

Baptism: what, why, and who?

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[0 : 00] So we're going to read from verse 22 to 24, and then we're going to read from verse 32 to 41. So let's read God's word.

So Acts chapter 2 and verse 22. Fellow Israelites, listen to this. Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through him as you yourselves know.

This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. And we're going to go down now to verse 32.

Verse 32. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

[1 : 26] For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this.

God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?

Peter replied, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call. With many other words, he warned them and he pleaded with them, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about 3,000 were added to their number that day. So please do keep that open.

[2 : 40] In front of you, as we spend time in it together. So not long ago, we finished a series of sermons in the book of Jonah.

And next week, we're going to start a series in the letter of James. But in between Jonah and James, it's just a suitable moment for us to pause and to consider together this morning the subject of baptism.

We are Cork Baptist Church. And so whether you've been baptized or not, it is helpful to ask a few questions about the subject of baptism this morning.

We're going to ask what, why, and who. So what, why, and who. And so let's ask, first of all, baptism, what is it?

What is baptism? Well, to baptize somebody is to put them under the water, to submerge them under the water.

[3 : 41] So this word baptism comes from a Greek word in the New Testament and elsewhere, baptizo, which means to dip or to plunge and typically to submerge under water.

And so, for example, in John's Gospel, John the Baptist, in chapter 3, he is baptizing near Salim and it says, because there was plenty of water there and people were coming and being baptized and so the suggestion there being that he needed plenty of water to submerge people under the water as he baptized them.

This idea of being submerged under the water in baptism, it comes as well or is fitting from Romans chapter 6 where Paul says, don't you know that all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death. And so, in that imagery, the idea is that just as in death we are completely submerged in the ground, in burial, so in baptism we are completely submerged in the water before being raised out of the water.

And so, in very simple terms, to baptize somebody is to submerge them under water. It's not less than that but it is more than that because if I and you were walking beside a swimming pool and I dunked you into the water, that wouldn't be baptism.

[5 : 16] There's more to it than that. And so, we're going to think about how it is a commandment. We're going to think about how it is a communication and we're going to think about how it is a commitment.

Now, those three words are just there to help us to remember what it is. It is a commandment, it is a communication and it is a commitment. And so, what we want to think about first as we reflect on what baptism is, it's a commandment.

It's a command of Jesus. And so, in Matthew's gospel, at the end of the gospel, Jesus says to his disciples, go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them.

So, it is a command of Jesus. Jesus says at the end of the gospel of Matthew that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. and in that authority, Jesus commands people to be baptized.

So, what we just want to recognize is this is a command of Jesus. It's not the church's invention. It's not my invention. When we baptize somebody in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we are baptizing them not in the name of Peter, not in the name of Corp Baptist Church, but in the name of Jesus.

[6 : 34] In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And so, baptism is a command of Jesus, but it's also a command for the church.

It's a command for the church. Sometimes, we will emphasize the individual aspect of baptism, but we also need to remember that Jesus gives this command to the church.

He gives it to his disciples, followers of him. And so, we as a local church have a responsibility to do what Jesus has commanded us to do in the authority that he grants to us as his followers.

There are exceptions, like in Acts chapter 8, but the norm is that it is the local church who will baptize people because Jesus has commanded us to do this.

And so, we have a responsibility as a local church to baptize people. We have a responsibility to discern as we chat with somebody prior to baptism whether they should be baptized.

[7 : 40] And so, we recognize as a local church, even though only maybe one or two will do the baptizing, it is as a church that we share this responsibility to baptize people.

So, baptism is a command for the church. Not only is it a command for the church, but of course, it's a command for the believer. And this is where we look at Acts chapter 2.

So, in verse 37, when people heard what Peter had said, they were cut to the heart. In other words, what Peter said had a real impact on them.

There were others who mocked, but there were many who were cut to the heart as they hear the good news of Jesus. They were cut to the heart.

And in verse 41, they accepted his message. So, they accepted the message that Peter has preached to them. And so, they have repented, they've turned away from their sin, they've turned back to God, trusted in this one that Peter says is Lord and Messiah.

