

# Baptism: Sign of God's Promise

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Blessing upon Joe and Haley and their children, O Lord, bless them as a family and bless! The covenant church family here too, as in days to come. Promises that were made will be kept by your grace and for your glory. And now, Lord, too, we ask you to guide us as we look into your word.

May it truly be a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this morning we're going to explore some of what the Bible says about baptism as a sign of God's promise. And we'll be referring to a number of scriptures, including some verses we'll read now from Romans chapter 6. If you're familiar with the book of Romans, you know that it begins actually with what we could call a reality check in chapters 1, 2, and 3. It's something we may not want to hear, and yet we need to hear this. We need to know this, namely that all of us, though created in God's image, have sinned and we've fallen short of his glory. And that's true whether we're Jews or Gentiles, whether we're poor or rich, whether we're young or old, whether we're female or male, we all have sinned against God. And that's a big deal because, as those chapters of Romans tell us, the wage that sin pays out isn't life, but it's actually death. And yet, after giving us this somber, you might say, and convicting reality check, Romans gives us good news. And wow, talk about good news, chapters 4 and 5 and following too. You can say this, hallelujah. Good news, folks, God saves sinners. He saves sinners. And listen to how Romans 5 puts this, verses 8 and 9. God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we, that's us, that's me, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Can you imagine that? The very Son of God, so full of love and mercy and so intent on it, he actually died for us? It's amazing. And since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him? Did you catch that? Think of it. If through his dying, he's a shed his blood to wash our sins away so that we might be justified and have peace with God. If by his dying, we are saved, how much more shall we be saved through his living?

He is risen never to die again. So if by his weakness is dying, we are saved. How much more by his strength, his rising, shall we be saved? And you see in this a hint of something we'll touch on a bit in the sermon this morning, and that's that when God saves us, he actually links us to Jesus. The Holy Spirit unites us with Christ in such a way that we actually share in his death and his resurrection and therefore his glory. This is a great teaching of the Bible, summarized in the words unity with Christ or union with Christ. And Romans 6 talks about that. Let's go ahead and read from Romans 6, starting at verse 1. What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace might increase? By no means. We died to sin. How did that happen? Union with Christ, right? We died to sin. How can we live it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were 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 might live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will also certainly be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. I can think of it. You are linked to Jesus by God's grace and through faith. And so, verse 8, now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again. Death has no longer any mastery over him.

[ 4 : 5 2 ] The death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God in the same way. Here's application. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. That applies. You died with Christ, you're alive with Christ. So, yeah, verse 13, do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness.

Like, what, your tongue, the words you're going to speak, your brain, the thoughts you're going to say, your feet, where you're going to go.

Don't offer them as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourself to God as those who have been brought from death to life. And offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

For sin shall not be your master because you are not under law, but under grace. That's God's word in Romans chapter 6.

[ 6 : 08 ] It was 92 years ago now, in connection with 1933, I think that's 92 years ago, the World's Fair at Chicago, at that event, a number of religious leaders from around the world gathered to talk to each other and just to discuss what their various religions taught.

And one by one, therefore, it's like they went around the table and someone talked about the way of Buddhism, the way of Hinduism, the way of Islam, and so forth. And at that gathering, there was a man named Dr. Joseph Cook who talked about the Christian faith.

And to get at it, he spoke of a scene in the famous play, Shakespeare play called Macbeth. That's a story of scheming.

It's a story of murder. In it, in the story, a military commander and his wife, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, they want to rule Scotland.

And so they plot together to assassinate, to kill King Duncan. And though it was Macbeth who used a dagger to kill the king, both he and Lady Macbeth ended up getting some of the blood of King Duncan on their hands.

[ 7 : 27 ] And so what did they do? Well, they didn't want to get caught for doing this. So they washed the blood off their hands. And though they did that, Lady Macbeth, she couldn't get rid of her guilt, which began to eat away at her soul.

And she started having dreams in this play. She's having dreams in which she would see her hands still red with King Duncan's blood. And as he was describing this, Dr. Cook said to the others from these other religions, he said, Behold, Lady Macbeth, and watch as she walks at night the corridors of the palace.

And listen as she mutters. And then begins to shout, Out, out, you cursed spot. Out, I say. Will these hands never be clean?

Will these hands never be clean? And Dr. Cook asked the others at that gathering, he said, Well, what does your religion offer Lady Macbeth?

What hope does your religion offer someone who is guilty? What does your religion offer to wash away a person's sin?

[ 8 : 48 ] And at least for a while, those sitting at the table were silent. After all, there's no cleansing in karma, the religious idea, which says what goes around comes around.

And if you've a sin, in some way you're going to pay for that. There's no getting around it. That's what karma says. Nor is there real release from guilt in religions that say in various ways, You know, what you need to do is you need to turn over a new leaf.

Say you're sorry and do good things to make up for what you did, the thing that's eating away at you. But that doesn't really offer a hope of true cleansing.

