

Baptism

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[0:00] There are basics. Basic baked beans. You can get baked beans with all sorts of nice coverings to the packet.! But the marketing gurus have recognised that there's a market out there for people who just want the basics.

And so they sort of rejoice in the fact, essentials, no frills. If you're buying a car, there's no end to the extras that you can have in a car.

There's a website that talks about all these things. If you've got a car like this, you can have air conditioning, built-in sat-nav, metallic paint, integrated television.

Integrated television. Anyone got a car with that? Sports suspension. Night vision. Sounds like SAS, doesn't it? Cruise control parking sensors. CD changes.

Well, the things that we thought were just a pipe dream five years ago are now sort of fitted as standard, aren't they, to cars? But you might say these are still optional extras. And actually, it doesn't make a great deal of difference to the fact that your car got you here this morning.

[1:15] Whether you had night vision or cruise control inside it, probably not very helpful in Brighton. I just wonder if this idea of basics and optional extras is so much in the DNA and the bloodstream of our culture that it seeped into Christians as well.

So that Christian people can think that being a Christian and living as a Christian is about choosing a belief system and lifestyle that suits them under the general banner of the love and example of Jesus Christ.

And don't bother me with the details too much. It's become increasingly popular and accepted for people who not only call themselves Christians, but truly believe themselves to be Christians, to be selective about behaviour and practices which are clearly spoken about and demonstrated by Christian people in the Bible.

Sometimes it's a case of just not getting round to taking something seriously. But for some, it's actually a deliberate choice.

In contrast to that position, I would encourage you to look at this particular verse from the Bible, which is 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 16 and 17.

[2:47] It's on the screen, but sometimes it's very important for us to open up our Bible or have it on your iPad. And every single word here is kind of pregnant with significance and importance for us as Christian people.

All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, which is a strong word.

And if you might say almost a negative word, it's saying you're doing this, I rebuke that. You should be doing that. Correcting and training in righteousness, practical, holy behaviour and living so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Extremely practical verse. It's about daily life. It's about Monday. It's about the situations that you're facing with your children in school, in relationships inside the family, in trying to make ends meet, in feeling in the wrong job and perhaps being under threat in your job.

You know, all that stuff that we have and that we bring into this place and we take away from it, this has a great deal to say about that. All scripture is God-breathed.

[4:17] God has given us his word. He's spoken to us. It's not so that we could just be proud to have a series of these stuck upon our shelves at home and say, I have a Bible, but so that we could open it and find very relevant and helpful direction for our lives.

it covers the whole of life and it certainly covers the particular ways in which Christians should live and how churches should operate and it was and is and will be a guiding principle for us here at Calvary Church that it is on the basis of the scriptures and only the scriptures that we have our lives directed this is important for us here individually as I've just indicated and perhaps you find yourself somewhere in the in that place which I early earlier talked about there which you you would say you're a Christian but there's really no definition to your life that you could sort of link with the Bible there's no great connection between those things you're glad about Jesus you can see him as a great example if you were to compare him with other great religious leaders you'd say well he's right up there I'm I'm with him but how that works through in the detail of life well there's a bit of a fog perhaps you're not too willing to come close to getting that fog cleared away but the Bible will have none of that it won't allow us to remain in the mist it will put its finger on the particularities of our lives the very things that are a daily issue for you are the very things that the Bible will will trouble and work away at there's a dangerous thing to take the Bible seriously because if you take it seriously it's going to change your life but I don't think there's a plan B so individually and as I've said corporately I'm always struck when somebody stands up here and becomes a church member as Christopher did last week and we ask a number of questions of people when they're becoming church members and one of the questions is is to do with uh faithfulness faithfulness in in in the way we think about giving of our time and talents and energy faithfulness in attending the meetings faithfulness in prayer faithfulness in reading the Bible all those things and then we say the strength of our church is according to the faithfulness or not of its members so you might say coffee church great good tradition glad to know it's there do you know just how intimately the strength and integrity of this church is related to the faithfulness or not of its members it's one thing to have great messages spoken it's one thing to have a declaration of faith on the board out there it's one thing to hold the meetings to say well we do that we have a prayer meeting and we read the Bible and we do all those things but if we do not do the things which God says we should do we are not faithful and if we are not faithful then it doesn't matter whatever kind of reputation we have in God's eyes we are unfaithful and those are the very points that those churches in Turkey in the first century AD were being criticized for rebuked for by the risen Lord Jesus Christ because they were not being faithful

