death, it dies.

[19 : 29] And just as He is raised to new life, so you are raised to new life with a clear, pure conscience before God.

Not because you washed yourself on the outside, but because you are united to Jesus. That is the gift of a clear conscience. It's a permanent solution. And this is the second good reason for confidence in faith, in Christian living.

You know, any coach will tell you, if you've ever played any sport, any coach will tell you, that if you step onto the field or the court with some sort of conflict in your mind about how the game is going to go, how you're going to play, not only will you not do very well, but you also won't enjoy the game.

You'll take no joy in the playing. God knows this. And out of love for us, He doesn't leave us to stew in our guilt the rest of our lives.

He actually offers us the gift of a clear conscience before Him. And we can receive that gift in baptism. Okay, so from where does our confidence come?

[20 : 34] From remembering God's provision in baptism and from receiving a clear conscience through baptism. Okay, lastly, our last reason for confidence in Christian living is trusting in His victory.

Trusting in His victory. And here, I want you to look back at the text and let's look at how it begins and how it ends. This is a complete thought here. And Peter begins this text and he ends this text with his main idea.

And here's what he says. Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him. Okay, here's why Peter brackets this text with those words.

It's because he's trying to encourage them. Remember, that's the whole reason for his writing this letter in the first place is to encourage and reassure Christians whose confidence is crumbling.

And so he reminds them of Christ's victory. Because remember, well, actually, think with me about this. Remembering God's provision, the story, what God has actually done, and receiving a clear conscience, and both of those things happening in baptism, all of that is really, I don't know if it's meaningless, but it's at very least powerless if Jesus is not actually victorious.

[22 : 03] Right? Because if he doesn't actually have the power to provide for you, if he doesn't actually have the ability to give you what you're coming to receive, then what does it matter whether you remember it or whether you try to receive it with open hands?

this is why it matters. Because Christ is victorious. He is in power. The reality is this, that all things, all things, all earthly, political, social, religious powers, all spiritual things, both good and evil, all creatures, all matter, all substance, every subatomic particle, even death itself, is now subject to the authority of Jesus.

There is power in baptism because the power in baptism comes from the one who is in power currently, presently.

Christ is victorious today and therefore has the power to provide and the power to give you what you come to receive. Now, before we keep going and actually before we conclude, I just want to say one quick side note.

You've probably noticed, if you haven't fallen asleep and been paying attention, that we skipped a couple verses. Did you see it? We skipped verses 19 and part of verse 20. And we skipped these because they're actually very, very difficult.

[23 : 27] And in fact, Martin Luther, who we talked about earlier, had something very profound to say about these few verses, verses 19 and 20. And I want to read it to make sure I get it exactly right because this is, this just really encourages me.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, said this about verses 19 through 20. I have no idea what this means. This is so encouraging. If you are new, if you are new to the Christian faith or even if you've been here for a while, sometimes you read things in the Bible and you don't get them.

They don't make sense to you. Join the club. It's okay. There are times when Scripture is crystal clear and we know what to do next.

There are other times where it seems foggy to us and we don't know what to do next. Let's look at what these verses say and see if we can't draw anything from them.

Verses 19 and 20. Peter says, in which he went, in Jesus, he's talking about, in which Jesus went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison because they formerly did not obey when God's patience waited in the days of Noah.

[24 : 36] There's a number of scholarly theories as to what is going on in this text. One is that after Jesus died, before he rose from the dead, he actually descended into the depths of the hellish spirit world and preached to those who had formerly been in disobedience to God.

One theory. Another theory is that Jesus was actually preaching, preaching, speaking, to Noah's contemporaries through Noah. That's another theory.

There are various other theories that seemed less important to me to share, but all of them actually pointed to the same thing. They all had a same, a similar theme that ran through the whole thing.

And so rather than agonizing over that, I just wanted to share it with you. The theme is simple. Jesus' victory over death and all subsequent powers in the entire world, whether earthly or spiritual.

That's the theme. Jesus' victory. And baptism celebrates this victory. And this is where we come to our third reason. In baptism, whether the water is sprinkled over the head of a child or whether somebody is plunged into the water and then raised back up, Jesus' victory over death and all other powers is being demonstrated and celebrated.

