

The Baptism that Saves

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Date: 13 August 2023

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[0 : 00] Good morning. How's it going? Well, how are you? I'm doing well. Thank you. That's generally why I ask, so that somebody will ask me back.

That's really the... Yes. We're going to be continuing in our series through various articles of our statement of faith, and today we come to the subject of baptism.

And for this body to grow in our shared understanding of this, we're going to be defining baptism.

We're going to be clarifying the role of baptism in the church and in the life of the believer, and we're going to identify a few misunderstandings about baptism.

And I'll admit, as tempting as it may be, every New Testament reference to baptism cannot and should not fit into one sermon.

But that is a tempting thing to try to do. Today, instead, we're going to look at one baptism event, and that's the conversion of Cornelius, and then we're going to provide a foundational understanding of baptism from that text.

[1 : 19] But first, let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, what a privilege and a pleasure it is to live in your world.

Even though it has fallen, you are with us. And for that, we thank you. We thank you that, just like this, in prayer, we can come before your throne in confidence because of the work of Jesus.

Father, would you guide us by your Holy Spirit to understand your word, to apply it to our lives, and to bring you glory.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, so first, some background before Cornelius' baptism. So the disciples were given the Holy Spirit back in Acts 2, at what we call Pentecost, where they declare the mighty works of God to crowds in various languages.

And this is considered to be the birth of the church. And from that day forward, the entire Christian church was made up of Jewish believers.

[2 : 37] But then years later, Peter meets Cornelius, and everything changes. Cornelius is a Roman centurion.

He's a Gentile. Kids, do you know what that means, to be a Gentile? It doesn't mean to be gentle, by the way. Do you know what that means, to be a Gentile? Gentile? Well, that, okay, so at one point that may have been the case.

Gentile pretty much is everybody who's not a Jew. Anybody who's not a Jew would be considered a Gentile. So guess what? Even if you're a believer in this room, if you're not Jewish, you're a Gentile.

Well, but thankfully, believers can still be Gentiles, and vice versa. That's a good thing. And actually, this story sort of hints at that.

And so Cornelius is a Gentile, and he and his household are devoted to God, but they are not yet saved because they have not yet come to Jesus in faith.

[3 : 55] How many of you know what a flashback is? Maybe you've seen it in movies where there's like a little bit of background given to the main character. Sometimes it's in black and white.

Sometimes it's not. I was trying to think of a child-specific flashback in the movie, and I think that Gru from Despicable Me has a couple flashbacks where we see him back in his childhood.

And if you're a little bit older, like me, you might remember the original Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles where Splinter tells the story of when he first met four baby turtles.

These are flashbacks. And so we're going to provide a little bit of a flashback to lead up to today's passage.

So think about this. When I tell this portion of the story, I want you to think about it in black and white, okay, because this is sort of the background, a flashback leading up to the passage.

[4 : 58] Okay, can you picture it with me? We're in black and white. Cornelius gets a visit from an angel. And this angel tells Cornelius to send men down to Joppa to find the apostle Peter and to bring him back to Cornelius' house.

So Cornelius sends his men. And Cornelius also invites his relatives and his close friends to his home to hear Peter's soon message of salvation.

Now while those men were still traveling toward Joppa, God gives Peter his famous vision of a sheet coming down from heaven that has a bunch of animals in it.

Peter is told to kill and eat the animals, even though some of them were unclean according to Jewish law.

And Peter said, By no means, Lord, I've never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice came to him, What God has made clean do not call common.

[6 : 08] Peter is baffled by this vision. We're still in black and white. Cornelius' men show up and Peter goes with them.

And Peter quickly comes to understand that this vision that God gave him was not actually about food. The Lord was showing Peter, a Jew, that he should not consider any person, even a Gentile, to be unclean.

Flashback is over. We're no longer in black and white. I'm now going to invite Kara up for today's text. We are now in full color. Peter is now entering the house where Cornelius and his household and his relatives and his friends are all gathered.

So we're going to hear Acts 10, verses 34 down through 48. So Peter opened his mouth and said, Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all. You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism that John proclaimed.

[7 : 36] How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

And we are witnesses of all that he did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people, but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. To him, all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word and the believers coming from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.