Because if you stop to think about it, there's no amount of praying today or burning incense or giving money to charity. There's nothing we can do today or tomorrow to actually change anything that we have done in the past.

Well, Dr. Cook continued and he said, friends, the Bible has good news for us because it reveals the saving work of the Son of God, Jesus.

[ 10 : 02 ] The Bible reveals that God himself has done what was necessary for our sins to be washed away. And it's not that we are washing them away.

It's that God is washing us through the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus. And then he quoted from Hebrews 10, verse 22, where the Bible says, Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, knowing that something's happened, right?

Having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, having our bodies washed with pure water. Goodness.

God saves sinners. Consider how this also is pictured in baptism.

We saw it again this morning that baptism is a ritual. It's a sacrament. It's a ceremony instituted by Christ in which we use water.

[11:07] And some churches use a lot of water so much they actually dunk a person. And we don't use quite so much water here. I really tried to get Anika wet, but we don't use quite that much.

But the point is that at the moment of baptism, whether someone's in a tank or the waters, I mean, they are actually underwater in baptism.

Whether it's a lot or a little water, a person is underwater. And that is a sign of what God has promised to do in our souls. The water of baptism points to his promise where God said, I'll forgive their wickedness.

I'll remember your sin no more. And I hope you did see this in Anika's baptism here this morning. I hope you saw in this simple ritual of washing that there's actually hope not only for Anika, but there's hope for you.

For you in Christ and in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I hope you see this, that as surely as water can wash dirt off of your body, so the blood of Jesus really washes away your sins.

[12:17] Now, you may not feel clean all the time because you might remember something you did and you're embarrassed about it. And you wonder because you still feel this and you wonder. But no, family of God, please know this, what the Apostle Paul wrote to the dysfunctional and formerly pagan believers at Corinth.

He said this, well, that's God's promise, but he said this in Corinthians. He said, I will forgive you. And you were washed. You were sanctified.

You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You used to be lost. You used to be living in sin. But now you have been washed and sanctified and justified in the name of Christ.

And that, friends, is what baptism pictures for us. It's a sign of God's promise to wash away your guilt.

At the risk of stating the obvious, we should point out that it's not the water of baptism, obviously, but it's the blood of Christ that cleanses us. It's not the water.

[13:28] It's the blood. All the water in itself does is, well, it makes a person wet. But it's a sign.

What the Holy Spirit does in our heart. This is God's promise. Come now. Let us reason together, says the Lord.

Though your sins are like scarlet. That's a deep red stain. Your heart, though it shall be as white as snow. Though they are as red as crimson, they will be like wool.

Sign. God's promise. Now, in the verses we read from Romans 6, we find that baptism is also a sign of God's promise to unite us with Christ.

And let me just read a couple of those verses again, starting at verse 3. And notice the references to being linked to Jesus. Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

[14:35] We were buried, therefore, 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 if we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. Well, how does baptism point to this promise of union with Christ?

Well, as we've already suggested, when people are baptized, they go underwater. Whether they're immersed completely or water's on their head. At the moment of baptism, they're underwater.

And that is indeed a sign, a symbol of dying, right? Going under. Being buried with Christ. But when we baptize someone, they don't stay underwater.

Oh, no, they emerge from the water. And they dry off and they go forward to live a new life.

Baptized in the name of Jesus. And that's the picture, you see.

[15:40] We die with Christ to live with Christ. And, yes, God promises this. The soul link us with Jesus in time and for eternity. That we share in his dying and rising and glory.

So there's that application again. As we follow Jesus, let's remember, count ourselves, reckon ourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God.

Which means very practically, you and I, day by day, well, we don't keep offering the parts of our body, hands and feet and so forth, as instruments of sin, but rather we would offer ourselves to God.

Because we know that united with Christ, we have been linked to Jesus in his dying and now his rising. Why? Why? We can live and offer ourselves to God to do what is right and holy and good and loving as instruments of righteousness.

Now, we don't do this all the time. But this is our calling and it's actually based on the fact that we are united with Christ. So reckon, think, think, think, reckon this.

[16:52] Well, what about baptizing the children of believing parents? Not all churches do this. And they would say, well, if a child's not old enough to understand this sin and forgiveness, Jesus dying and so forth, just wait.

Maybe they'll ask to be baptized later. Well, our catechism addresses this question where it asks, should infants also be baptized?

And yeah, based on scriptures like Genesis 17 and Matthew 19, the answer it gives is yes. And the reasoning is this, because infants as well as adults are in God's covenant and are his people.

So infants may receive baptism as a sign that they're part of God's community of faith. And I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but you see this already in the Old Testament, how God includes children in his covenant.

You see this in Genesis with Abraham, where God made a covenant not just with Abraham and Sarah, but also with their descendants. And when God gave circumcision, Old Testament, as a sign of his covenant, God said it was for actually all the males in Abraham's household, Abraham and servants too, regardless of their age.