and those churches died they're not there it's ruins we don't want to be in that place we don't want God to remove his presence from us because of our unfaithfulness because we have just chosen to slip out of obedience into a life of foggy disobedience we want to please him in everything we want to pick up our Bibles and to search those scriptures so that we can find out how can we be more pleasing to our God we want to line ourselves as closely as possible to his character his desires we want to hate the things that he hates and love those that he admires so there's something for us corporately in this idea that what the Bible has to say is not an optional extra but we search it so that we can find out how we can more and more be changed into the kind of people that God wants us to be and so over three Sundays I want to talk about these three particular topics baptism communion and church belonging because they are both individual subjects and also church subjects as a church we practice something called believers baptism in fact just where Martin is sitting now underneath that there is something we call a baptistry it's basically an enormous bath filled with water from time to time for people who want to be baptized to demonstrate their faith in Jesus Christ baptism as a church we celebrate communion or the Lord's Supper various words are used for the indifferent church traditions and we do that twice a month I have to say when we do that on the first Sunday of the month not many people come vast gathering but you know a good number of people here but I think it's a bit shocking in a way that for our communion time on a Sunday morning the first Sunday of the month which happens to be next Sunday 10 o'clock in the morning there might only be 12 people so I think this is a fair subject we ought to be addressing we should be facing this subject we need to be taught about it because if we're not clear about it we don't see that it matters if you don't see it's in the Bible but of course we won't come and church belonging I put it in those phrases don't want to use the m word because people don't like the m word because it sounds like commitment membership but church belonging that sounds very sort of bright and in the 21st century doesn't it

I don't really care what words we use as long as it expresses some reality so we're going to be thinking about that but today we're going to be thinking about baptism baptism and I hope that this will be helpful not just for those who are sort of on the cusp of that sort of thought because many people here have been baptized I know that but it's important for us to know that this is this is a very

significant scriptural thing and it's important for us to know that we are going to go forward and as a church this is something we will do because we believe it's not just a sort of a quaint old tradition but it says something extraordinarily powerful about the gospel of Jesus Christ and it is there as a public demonstration of the saving work of God I will give you a definition this morning and I'll talk about it in this way what I want to talk about is Christian baptism is taught and practiced in the Bible because there are other faith traditions that have a version of baptism and there are also Christian faith traditions that have versions of baptism but I have to challenge some of those on the basis of whether they actually seem to line up with what the Bible has to say so those are the two things there

Christian baptism and as taught in the Bible now here are some comments objections that people might make about the subject of baptism somebody might say baptism does not make you a Christian actually some people do think baptism makes you a Christian but not in terms of the Bible the Bible is very plain on that baptism does not make you a Christian doesn't matter how old or young you are so if people say quite rightly baptism doesn't make you a Christian so I don't need to be baptized to be a Christian yes and no yes theologically but no spiritually because if you pick up your Bible and you see the sort of passage that we saw this morning in Acts chapter 2 where Peter said to them they ask a question what should we do and he says believe and be baptized he tells them to do it so if someone comes to me and says well I'm a Christian I don't think I need to be baptized

[14:25] I'd say well please read the Bible and once you've read the Bible then we can have a good discussion about what the Bible has to say about that point secondly the whole issue of baptism is very confusing some people are very confused about baptism so I have a picture here it could have been any subject matter this is a christening sometimes called child baptism and it is confusing what is going on what is going on in that picture well like well in simple practical terms there's a little bit of water in this basin here and there's a baby and there's probably two parents and there is a priest figure sort of dressed appropriately and rather special implements being used to pour water over the baby's head and there are no doubt lots of other people looking on as well how many of you have were baptized or christened like this so for the benefit of those who aren't looking around you have to put your hands up a bit higher so I can sort of get a sense well that's quite interesting it's about a third of this congregation the figures of the United Kingdom are that in 2011 there was approximately 11% of live births ended up with sort of infant baptism

I expect it's probably now about 6% you know sort of shot down it's a very small number of people in this country who actually go through this but it's still a part of many people's traditions but if you say this is confusing I would totally agree with you it is confusing because there are roles that these people play in different ways parents are saying things on behalf of that child they may not actually believe the things they're saying but they're saying it and then there are other kind of people who are called godparents who are also making certain promises and saying I will do this and that and the other for the child and they're reading some serious stuff but they may not be believing those things so for them this is like a ceremony it's like an initiation ceremony I have to say the bible doesn't know anything about this this is foreign territory