[8 : 50] God has made him Lord and Christ and so, I want to respond to that. I'm going to obey the Lord's command. I'm going to obey the Lord's command to be baptized.

And so, it's a command for the individual. We have a responsibility as followers of Jesus to obey all of Jesus' commands. And so, baptism is a command for the believer and so, it's a command from Jesus, it's a command for the church and it's a command for the believer.

But it's not only a command, it is also a communication. Now, that's a clunky word, but hopefully it'll help us to remember that it's a command, it's a communication.

In other words, baptism says something, it shows something, it portrays something, it is a vivid visual that God has given us to communicate something.

so, it is communicating a response to the good news of what Jesus has done. So, in verse 38, when Peter is asked, what shall we do?

[9 : 59] In other words, how do we respond to this good news of Jesus that has cut us to the heart that we have received, we have taken it to heart, what do we do? And Peter says, repent and be baptized.

And so, repenting is turning away from their sin, turning to God, and Peter says, be baptized. Now, the reason he tells them at this particular point to be baptized is because they've heard the good news of Jesus and this is the appropriate response to it.

And the order here is important. They have heard the gospel, they have responded to the gospel, and then they've asked what to do, they have to be baptized. And that's what happens down at the end of the passage.

They were baptized in verse 41. And so, what it communicates is, I'm responding to the good news of Jesus. What it's saying is, I'm responding to the good news of what Jesus has done.

But it also communicates what has already happened. It communicates what has already happened. And it shows that those who are responding in this way have died and risen with Christ.

[11 : 16] So Peter speaks about how Jesus died in verse 24. God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death.

And so Jesus has died and been buried. Jesus is raised again to life. And what baptism is communicating is that if you have repented and believed that you too have been buried with Jesus, you've died with Jesus, and have been raised to new life.

That's the imagery that we see in baptism. It's communicating what has happened in a person's life. Romans 6, Paul says, don't you know that all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized 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.

And so as we baptize people and they are plunged physically under the water and raised out of it, it is communicating this image of having died and risen with Christ to spirit-filled life.

[12 : 29] So it shows we have died and risen with Christ. It also communicates that we are washed clean. It shows that we are washed clean. Peter says in verse 38, repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

So what Peter is saying there, he's not saying that baptism makes people forgiven. He's saying be baptized in order to show that you have been forgiven. Be baptized in order to show that you've been forgiven.

Responding in this way doesn't make you forgiven, it shows that you have been forgiven through the death of Jesus. You see, to come into God's presence in the state that we were in would just not work.

To come into the presence of a holy God as unholy people just would not work. I used to work in a clean room in fabrication and when you went into the clean room you had to go through all these different steps because you were just, even though you didn't look at you, you were covered in dust and particles and all these things that they needed to get off you.

So you'd go through an air shower, you'd put on gloves, you'd put on covers over your boots, you'd put on a hairnet, you'd put on goggles, you'd put on the whole rig out because you couldn't enter into the clean room in the state that you were in.

[13 : 55] And what we know from the Bible is that God is holy and we cannot enter into his presence in the state that we are in. And so what Jesus has done is he has washed us clean.

Our sins have been forgiven. And so baptism communicates that we have been washed clean in the water that is involved in baptism.

That is the image that it is portraying to us. And so baptism shows that we are washed clean. It doesn't wash us clean.

And so it's communicating something about the individual that they have died and been raised with Christ and that they have been washed clean. And it communicates something on the part of the church. So we normally will baptize people as part of the church service or as the gathered church.

And the reason we're doing that is because the church is communicating something as well. What is the church communicating? The church is communicating this. We have heard their story.

[15 : 00] We have seen the fruit of the spirit's work in their life. We have seen genuine repentance and faith. And we say yes, they are a child of God.

Yes, they are united to Christ. Christ. We affirm that as a local church. And so we will baptize them. And so if you are here this morning and if you have already been baptized as a believer, I want you to think back on when you were baptized and reflect on the fact that it wasn't just you saying something to the world.