For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?

[8 : 50] And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. Thank you. Praise God for the gift of his word, that we have it.

Now this event with Cornelius was so important to the earliest years of the church because beginning with the Jews, God was baptizing his people with the Holy Spirit and then Cornelius, a Gentile, and his household were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

And Jews and Gentiles are no longer separate. But they are one in Christ Jesus. Then Peter calls for them to be baptized in water.

So what do we do with all this? First we have to understand what it means to be baptized. So we get the word baptize straight from the Greek.

You ready? Baptizo. So. Starting to see why we call it baptize. Baptizo. Baptizo. It literally means to immerse or to submerge.

[10 : 06] When an article of clothing was dyed a new color, it was baptized in the dye. And the New Testament speaks of two types of baptism.

There's the baptism from God, which is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the baptism from the hands of people, which is the baptism of water. Now this means that though they are connected, we

can't read every mention of baptism only in one way.

Cornelius has received God's baptism, baptized with the Holy Spirit, and soon after, Peter commands him to receive water baptism.

Now interestingly, the conversion and baptism of Cornelius closely follows Jesus' words in the Great Commission. You might remember after his resurrection, I'm going to read along with you on the screen, Matthew 28, verses 18 through 20, after his resurrection, Jesus came and said to them, So in commanding Cornelius to be baptized, Peter wasn't only giving a command, he was also obeying a command.

Because Jesus has commanded his people to preach the good news, to make disciples, and baptize them. Now following this baptism, disciples are to continue learning what Jesus has commanded.

[12:04] We're going to trace the Great Commission alongside what we just read about Cornelius. So Jesus said, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

Peter was sent to Cornelius where he preached the gospel, saying in verse 43, To him, that's to Jesus, this is Peter speaking, to Jesus all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives the forgiveness of sins through his name.

Cornelius has received that message of salvation in faith. Jesus said, Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

So making disciples involves baptizing the believer and teaching all that Jesus has commanded.

And, okay, verse 48, And Peter commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and then they asked him to remain for some days.

Quick side note, you can bet that Peter taught the commands of Jesus during this multi-day visit after this. So Cornelius was saved.

[13:24] He was immersed or baptized in the Spirit. This is the baptism that saves. The baptism of the Holy Spirit.

And then Cornelius is baptized in water, which was a sign of unity with his Savior, and it was his first act of obedience to his Lord.

And from then on, the Holy Spirit is faithful to guide Cornelius into all truth. And the same is true for every redeemed child of God.

And I will just say, if you have been saved, if you've been baptized with the Holy Spirit, and your faith is fully in Christ, you are immersed and placed fully in Christ, but if you, believer, have not been baptized in water, I will ask the same question that Peter asked.

Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? So that brings us to some key phrases from our statement of faith, since that is our series.

[14:39] This is right from the baptism portion of our statement of faith. We believe that Christian baptism is the immersion in water of a believer into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to show forth in a solemn and beautiful emblem our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior with its effect in our death to sin and resurrection to a new life.

In short, we celebrate baptism by immersion for believers in Jesus as a proclamation of the baptized person's union with Christ, sharing in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

And it's not to be taken lightly, did you hear it? It's a beautiful and solemn emblem. Cornelius, in God's kindness, has received the new birth.

He was born of the Spirit and it was the logical and commanded next step for him to be baptized in water. And being baptized was then and still is now a very public demonstration of being united with Christ.

Now that phrase should catch our attention. Have you thought about what it means to be united with Christ? If you are a Christian, hear me.

[16:15] You are united with Christ. You are known and loved by Christ. He has claimed you.

You are one with the Savior forever. Let that thought wash over you.

Being united with Christ is being in Christ. And here's a fun fact for you. The phrase in Christ along with the variations in the Lord and in Him that phrase shows up 164 times in Paul's letters alone.

This is one of his favorite phrases to describe those who are saved. Believers are in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5.17 which is a great memory verse by the way.

It sums up both what it means to be in Christ and what baptism signifies. 2 Corinthians 5.17 says, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

[17 : 37] The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. And if you've had the privilege of attending a baptism ceremony of someone who has come to faith in Christ, it is a celebration.