I think it's grown up through traditions over centuries certain things being done in certain kinds of ways it's got more and more complex and actually the things that God deals with are typically very simple and straightforward so understood it's very confusing it's also a bit weird and scary and actually it's quite a problem for some people to entertain the idea of an adult baptism because it looks a bit like this and this dear lady has just come out of the sea probably and by the way you don't have to be baptised here very happy for it to be done in the sea if you want to Corinne is smiling because she was baptised in the sea we have wonderful waves it's beautifully cold but if you find this claustrophobic and so forth don't let that trouble that's not the point the point is being able to do something in water out there but it does look a bit weird doesn't it?

so that can be a problem for some people it's a bit scary to go through this especially if you don't like water so I'm just going to address these points through some Bible verses so please have your

Bibles to hand as already noted if you want to have the Bible page get there fast in the church Bible it's always in brackets there so the first thing to say is that baptism of Christian believers is commanded Matthew 28 verses 19 and 20 these are the closing words of Jesus as he's commissioning the eleven to go out and further the mission of Jesus Christ therefore says Jesus go and make disciples of all nations baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything

I have commanded you and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age isn't that big? isn't that enormous in time terms I'm with you to the very end of the age so the words I'm speaking to you now they're not just stuff for the first few hundred years they're for the end of the age until Jesus comes again and who does this relate to?

[19:49] go and make disciples of all nations all of us are part of a nation in this room today no one is excluded from receiving this particular instruction and notice the order Jesus says go and make disciples of all nations and that comes first baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and that in that sort of brief one sentence language expresses exactly what baptism is about and the challenge and the command of it and we read already but you can turn it up again in Acts chapter 2 verses 37 and 38 Peter having heard those words ringing in his ear and knowing that this is part of what he has to do and when the people say you know brothers what shall we do he knows exactly what to say so by the power of the Spirit and on the basis of hearing

Jesus' words on that mountaintop he says repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ and it's not an option it's a command I labour this point but I will labour the point because I wouldn't like anybody to sort of slip out of this and to feel that there is some sort of an exclusion clause here no he's saying to all the people all the people who are inquiring and wanting to take a further step forward what do I want to do what do I need to do to be a Christian you need to be repenting you need to be trusting in Jesus Christ and as a mark of that you are baptised and there's sufficient weight upon all those matters in what Peter has to say baptism of Christian believers is commanded it's a sign of our being disciples in John chapter 14 verse 15

Jesus says to his disciples if you love me you will obey what I command there's an interesting verse in Romans chapter 1 verse 5 and one that we kind of slip over because of the sort of weight of the language which is yet to come in Romans but this is what Paul says when introducing himself by a letter to the Roman Christians and he says through him and for his namesake we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith this was a tussle in the early church it's a tussle nowadays I have faith not worried about obedience hmm apostles say universally you can't separate the two you show your faith by your obedience it's a matter of pleasing the Lord 2 Corinthians 5 verses 9 and 10 the apostle himself puts himself under a scripture searchlight and says this is my attitude this is the way

I go about things we are so we make it our goal to please him whether we're at home in the body or away from it for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body whether good or bad so if God tells you to do something especially when it comes powerfully to you through the word of God you have only one course of action as a Christian which is to obey so when you hear something through the message and God speaks to you through that message you have only one course of action which is to obey because we're all going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of what we've done with the knowledge that we've received with the challenges that we've received all the stuff we saw in 2 Timothy about the rebuking and teaching and guiding of the word we're going to have to give account for that so Paul says well I've just made it my settled position

I'm making it my goal to please him because it's a very sad and troubled state to be in to be a Christian who is saying I'll obey you so far but I just won't obey you in this I just don't want to go down that route it is 100% baptism is taught and practiced in the Bible is not confusing it's all it's for believers so we won't look at that again but as Acts 2 verse 41 no we will look at it again Acts 2 verse 41 says exactly what happened he said what should we do repent and be baptized those who accepted his message were baptized about 3,000 were added to their number that day fantastic what a baptism what a logistical problem what a necessary logistical problem they didn't delay they

didn't put it off they didn't say well all the people with names were getting A to C will have you now the other ones can just wait down the line they just got on with it it is a hassle filling up this pool and heating it all up and getting it all ready and so forth but if somebody today was wanting to do that it's exactly what we would do because it's the command of the Lord we don't want to put it off we just do it it's all it's for believers