[25 : 52] Without Christ's victory over death and all other powers, baptism would just be a mere memorial service, wouldn't it? And there wouldn't be any power in it. But there is. As we've said, there is power in baptism because the one who gives it power is in power.

When you remember your own baptism, if you've been baptized, or when you celebrate or watch somebody else getting baptized, you are trusting in Christ's victory and this is our third good reason for confidence, trusting in Christ's victory.

Okay, let's conclude. Let's review where we've been. Baptism gives a Christian good reason for confidence. In baptism, we remember God's provision. We receive a clear conscience and we trust in his victory.

And these are just a few of the daily actions of the Christian life. Remember, receive, trust. These are Christian verbs.

When you are faced with opposition and your confidence begins to crumble, remember that God has always, always, always provided for his people and he has provided for you in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

[27 : 04] When your inner conscience is troubled and you are conflicted on the inside and your confidence is shattered, receive again the clear conscience that God offers you in baptism.

And when you are intimidated by the political, social, cultural might of those who mock the Christian faith and your confidence begins to shrink, then trust in Christ's victory.

As strange as it might sound, if you've been baptized, trust in your own baptism. And if you haven't been baptized, then by all means, come and get baptized.

God has given his people baptism because he's a good and kind God and he knows his people will need encouragement and reassurance and comfort and baptism is one of his gifts to instill, to inject confidence into his people.

And this is not a new idea. I'm not making this up. It's actually a very ancient idea. It goes all the way back to Martin Luther and beyond. But this idea of trusting in your own baptism was actually incredibly significant to Martin Luther.

[28 : 08] And we'll close with this. Luther had plenty of reason for failure of confidence. He was opposed politically, socially, and religiously. He was mocked. He was belittled. His reputation was dragged through the mud.

Even his own sin, his own inner conflict and corruption was discouraging to him. And frequently, his confidence shrank and even crumbled. One particular confidence-crushing time in his life came when he was in political, social, and religious exile.

He had fled to a remote castle in Germany and was attempting to translate the Bible from Latin, which is the language of the elite, into German, the language of the people. And he was struggling, but not with the, he wasn't struggling with the academic work.

He was struggling with his confidence. He felt weak. He felt impotent. He felt insignificant. And whenever he did, he would return to this one practice.

You know what he did? Here's what he did. This is actually amazing. You can read about this from other people who wrote during that time who either lived in or near this castle. When it was dark outside, as it is right now, you could see a candle lit in the window where Luther was working, transcribing the Bible from Latin into German, doing the work for the people, trying to get God's Word.

[29 : 28] in the hands of the people. But whenever Luther's confidence waned, whenever he was particularly discouraged or frustrated, he would have this practice. He would pace in his room and you could hear his bellowing voice ringing out all throughout the castle to the point where people outside the castle could even hear it.

And you know what he was saying? I am baptized. I am baptized. And he would say it over and over and over again.

And he's not a lunatic. You know why he was saying that? Because his baptism was his anchor for confidence. Because in his baptism, he was remembering God's provision.

He was receiving again a clear conscience from God. And he was trusting in Christ's victory. And it gave him confidence. It injected a fresh dose of confidence into his life.

If you know that God has provided for you in Jesus, if you want to receive a clear conscience, if you trust that Jesus is victorious over death and everyone and everything else, and you haven't been baptized, then please come talk to the leadership of this church.

[30 : 37] Please do. Baptism will help you going forward. It really will. If you have already been baptized, then I would simply encourage you, as Peter encouraged these early Christians, as Luther tried to encourage himself, to look back to your baptism and remember God's provision and receive again a clear conscience and trust in his victory that you might live confidently as a Christian today.

Let's pray. God, thank you for knowing that we are human creatures and we get really discouraged really quickly.

Our confidence falls apart and we need something to look to. Thank you for giving us something physical, something we can actually touch and feel.

Thank you for giving us water to be sprinkled or poured or dunked to actually experience. Thank you for giving us something to grab a hold of, to give us confidence in this life.

We thank you for it and we love you. We pray in your name. Amen.