

Baptised into Christ

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[0 : 00] A very, very famous part of the Bible, Romans, written to the Romans, that's why it's called Romans. It's St. Paul writing to a church in Rome 2,000 years ago, and it's quite a complicated letter.

If you care to come along next Sunday, we're actually going through this letter in some detail, but I'm not going to try and do something very detailed just now.

I want to say three sort of fairly basic things. Romans chapter 6 says this.

What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means.

We died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

[1 : 14] 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 in the dead through the Lord.

We too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

I'd like to say a few thoughts about those words, and let's pray and ask God to help. Lord, help us, we pray, to hear from you, to know what you are saying to us.

Lord, help us, give us, give us open minds and hearing hearts, and help me to speak as clearly and honestly and truthfully as possible in the power of your Holy Spirit.

Lord, help us, give us a few thoughts, and we ask it for these next few minutes now, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So, this is the bit that we were thinking of before.

[2 : 32] Christian baptism, an outward sign of an unseen spiritual reality. The sign of a new beginning, the sign of a new belonging to Jesus and his people via believing.

And the candidates each said that they received and believed that message. So, I've got three more things up on the screen. Please bear with me, because I've got a whole confusing set of papers here, which I don't need.

Let's try and find the ones that I do need. Well, let me try and say three things from that bit of the Bible that we read.

I say it's from the Bible, because I don't expect people just to believe me because I'm wearing a nice pullover or anything like that. But, because it's in the Bible.

This is how we get truth from the Bible. And if it isn't there, then it isn't true. So, this is one important thing. When Paul writes this to the church at Rome, he says, Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

[3 : 53] So, this is what he writes. Don't you know, folks, that we were all baptized? We were all baptized into Christ. We were baptized into his death.

This has implications. And my first point is just very simple, that he does assume that if you're a Christian, you're baptized. And if you're baptized, you were a Christian.

You're a Christian. That's his assumption. And therefore, baptism marks off one group of people genuinely and really from another group of people.

He's assuming, you see, his readers will say, yes, we're all baptized. All of us who are Christians are baptized.

All of us who are baptized are Christians. What's going on there? Now, one way of ensuring that everybody who listens to you or reads the letter is baptized is to baptize every baby that's born.

[5 : 03] That would be one way to do it, wouldn't it? So, you'd be sure that when you're speaking to a group of people, you could say to them, we're all baptized, weren't we? And I'd say, yes, of course, we were all baptized as babies.

When he was writing, that wasn't the case. They didn't just baptize babies in some sort of ritualistic, I don't know what I'm trying to say, just something that you did.

You know, like getting vaccinated or something like that. It's like protection for your life to come, so get the baby baptized as well. That wasn't the case when he wrote.

And actually, in Brighton today, it's not the case either. It used to be that people just got baptized without it meaning very much. But I think we actually all agree that baptism is something quite special.

It's not just like being inoculated. It's one of the things that you do, one of the things you do to children. It marks off, really, one group of people from another.

[6 : 18] A group of people who take spiritual things really seriously and personally, from the group of people who haven't yet got to that point. And that marking off, I'd be pretty confident to say, includes us here in this room.

Some of us have been baptized, some of us haven't. You might have watched the baptism and you might have thought, I've never seen anything quite like this before. You might have seen people, impressed.

And as an onlooker, you say, I couldn't have done that. I'm not in the position to do that.

And I'm not going to persuade you to try and do it. But I am going to say, what does it make you think to see somebody say something very clearly about faith, be brave enough to stand up in front of all sorts of people, risk tripping over in the pool and looking foolish and all those sorts of things, and to be prepared to go through that, that's quite something, isn't it?

And I wonder whether it makes you think, am I missing something? That's one of the things that there is in the Bible.

[7 : 53] There is that people find the blessing of God and testify to it and it provokes other people to jealousy.

They say, do you know, they've got something. They've got something and I don't. So I'll just leave that first point with you like that.

Maybe it's made you think a bit and maybe you're thinking, I'd like some of that actually. Good thought. Don't let it go.

Tell God about it. Follow it up. Number two. When Paul writes this to the Roman Christians, he makes a link between going down into the water and all of that and the power and the person of Jesus Christ.

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were buried with him through baptism in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father we too may live a new life.

[9 : 16] I want to point out the link to the power and the person of Jesus Christ. that's what he's saying.

He isn't asking them to hang on feebly to some distant memory of some person who was lost in the midst of time in some feeble sort of way.

He's saying no. Jesus Christ is a real powerful living person and there is such a thing as having our lives somehow plugged into him now.

Baptism signifies that. Don't you know he says you're baptized you're baptized into the power of Christ's death and into the power of his resurrection and that affects you not only in the life you live now but for the distant future which I'll come to in a moment.

And I simply want to flag that up. What we've seen this morning is not just a ceremony not just a nice ceremony not just an interesting ceremony but there is at work a force that overcame death Jesus rising from the dead there is a force that has the power to change people's lives now in a noticeable way there is at work a force if you want to call it that a power so that the guilt and the tangling and the confusion and the general mess up of sin can all be wiped away sorted out straightened out etc.

[11 : 27] Baptism links or marks a link to a power and to the living person of Jesus Christ so I want to flag that one up and I want to say a little bit more about that power number three what sort of power is it what sort of power is it what sort of person is he he's a person who died on a cross Jesus was executed he was condemned he hadn't done anything worthy of condemnation when he died on the cross the earth quaked the sky went dark the curtain in the Jewish temple was torn in two it was an earth shattering thing that happened when Jesus died and he rose again from the dead this is Christian this is the truth that Christians believe not make believe not saying

I wish this was true saying that there is evidence from the Bible which is strong enough to convince us that this extraordinary claim is true that here is someone who shattered the power of death and who is alive now and with whom our lives now can be linked up and he says to them don't you know this don't you know that all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death we were 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 and don't you know that if we've been united with him like this in his death we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection don't you know this is what it's about don't you know this is what it's about there's a sort of don't you know for well really it's for Christians it's saying don't you know this is what you've just experienced this is what you've just marked in your life my son who is a student who is living in London it's the first time he's lived away from home in in a student house and he rang me up and he said dad we've just got a gas bill you can imagine the shock it's hundreds of pounds well don't you know don't you know that if you live in a house with central heating through a cold winter and you use a hot shower you're going to have a gas bill didn't you know that a bit of a shock I'm afraid but there's a don't you know here isn't it don't you know didn't you realise that when your life is linked with Jesus Christ everything changes didn't you know how powerful he is didn't you know that when he died on the cross he paid the penalty for sin didn't you know that he rose from the dead didn't you know that that's what you're linked up to as a Christian didn't you know that you're not free floating in a random universe that you are anchored in what Christ did in the past and you have an anchorage point in the future where his resurrection will become your resurrection didn't you know that death won't grab hold of you and keep you don't you know this well you ought to know it he said so I offer those three points about baptism there's something there would you like a bit of that it is not just a ceremony it links us to the powers and the person of Jesus Christ and don't you know what that means in terms of his death and resurrection and all of that thank you for listening and we will now sing together to close those two