[26:21] Acts 18 verse 8 Crispus the synagogue ruler and his entire household believed in the Lord and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized so just make reference to this particular point here's a Jew there are some Gentiles they're believing they're baptized it's for all believers for all believers there are nine examples in the New Testament of baptisms taking place and God by his spirit has been very careful to choose the examples because there were thousands more of examples of baptism but these are the ones that were told about and each of them is sort of freighted with importance so in Colossians chapter 2 verse 12 we won't look at all all of these things here but in Colossians 2 verse 12 he addresses that particular church with the assumption that those who are Christians are also people who have been baptized if you're part of that church you would have been baptized in Acts chapter 8 there's the story of the Ethiopian eunuch do you remember that?

he was sort of riding back home on a chariot and Philip drew alongside him there and so Acts chapter 8 verses 36 to 39 as they travelled along the road they came to some water and the eunuch said look here is water why shouldn't I be baptized?

and he gave orders to stop the chariot then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him well he was a eunuch and he was a foreigner but he was baptized there was no problem Philip didn't have to sort of look up his manual and say I'm not quite sure whether you're let in yet he was an absolutely prime candidate because he believed in Jesus Acts 16 tells the story of Lydia first convert in sort of Europe in Philippi she was a woman you think well that's not very unusual is it?

no it was unusual it was unusual in the Old Testament times it was the baby boys who were circumcised the women had nothing but in the new covenant men and women equally are to be baptized Acts 16 verses 29 to 33 tells about the Philippian jailer so I say people from all backgrounds and occupations he too and his household were baptized after believing and there's also an interesting passage about people who had been baptized before but not as believers in Jesus so Acts chapter 19 look at this one verses 3 to 5 there were some disciples whom Paul came across and he had to say to them did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed they answered no we have not even heard there is a Holy Spirit so Paul asked them what baptism did you receive they did receive a baptism it was John's baptism it was a baptism of repentance but it had no sort of concept an ingredient to it as to Jesus the Messiah and Paul said

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance he told the people to believe in the one coming after him that is in Jesus this one's now come you can know about him on hearing this they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus so I'm very glad for this particular passage because it encourages me to say to you this morning that whether you were baptized as a baby or not if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus now here's a classic example of the need to be baptized as a believer these people got baptized twice didn't they they got baptized twice as adults actually but the important point was as believers in Jesus Christ they then were baptized baptism as taught and practiced in the Bible is personal so Acts 16 verse 32 believe in the Lord

[31:02] Jesus you'll be saved you and your household then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house interestingly passages like this are sometimes taken to mean that there's some sort of some sort of permission given by this that if somehow the father in a household becomes a Christian that somehow it's okay to then baptize the wife and the children on the back of it and in fact in church history that sort of what I would call misbehavior has occurred where whole tribes have been baptized on the basis of a tribal leader saying I'm a Christian but it's very interesting read those passages and Acts

carefully and you see that the word of God was spoken to the groups of people they were in the room they were hearing these things they were making a personal response each one of them and if anybody is baptized here it's not on the basis of the fact that their father or mother is a Christian and is a Christian believer but because they themselves are making a personal profession it's decisive and non-repeatable and simply because to become a Christian is a once in a lifetime experience to be born again is a once in a lifetime experience it's unique so if you've been baptized as a believer you don't do it again

I was talking to a dear brother recently and he'd gone for it several times as baptism because he sort of so enjoyed it in a sense it was a recommitment but I'm sorry we won't do that because it actually it undermines a fundamental theological point the fundamental theological point is you're baptized to say that I've died once I've risen again once I'm in a new life now just enjoy in a proxy sense when the next baptism occurs get around the pool and say that's exactly where I was praise God hallelujah for new life it's public it's not private here are some strong words that Jesus spoke about what discipleship is like it's not done in a corner whoever acknowledges me before men I will also acknowledge him before my father in heaven but whoever disowns me before men I will disown him before my father in heaven it's a big thing it's in public it's to be said to the world because it's shouting something a message about the gospel it's saying this isn't just me this is for you this is the bigness of the gospel what does it mean point three what does it mean it's not a miracle it's not a miracle the water is ordinary the water is not changed there is nothing that occurs as a result of words that are said by any specially appointed person that somehow magically supernaturally changes the spiritual nature of the person who's being baptized that is what is taught in Roman Catholicism and there was enormous debate and still is in some quarters of the Church of England along with something subject called baptismal regeneration that as a result of baptism that the person has been brought into a new place as a result of the act of baptism I don't think that's defensible from the Bible to see why it curves up and why people have brought that idea into being but it can't just read these Bible texts by themselves and say that that is in any way reflective of this idea of a miracle it's a picture it's a picture and the picture is this it's identification with Jesus Christ praise God he identified with us the son of God came from heaven to earth to identify with us in Hebrews chapter 2 verse 17 we read of this for this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God he came to earth he took on flesh he became a man he thought he felt he had all the experiences of mankind he identifies with us so absolutely he himself was baptised and and strikingly so and John says when he comes to John and asked to be baptised and John says that can't be right I shouldn't be baptising you but Jesus says we need to fulfill all righteousness and I think in a very powerful and profound sense is Jesus the sinless one was going into his own baptism standing in our place and representing us sinners the sinless one representing us sinners and saying I'm so identifying with this race of sinful people that