A person has been born again into God's family. The believer is united to Christ and we are seeing a beautiful picture or emblem, since that's a way cooler word, of that invisible spiritual reality. We rejoice at this picture just as all of heaven did when that lost sheep was found. I also find it necessary to point out a sad fact.

The subject of baptism, yes, is a beautiful celebration, but it's also the source of a lot of confusion and imbalance. Unhealthy beliefs about baptism are ubiquitous.

There's a vocabulary word for us all. Can you promise you're going to use that word at least once before bedtime? Ubiquitous. Ubiquitous means it's everywhere.

[18 : 54] It's all over the place. Imbalanced beliefs about baptism are ubiquitous. I'm going to warn against two, but we're going to spend most of our time on the first one.

Here's the first one. We must avoid the error of seeing water baptism as an act of salvation itself. To say that water baptism saves the person being baptized not only reverses the conversion of Cornelius, but more importantly, it claims that salvation is in the hands of people and not of God. This is known as baptismal regeneration. baptismal regeneration. But does water baptism save a person?

For example, when a baby is baptized in the Catholic faith, the church sees that ceremony as bringing about the actual salvation of that baby. The Catholic Catechism puts it this way in paragraph!

1250, you can read along. It says this, the church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer baptism shortly after birth.

[20 : 26] So parents are accused of blocking their children from being born again, from being saved, if they postpone infant baptism. Make no mistake, baptism is a serious and beautiful picture of the Holy Spirit's baptism and the person's union with Christ, but it is improper to place water baptism in the category of a saving act.

To further complicate the matter, the current Pope, Francis, has gone beyond this. He not only upholds baptismal regeneration, but he's now taught that baptism saves not only the one being baptized.

How? Well, just a couple years ago, Pope Francis was at a speaking event in Italy where he was answering questions from the crowd, and a little boy was chosen and he came up and asked a question, and he told Pope Francis that his dad had just passed away and that he died as an unbeliever.

He also said that his father had all of his children baptized. The boy wanted to know, is my dad in heaven? And here was the Pope's answer.

God surely was proud of your father father. Because it is easier as a believer to baptize your children than to baptize them when you are not a believer.

[22 : 09] Surely this pleased God very much. Talk to your dad. Pray to your dad. What?

That is absolutely stunning. The other troubling statements aside, because there are many, but this little boy was just told that his dad is in heaven, not because of any faith in Christ, but because he had his children baptized.

The message of the gospel has been completely abandoned. what happened to the words of God regarding eternal life.

Hear these familiar words. John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

And then we continue. Verse 17. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Verse 18.

[23 : 21] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God.

God's word is crystal clear. and it's sobering. But hear the promise of redemption through faith.

Romans 8, 1. You've also heard this one. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

That is the gospel. But the Pope's message to that boy and to the crowd and to everyone who has seen that footage since was this.

It is not faith that matters. The water matters. Baptize your children. Not only will the water save them, but it will save the unbelieving parent who allows it.

[24 : 30] Brothers and sisters, I know that that boy's question was very difficult. Very uncomfortable. terrible. But hear me, violating the gospel to make someone feel better is not loving.

We must love people with the gospel and point them to Christ, not comfort them to hell. Salvation is found in no one else.

Christ alone saves. And without faith, it is impossible to please God. That's Hebrews 11 6. There's another belief about baptism which is not as well known, and it's held by a group called the Church of Christ.

This is a wide and diverse collection of churches, and they say that a believer must also be baptized in order to be saved. So there is faith, there is belief, but also baptism in order for salvation to actually occur.

Belief plus baptism. You might recall the Galatians in Scripture, they were tempted to believe that faith plus circumcision was required for salvation.

[25 : 51] And do you know what Paul said about that? That gospel is no gospel at all. If you add anything to Christ's work, we must be on guard for any gospel that is faith plus works in order to receive salvation.

Faith plus good works, even a great work, even a great act of obedience like baptism. That is no gospel at all.

Okay, we need an illustration. How many of you have seen the movie Home Alone? Home Alone?

Okay, if you have your hand up, congratulations.

