

# The meaning of baptism

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Date: 08 March 2020

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[0:00] In the name of Jesus and all that he has done, all that he has achieved, all that he stands for.! So it's baptism in water but in the name of Jesus.

! Linking, in other words, to the goodness and power and achievements and promises of the Christ. In Matthew's Gospel, it's spelled out a little bit further. What is the name of Jesus?

Well, the name of Jesus involves more than just Christ on his own. He is the one who is both Lord and Christ.

There's something divine going on here and thus to be baptised into the name of Jesus is in fact to be baptised into the single name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

So in Christian talk, there is something Trinitarian about baptism. It is something that stands in a sequence of before and one-off and after.

[1:11] So you don't get baptised every week like you take communion regularly. So there's the somebody before. They go into the water.

They come out of the water. And they set off on a new life. It has a before, a one-off thing and then a new life to follow.

It marks a boundary in time in one's life. Before I was baptised, then after I was baptised. Baptised. And it has a meaning.

Baptism doesn't do anything in itself, but it is a sign of something and a powerful sign. A sign of a deep spiritual and inward step change by God's power through faith.

So it's a little bit like a wedding ring. It doesn't make you married. You can try on a wedding ring in the jeweller's shop and you don't instantaneously become married when you put the wedding ring on.

[2:19] But in the right circumstances, in the right context, the wedding ring shows that a deep change has taken place when you get married.

And the baptism signifies a deep change and in particular the beginning of a new life. It's a sign of a washing, like having a shower or having a bath.

So there's a remarkably dirty, smelly person who gets washed and comes out remarkably clean.

There's a transition from being dirty to being clean.

That is not actually to do with physical dirt, but it is the change from the stain of sin before one is forgiven.

This moving from unforgiveness to forgiveness. Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

[3:25] And I just stop and emphasise that. I think I'm going to do the same emphasis later. But what an amazing thing to be forgiven for all one's sins.

And it was particularly poignant for those people there in Jerusalem, that particular group of people who had linked themselves up, perhaps very specifically, with this terrible thing.

The death of the one whom they'd been looking forward to greeting, the Messiah. And the shock that they have. What can we do? How can we be forgiven?

And Peter is bold to say, you know, if you turn back to the one whom you've injured and be baptised in the name of that person, you will receive the forgiveness of your sins.

All washed away. To me, that's a tremendous thing. It's a sign of washing. It's a sign of belonging to Christ. The Christ who died and rose.

[4:34] So the belonging puts us into a circle. The circle, as it were, generated by Christ, but including the community of his people. By being

baptised in the name of Jesus.

And moving from the community, which Peter says this corrupt generation, and belonging to the 3001 of the church.

So there's a movement there of belonging. So to summarise, it's a sign of beginning and washing and belonging.

It's a sign to the believer. It's a sign for the believer. And so, Annika, this is God saying something to you. He's saying to you, your sins are forgiven.

I give you a new life. Everything's changed. And it's an assurance to you, as well as what you're saying to us. It's an outward sign of the inner work of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, from someone who now believes and has moved into forgiveness and joins the fellowship of the church.

[5:46] So that's my little summary of baptism. I hope that made sense. And I'm going to ask, what does baptism say? So we've been here as witnesses of this event this morning.

And what are we to take away as we go? What does baptism say? So I've broken that down into pieces.

First of all, what does it say? What is Annika saying to God in baptism? What is God saying to Annika in baptism? What is God saying to the rest of us here as his church, his people?

And what is God saying to those who have come along who are not yet his people, not members of the Christian church? So those are the four questions I'd like to ask.

What is baptism saying on those four issues? So number one, what does baptism say? What is Annika saying to God in being baptised? She's saying this, I need a wash.

[6:53] Well, past tense, I needed a wash. When every time you get into the bath, it's a confession of being dirty. Forgive the vulgarity of my reference, but it's true though, isn't it?

Every time you get into the bath, it's saying, I don't care, I need to be cleaned. And being baptised is a confession of sin.

It's saying that my life is not right before you, that I have guilt that needs to be taken away. It's a confession of sin.

It was said to the Apostle Paul when he met Christ on the road to Damascus, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

First of all, it says, I need a wash. Then it says, I believe the word. I believe the message. Those who accepted his word on the day of Pentecost were the ones who were baptised.

[8:03] And the word, the message said, be baptised in the name of Jesus, or in the name of Jesus Christ.

And so Annika is saying to God, I believe you on this. Jesus Christ is the one for me. Jesus Christ is the one who is able to get me this wash.

And how does he do that? In his time on earth, Jesus said, I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

And that statement was seen as a blasphemous statement. The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

How does he get that authority? He has that authority through the achievement of his death. He washes through the cleansing power of his blood.