[18:14] And when the promised son Isaac was born, when Isaac was just a few days old, he received the sign of the covenant. And if you think about it, that's just so gracious of God.

I mean, Isaac's what, seven, eight days old only? What did he do to earn a place in God's covenant? Well, he didn't, but God freely and graciously included Isaac in the community of faith. Of course, when Isaac would grow up, he would have to decide whether he would keep or break a covenant with God. But from infancy, you see, God included him in the family.

Now, the reference in Matthew 19 is to when some parents were bringing little children to Jesus, hoping that Jesus would just place his hand on them and give them a word of blessing.

The disciples, remember that story? They didn't want those parents and children bothering Jesus, so they were like ready to shoo them away. But Jesus said to them, no, no, no, let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for such is the kingdom of heaven.

[19:26] That's not an obvious reference to baptism, but it shows us that even now, New Testament little children are still very important to Jesus.

Very important. Now, our catechism goes on to note that infants, no less than adults, are promised the forgiveness of sins through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit, who produces faith.

So think of it like this. The promise of salvation is not age-restricted. It's not like a sale comes out in a flyer in your newspaper and you go to the store on Tuesday and, sorry, it doesn't start until Wednesday.

And you go there the next Thursday and, sorry, it ended yesterday. It's not like that. It's not age-restricted. It's not time-restricted. The Bible doesn't say to senior citizens, oh, sorry, but you're too old to believe and be saved.

You should have done that when you were in your 20s. Oh, no, no. Nor does the Bible say to a child, let's say, less than 12 years old, oh, sorry, you're too young to believe and be saved.

[20:41] Not at all. The promise is for everyone, whatever our age, even infants, to hear, though they don't really understand it yet.

And one way to think of this is like a check. Remember writing out checks? Some of us still do. A check is a promise, a written-out promise.

When you write out a check, you promise you're going to pay or give something to someone. So what is it that God, Triune, promises in the gospel?

Well, he promises forgiveness, and he promises new life in Christ to whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is for all of us. God hands us the check.

In baptism, I think you could say the promise is personalized because, you know, the name is called out.

[21:52] And Jo and Haley can teach Annika this, that at her baptism today, God not only repeated the promise, but called her by name.

Very personal. It's for you to see, to know, to believe, to receive. Now, when we write out checks, there's laws about that.

And if they're not cashed right away, you know, they might become void after six months or a year or something like that. But but thankfully, God's promise doesn't expire. It doesn't expire.

It's good even now. Right. So if you first were given this promise when you were a little one, maybe 50, 60, whatever years ago, guess what?

His promise still stands. It is good. Even now, it's for whoever believe. The Bible says now is the time of God's favor.

[ 22 : 52 ] Now is the day of salvation. That means the promise is good now. Now. So, oh, dear friends, especially if we've never done this before.

Let's take this gift from God, this check, so to speak. And let's turn it over. And let's write our names on the back. Let's endorse it. Let's say, Jesus, you've called to me and I want to follow you.

You died for my sins. I want to serve you. Let's turn it over. Let's receive. Receive. But God is proud.

Now, when we think of infants again, we can consider to briefly the word household that we find in the Old and New Testaments. Back in Genesis 17, the sign of circumcision was for Abraham and for all the males in his household, including servants, including baby Isaac.

And it's interesting that in the New Testament, the word household comes up several times in connection with baptism. In Acts 16, Lydia.

[ 24 : 05 ] She heard the gospel. She heard the gospel. The Holy Spirit opened her heart to receive the good news of Jesus. She believed she and her household were baptized. Also, later in Acts 16, there was a jailer at Philippi.

He heard the gospel.

Over in 1 Corinthians 1, 16, the apostle Paul wrote. He said, I didn't really baptize many people, although I did baptize the household of Stephan.

Stephan. So there you have the household idea, old covenant, and still new covenant, circumcision, and now baptism.

Well, there's so much more, you could say. But let's just go back to the main idea this morning.

Baptism is a sign of God's good news promise.

[ 25 : 33 ] His promise to wash our sins away. And oh, I hope you know this, that the blood of Jesus really, truly cleanses us.

Believe. You shall be saved. That's God's promise. And it's a picture, a sign of God's promise to save us by uniting us with Christ so that we are buried with him in baptism.

We are raised with him to live new lives. We are connected with Jesus, sharing his glory. And notice, too, this is God's promise.

Young and old alike. Oh, believe. Believe. Live. In covenant with God.

Believe. And receive. All that God has promised. Amen. Shall we pray. Thank you, God, for the word that we hear.

[ 26 : 41 ] And for the sacraments, the simple rituals of eating and washing. Which reminds with picture for us. The amazing, saving grace.

That you have for us in Jesus. Lord, may we each look to you in faith. And receive what you have pledged.

To us and Jesus. In whose name we pray. Amen.