It wasn't just you saying, I have died and risen with Christ. I have been washed clean. It was the church saying, yes, this is true of them. Now the church doesn't have the power to affect that change in our lives, but it does have the power to say, yes, we recognize God's work in their lives as best we can discern.

This is why Jesus tells his church to go and baptize people because he gives us the authority to do that in his name as best we can.

And so baptism is communicating this affirmation by the local church. And so it communicates what God has done in the person's life, it communicates their response to that, and it communicates the church's affirmation of that.

[16 : 27] So it's a command, it's a communication, and lastly it's a commitment. It's a commitment. So it's a commitment to Christ, to be baptized is a commitment to Christ.

On that day when Peter preached and there was thousands of people there and some of them mocked but 3,000 were added to their number and when they were baptized what were they doing?

They were saying I belong to Jesus. I identify with Jesus. I am a follower of Jesus. They were committing in that moment to following Jesus in a very public way, in a very visible way.

they were followers of Jesus that everybody could see. It wasn't a hidden thing, it wasn't a secret thing, it wasn't a private thing, it was this public commitment, I belong to him.

And so baptism is an act of commitment in and of itself. Not only is it an act of commitment to Christ publicly, but it's also an act of commitment to his people publicly.

[17 : 34] when we were given new life in Christ and united to Christ, we are not only united to him, but we are united to his people, to brothers and sisters all over the world.

That we are part of one body. And so to be baptized is this public commitment to his people, to Jesus' people. And so what is baptism?

Well, it's this command of Jesus, it is something that communicates, it shows us something, and it is a commitment. Our second question is, why would you want to be baptized?

We're not going to spend as long on the question of why would you want to be baptized, and the reason we're not going to spend as long on it is because the answer to this question is the same as the answer to the question of what it is.

it's the same answer. If baptism is a command of Jesus, as followers of Jesus, we want to follow his commands.

[18 : 42] And so as a church, why would we want to baptize people? Because Jesus has commanded us to baptize people. We don't make up the plan, we don't make up the strategy, we don't make up the rules, we have the joy and the weight lifted off to our shoulders of saying, what would Jesus have us do as a church?

Well, he's told us baptize people, baptize believers. We simply do what Jesus has commanded us to do as best we can in his strength. If he's told us to baptize people, then we'll baptize people and make disciples of people, teaching them the word.

Not only as a church do we want to follow Jesus' commands, but as individuals we want to follow Jesus' commands. Why would you want to be baptized? If you're here this morning and you're wondering should I be baptized?

If you have repented and believed, you will want to follow the Lord's commands in your life. Peter says that God has made him Lord, which means that our lives are not our own.

We follow his commands and here's a basic foundational one from Jesus. Be baptized. He gives us his commands for our good.

[19 : 59] And so if we trust him, if we know him as our Lord, we will want to follow his commands. And as a church and as individuals, that is reason enough to follow or to be baptized and to baptize people.

But we're given more reasons. Why would we want to baptize people? Why would we want to be baptized? baptized? Well, if baptism communicates something, as we've been thinking, if it says something, if it shows us something, as individuals, if we have repented and believed and not been baptized, we will want to be baptized because it communicates to the world.

Look at what God has done in my life. If you're wondering, how can I share with people my new found faith? Or my old found faith, as the case may be.

This is the way that Jesus has given, one of the primary ways to be baptized. It says to the world, this is what Jesus has done in my life. This is what God has done in my life.

And so if we want people to hear and see what God has done in our lives, how we have died and risen with Christ, how he has washed us clean, how he has done incredible work that we could never, have done ourselves.

[21 : 21] Well, God has given us this vivid visual so that we can communicate that to all who would see. It is saying to people, I have died and risen with Christ.

I have been washed clean by him. And so if as individuals we want to communicate to people, baptism is one of the key ways in which we can do that. as a church we want to be communicating too.