You can grab candy on the way out, that's fantastic. Now, unbeknownst to the makers of the movie, they did not go for this, but there is a scene in Home Alone that can serve as an analogy for baptism.

Are you ready for this? I hope the wheels are turning and you're trying to figure it out before me.

Okay, so the McAllister family is about to head to the airport early one morning to fly to Paris for Christmas.

[27 : 12] That morning, Kevin's parents accidentally sleep in. Kevin has spent the night up in the attic and the family is now outside loading up the vans.

And one of the family members does a head count to make sure that the whole family is present and accounted for. Does that sound familiar? But there's a problem.

Kevin isn't there. Thank you. So he's not counted. And there's another problem.

Some neighbor kid waltzes over in the midst of this head count and he is counted as a family member. And you might still be thinking, okay, what on earth does this have to do with baptism?

I'm so glad you asked. We're going to use that head count as a metaphor for baptism. Because remember, baptism is a public declaration that a person has been united with Christ.

[28 : 14] It's an outward identification as a child of God, as one who is truly in the family of Christ. The head count in Home Alone was an attempt to identify those who were truly in the family.

So let's look at the three situations. Number one, we have Kevin, who should have been counted, but he wasn't. He is a true family member, and we agree that he doesn't lose his status as family member by missing that head count.

But he should have participated in that family identifying process. Number two, we have the neighbor kid, who shouldn't have been counted, but he was.

And we know that counting him as part of the family didn't actually change his identity into family member. And number three, we have those who were properly recognized.

Most of the family, right? They followed the directions of being clearly identified with their family. They were in the family, and they were rightly recognized as such. So it is with baptism.

[29 : 24] To compare Kevin's situation, the true but uncounted family member, this is like the truly saved, born again believers in Jesus, children of God, but they haven't been baptized.

Whatever the reason may be for not yet taking this step, each of God's faithful children should stand up and be counted through the obedient act of baptism.

To compare the head count of the neighbor, we recall that his participation in the act didn't change his identity into a family member. Likewise, the act of water baptism does not cause a person to

become a child of God.

It does not change the person's identity. We must reject that doctrine of baptismal regeneration, the idea of being baptized in water causing a person to be born again with a new identity.

And like the family members who were counted, they had family membership and they were acting in accordance with their identity. Remember Cornelius.

[30 : 30] He was united to Christ by being baptized in the Holy Spirit and he acted in accordance with his new identity through water baptism. So perhaps you were maybe a believer who already has been baptized.

baptized. You've been immersed in the water and every part of your body was covered in water and when you stepped out of the water there was no hiding it. Every part of your body is drenched and dripping with water.

But time has passed since your baptism. You've already come out of the water, you've dried off, you've changed clothes and you no longer look like you were just immersed in the water.

And that makes sense, right? Because the signs of our outward baptism fade away with a towel and the passing of an hour.

But remember, your baptism in water celebrates your baptism in the Spirit into union with Christ and the signs of our inward baptism do not fade away.

[31 : 45] Remember how Jesus finished his great commission. He said, I am with you always to the end of the age.

So fellow believer, the water may not still be on you, but the Holy Spirit is still in you. Remember daily that you are forever united with Christ.

And that's why together with Paul, we can declare from Galatians 2.20, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Can we pray together?

Father, we thank you for your perfect loving plan of redemption. We thank you that you have called your children to faith, both from Jews and Gentiles to be counted as your children being born of you.

[33 : 13] Lord, we recall that when you grant us repentance from our sin and faith in our Savior, that we are born again.

We are a new creation. our old self has passed away and the new has come. And when we are united with Christ, we are joined to our Savior forever.

Father, please prevent us from ever getting used to that idea as an ordinary thought. Lord, help us to rejoice daily in that truth and to constantly and humbly be grateful for your wondrous gift that we did not earn.

We cannot merit our salvation. We remember it's a gift from you. And as we go forward, Lord, we pray that you would help us to keep in step with the Spirit who has saved us and that you also help us to be unashamed of the gospel and to share the truth in love and in concern with people who don't yet know you because we know that Christ is the only Savior and it is through faith that we are united to Him.

We thank you for this truth and we pray that you go before us in Jesus' name. Amen.