[9:13] And blood in the Hebrew scriptures, which Jesus knew, of course, is an instrument of cleansing. Sacrificial blood is a cleansing, powerful thing.

In the Hebrew scriptures, blood is simultaneously the most polluting thing. And it is also the most powerfully cleansing thing.

Jesus Christ died on the cross as a sacrifice. As a sacrifice in his blood.

He has the cleansing power to wash away sins. And Annika is saying, I believe that. She's also saying, I turn to the new changed life empowered by Jesus.

I turn to the new changed life empowered by Jesus. Just thinking of the migrants who went to America in the early days.

[10:25] Crossing in the, what was the boat? What was the pilgrim fathers? The Mayflower. Setting off, saying goodbye to the old world. Getting in the boat.

And going off to a new life in the new world. And baptism is like that. A new life. Jesus said to his first disciples.

Follow me. And I will make you. Well, what he said was, I will make you fishers of men. They were fishers of fish. To begin with. And he said, if you follow me, I'll make you fishers of men.

But that was a change. It shows the power of Jesus to change people's lives. He was that sort of person. And he still is.

He loved to change people's names. He said, you are Simon, but you will be called Peter. He changes people. And here is a new life.

[11:24] A new changed life. Empowered by Jesus. And this is what Annika is saying. I turn to that. And she's also saying, I pledge myself to a life of obedience under the lordship of Jesus.

Let all Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

He is Lord is the fundamental confession of Christian people. Being Lord means that we do what he says.

Why do you call me Lord, Lord, but not do the things that I say? He said on one occasion. And baptism is a pledge to a life of obedience under the lordship of Jesus.

And it starts here. Well, that's already started. But coming out of the water, symbolically, is a start of that new life. So those are the things I think Annika is saying to God.

[12:45] Would you agree? Yeah, good. I got that right. What is God saying to Annika in baptism? Now, baptism has promises and assurances with it.

Sort of guarantees. Affirmations. Confirmations. So you'll remember in the bit that was read to us by Christopher, there was this reference which said, the promise is to you and your children and for all who are afar off, for all whom the Lord our God will call as promises attached to baptism.

And the particular promise that Peter referenced on that day of Pentecost was as follows. The forgiveness of sins. So baptism is attached to the promise or the promise is attached to baptism.

Your sins are forgiven. It's not a con. God knows what he's talking about. Jesus knows what he's talking about. Jesus is competent to forgive your sins.

And truly, as surely as you went into the water and came out, your sins are forgiven. That's true.

[14:09] As we go onward in life, Christian person has their sins forgiven. And you might stop and say, really? Could he forgive me?

Could he forgive me? And the answer is yes. We have a song which says, the vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

The Apostle Paul put himself forward as a prime example. Somebody who was violently opposed to Christianity and he received forgiveness. And he says, he calls himself the chief of sinners.

If God could forgive Paul, says Paul, he could certainly forgive you. So, an assurance of the forgiveness of sins. An assurance of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That's the second part of the verse. You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. You will receive, or put it in the past, you have received. You do receive. The gift of the Holy Spirit.

[15:20] The genius, central blessing of the new covenant. The old covenant showing the demands of God and pinning them on people from the outside, which they could never keep.

The New Testament putting within the life of God to enable a new obedience from the heart. Ruach. Spirit. The inner spiritual power that makes the difference between the life, the spiritual life being an impossible, grinding chore and a miraculously successful battle for holiness.

The Apostle Paul says, If you by the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit are the sons of God.

So, you're embarking upon a life empowered by the Spirit. The Spirit doesn't do everything for you. You have to kill sin. We all have to kill sin.

[16:32] But it's not an impossible battle because by the power of the Spirit that can happen. And he says, Those who are led by the Spirit, those who are driven by the Spirit, those who are empowered by the Spirit are the children of God.

It's a family thing. Our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, was relating to his Father through the Spirit. It's the Spirit upon the Son and we have received the Spirit of Sonship.

Not trying to be wrong in terms of gender but sons inherit in the Bible. So, this is sons and daughters inherit. Those who are led by the Spirit are the sons of God. More promises and assurances. The promise is to you, your children, all who are far off and all whom our God will call. There's a promise about community. They were added to their number 3,000 on that day of Pentecost. And here is the promise. You now belong to a new community, a new family. You used to be in what we would say the world, the mass of humanity that is distant from God and now you have entered the church, the assembly that Jesus Christ has called together, the new community of God.

[17:56] We've been going through Isaiah and Isaiah is full of the vision of God's community. It's full of the vision of God's city and he laments the failure of the earthly city in his day and generation and he looks forward to the fact that God will establish his city, his community, he will do it and that community will have his ancient people, the Jews and the nations all together and this is a promise.

You're in that community. It's like a passport and guarantee of admission. What colour is the passport? We won't go down that route at all and it's also a promise for the very, very distant future. You are booked up for future bodily resurrection. If you have been co-planted with him in his death, we will certainly also be with him in his resurrection.