[36:54] I too have been baptised that's the that's the magnitude of his identification and so we identify with him and Romans 6 verses 2 to 4 which again is sort of picture language for us but it speaks of the this illustration by no means we die to sin don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death 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 that's the symbolism of baptism it's a statement I've died to the old life I've risen to the new life 2 Corinthians 5 17 says if any man is in Christ he's a new creation old things are passed away behold all things have become new it's a sign of washing

Acts 22 verse 16 we're not baptised in sand we're baptised in water water is forever in the bible a sign a symbolism of washing now what are you waiting for get up be baptised and wash your sins away calling on his name I will stress that not saying that the water is washing the sins away but in the picture language the washing is taking place we need to be washed from our sins only Jesus Christ can do that for us it's a picture it's a grand picture this picture only works with full immersion the Greek word baptizo is only and universally used both in the bible and in secular Greek texts to

mean something which is fully dipped so it is used for cloth which is dipped dyed beautiful to think of that illustration in relation to Lydia who was a dealer in purple dyes and she was baptized into Jesus Christ it means the whole body is taken under the water and all these nine examples given in the book of Acts there they either directly and particularly think of the Ethiopian eunuch it talks about him coming out of the water or by implication refer to a full immersion it shouts the gospel in a most powerful sense this is not a quiet thing this is a outrageous thing it's a radical thing it's saying something completely demonstrative it's saying that was my life I've died to it I've gone under this is my new life I want you all to know this I'm a new person in Jesus Christ and it reminds and challenges us of the mighty work of God in salvation who can make the dead live who can grant eternal life who can wash away all our sins!

only Jesus if you're a Christian believer what stops you being baptized? Some people say I feel unworthy it seems a very big thing to be doing this well it's the point you are unworthy and you're saying I am that unworthy I need what only God can provide if you're being baptized you're completely passive in a sense you're taken into the water you're brought out of the water and in a way the work of God in salvation is that powerful you contributed nothing to it you didn't bring your own righteousness to it you didn't say what a good person I am you said I'm just filthy I need to be clean I'm dead

I need to be made alive I'm not worthy but Jesus is worthy maybe you might say I'm not committed enough I see these people and they've got to be jolly committed to want to go and do that don't feel I've got to that point I say to you take the next step it's a measure of the next step of your commitment to say I will do this I know I fail I know I sin I know I do wrong in my life I'm not what I want to be but I do want to take the next step and it's a bad thing not to take the next step because you'll get stuck in your life so this might be the step for you to take and you might be afraid of what others might think it's quite interesting just what a challenging issue this is for people within families you know okay

[42:38] I'm happy for you to be a Christian okay you know your life's getting changed a bit you want to be baptised you want to be baptised like those sort of rabid evangelical Christians do you want to do that and you want me to come and see you do that that's very radical isn't it there's one area where my parents got quite upset when I became a Christian but Jesus wasn't ashamed of you almost naked hanging on a cross in the sunlight of Judea bearing your sin in public he wasn't ashamed of you don't be ashamed of him don't be ashamed to testify about him maybe you are frightened of the water and the enclosed space and so forth and I've already said we'll work around that in some way there are ways of dealing with that if you want to find out more you want to think about this more carefully please have a word afterwards and I do have some copies of this excellent booklet called believe and be baptized which you will find very helpful please take that please read that we must have a discussion after you've done so and put it in your heart in principle today to be saying well if all that has just been said this morning is true that really is a step

I need to take don't hold back please take the step for the good of your soul but more importantly for the glory of Jesus Christ Christ and for the honour of his gospel God is a God you God is a God you God to God to!