We want to be saying something as a church. And of course we do say something as the word is preached, as we spend time in his word, as we teach the Bible. But Jesus has given us this vivid visual so that we can communicate something.

so that we can affirm this person belongs to Christ. So that we can affirm and communicate that to all who would listen.

This person belongs to Christ. You know, if you want to be affirmed in your faith and you haven't been baptized, this is a wonderful affirmation of your faith from the local church on the authority of Jesus.

[22 : 40] To hear not just from yourself but to hear from others who have heard your story and said, yes, they belong to Jesus and we will baptize them because we see that clearly.

It is a wonderful affirmation of your faith. If baptism is a commitment to Christ and to Christians, then we will want to be baptized to show that commitment.

If you want friends and family to understand where your commitments are, here is the ideal way of showing that given to us by Jesus.

And so as we reflect on baptism, why we would want to be baptized, there are many good reasons. I know there are some reasons why you think, well, it's scary, it's daunting, can I do it?

I can understand that and empathize with that, but surely and certainly the whys outweigh the why-nots. Let's think lastly about our third question, even more briefly again, this question of who.

[23 : 53] So we've thought about what baptism is, we've thought about why would we want to be baptized, and let's think briefly about who should be baptized. and hopefully by now the answer is clear. We've seen the order in Acts chapter 2, it is people who have heard the good news of Jesus, who have realized that it demands a response of repentance and faith, who have turned from their sin and are trusting in Jesus as their Lord, and who recognize that as their Lord, Jesus commands them, one of which commands is to be baptized.

And so trusting his goodness, trusting his kindness, trusting that all his commands are for our good, if that is you, then you will want to be baptized.

If you've never been baptized as a believer, I want to encourage you, come and chat to me, we can talk it through, come and chat to Philip or to John, one of the elders here.

If you are baptized as a baby, hopefully you see now that that isn't the baptism that's been described here, that wasn't believer's baptism, somebody who has heard the good news, realized its demand on their life, understood that Jesus is Lord, and responded in repentance and faith.

And you know, we need to be conscious of priorities, so sometimes we fall into the idea baptism isn't too important, and I can understand that, so baptism isn't so important in the sense that the thief on the cross, he was assured of paradise, even though he wasn't baptized, so if we're not baptized, it's not that we won't be saved through the finished work of Christ.

[25 : 45] I understand that, but we could also ask the question, how important is it to follow the commands of Jesus? How important is it to communicate to the world what he has done in our lives?

How important is it to commit to him and his people? I would say very important, very important. Baptism is a command of Jesus for the church, for the individual believer.

It communicates what he has done in our lives, it shows our response to him and the affirmation of his people, people. And it is a commitment to Christ and to his people and it is for our good.

And so as you reflect on your own baptism, if you are baptized as a believer, allow these truths to shape how you see it. Allow these truths to sink into your reflections on your memory of that.

If you are here and haven't been baptized as a believer, I want to encourage you, this is important. It's significant. It is a command of Jesus for our good.

[26 : 58] And so I want to encourage you to seriously reflect on this, pray it through, come and chat, and ultimately that you might follow your Lord in this.

And so let's pray and ask for God to help us as we respond to him. Heavenly Father, we want to thank you and praise you that you have given us clear command through Jesus, that we are to be baptized as believers and so Lord, we ask you to help any here this morning who are wondering, who are doubting, who are questioning, Father, that you in your mercy and kindness would bring them to a clear conviction in this point.

And Father, that they might know the joy of walking, following Jesus in this. Father, that you guide them, protect them, help them, Lord, give them strength and courage, where they feel weak or frail.

And Father, may it be to your glory. And Lord, for those who have been baptized here as believers, Lord, we rejoice as we reflect on our baptism, not because it saved us, not because it made us yours, but because of what it shows us about what you have done in our lives.

And Father, we rejoice in that and delight in it. Lord, that you have united us to Christ through repentance and faith. Father, that you have washed us clean of our sins, that we are forgiven and that we are yours, Lord.

[28 : 24] We praise you for it. In Jesus' name, Amen.