Coming up out of the water links with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and is a promise for the distant future that one day we will have new bodies in a new heaven and a new earth and we will see him face to face.

We will be with him. We will be like him. It's a wonderful promise, isn't it? So what does God say to Annika? Those are my thoughts on that.

[19:37] What does God say to his people, to those of us who have been privileged to witness this event this morning? It's a reminder to all who are baptised and it reminds us as Peter reminded his readers that we too have left the old community.

We too have left the old environment or sphere of sin condemnation and condemnation and death and Peter reminded the people of Noah.

I'm just going to click and see if we get a Noah's ark on there. Oh, we do. Very good. Peter took great water event in the book of Genesis.

The flood when God judged the world but brought a small number of people, that is eight in all, through those waters of judgment, in the ark, and then when the waters had ebbed away, they came out into a new world, a new world that had been washed clean and they started a new life in a new world.

That's where it is when you're baptized. At the day of Pentecost, people left the old community and joined the new community and of course this comes from Christ who in his death on the cross, finished with, dealt with, terminated the power of sin and rose again in newness of life, in resurrection power, in the glory of the Father and entered a new sphere of his own life.

[21:31] And if we're baptized, we're linked with that. If we're baptized, we're linked with that. The life we live, if we are baptized, is resurrection life.

It's newness of life. Peter says, please remember this so that you don't act as if you were living the old life.

That's exactly the point he wants to make. He says, arm yourselves with the same attitude as Christ. He says, you've spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do, living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry.

He says, that's the past. We don't do that. We don't live there. That's not the way we do things. We do things in the way of the new world, living for the will of God.

It's just a reminder, isn't it, to us as Christians who have been baptized maybe a long time ago. This is how we now live. Peter also says, you do know that that will be difficult.

[22:42] You'll have opposition. Be ready for opposition and hardship on the way. Don't dream of getting back into the Mayflower and sailing back to the old country because you're in the new world and live there.

And don't give up. We need that encouragement sometimes, don't we? Don't give up. It might be a long time since you were baptized. It might be a distant sort of memory, but even so, don't give up. Keep on keeping on. We still haven't got there yet. And what does God say to those who are not yet his people? Well, he says things like this.

You have seen this morning evidence that Christian faith is alive and well. Christ's life and death and teaching and word have not become obsolete or out of date.

There's a temptation for people to think that. Christianity, oh, 2,000 years ago. Christianity, 500 years ago. Christianity, Victorian. Well, it's alive and well today.

[23:53] Fresh and powerful today. What else does God say? He says, Christian faith Christian faith, the real thing, is personal and real.

And there is, as we have seen and heard, a vast difference between being religious, going to church with mum and dad, going to church at Christmas and Easter.

there's a vast difference between being religious, being observant, keeping the outward forms of things, or just going to church.

A vast difference between that and a true, person-to-person, real knowledge of the God of the Bible through Jesus Christ. Chalk and cheese, two completely different things.

And this morning, you have seen the real thing. Christian faith is personal and real. It doesn't remove suffering, it doesn't remove the need to walk by faith, it doesn't turn us into fanatics and super spiritual people that aren't human, but Christian faith is personal and real.

[25:09] What else does God say? He says, Christian faith is available to you. So, I don't know all the faces here.

Maybe you're somebody who knows a lot about Christian things, maybe it's completely new, and this is the first time you've ever come across it. And you might think, wow, they're very different people to me, I could never be like that, that would never happen to me, and I want to say that's wrong.

Peter said in his address on the day of Pentecost, the promise is for you, for your children, all who are far off, for anybody and everybody that the Lord will call.

Notice how comprehensive that is. You talk to his first here, it's for you and for your children, and it's for people who are far away, people who live in distant lands, like Brighton.

The promise is for you. Christian faith is available to you. You could have this. You could have this. You need to ask God for it.

[26:34] And I would say, don't settle for less. Don't think, oh well, my religion is probably the best I'll ever manage. God says, you can have the real thing, the full deal.

Don't settle for less. Sometimes people are on the edge. They're on the edge and they can see the real thing, but they never quite get beyond the edge into the sense of word, into the depth.

earth. Don't always be on the edge. What's stopping you coming to the point where you have asked God, where you have confessed your sins to God, where you have called on the name of the Lord, where you have prayed a prayer.

Maybe you start, Lord, show me whether you're real. Or maybe you say, Lord, take my life because I can't manage it. Or whether you say, I'm a miserable sinner. If you can forgive me, please forgive me.

I don't know what the appropriate prayer would be for you, but there's no reason why you shouldn't come to the same point that Annika has so clearly explained this morning.

[27:52] Why you shouldn't come to faith and you could be baptised. God have a good and have a