

Baptism: The Gateway to the Church

Selected Scriptures

May 10, 2015

All right, we have started into a series on involvement in the local church. We set a foundation last week in 1 Timothy 3:14-16 by seeing how significant the local church is in God's eyes, churches, the pillar and ground of the truth. That's the language that's used there in 1 Timothy 3. As we said, local churches are like temples. That's the imagery that Paul used in 1 Timothy 3.

And God has filled those temples, the local churches, he's filled them with the precious treasure of his Word. That means every Christian is a keeper of the truth. Every Christian is a guardian of the truth, and we guard the truth, like we said, we guard it by giving it away. We preserve and protect the Gospel by proclaiming the Gospel, proclaiming it to the whole world.

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Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

You know how the church builds and grows? You know how it fulfills what Jesus said there? You know how it stays strong so no power of hell will ever overwhelm it? Well, the church holds fast to the truth by proclaiming the truth. In a very real sense, it's this proclamation mission of the local church that is the means of its own preservation. It's by the repeated proclamation of the true Gospel to an unbelieving world. It's by the continual reaffirmation of the truths of orthodoxy as we teach disciples to follow Jesus Christ. That activity reinforces those truths continually, protecting and preserving the Gospel and all its implications in our lives.

So as a local church remains faithful to its mission, to that mission, it remains relevant to God and to the world. When a church gets distracted from that mission, it ceases to be relevant. You get churches doing all kinds of stuff these days. Soup kitchens reaching out to the homeless. All those things are good things. But are they the church's mission? They're not.

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The church has no other purpose than this purpose. There is no other institution with the sole purpose of proclaiming the truth, no other institution on the earth with the sole purpose of making disciples, just the church. So it's time to clear away all the distractions and reestablish that singular focus.

Now, having said that, it's also time to reestablish the truth about the membership of the local church. Who are its members? What is the local church made up of? I guess it goes without saying that the church is made up of Christians, believers who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The church consists of born-again followers of Christ, true disciples of our only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Sure, I know there are false professors who attend church, but they aren't the church. There are lifeless branches who are superficially attached to the vine. But there's no vitality in them, is there? They aren't the church. Those are the tares among the wheat. They are the profane mixing in among the sacred. They are the pretenders hiding out among the sincere

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worshippers. The tares, the profane, the false, they don't do such a good job at helping us to fulfill, to carry out the mission that God gave us to do here on the earth, do they? They undermine it. They run counter to it.

And that is one of the reasons why Jesus gave the church ordinances to practice until he returns. Some call them sacraments. It's an okay word. As long as you don't have the Roman Catholic definition of conferring grace in your mind, sacraments is an okay word. It's just talking about an outward symbol that gives, that gives expression to an inward reality, inward spiritual reality. We call them ordinances.

And he gave two ordinances that define and protect the fellowship. Baptism is an initiation sacrament, and communion is a preservation sacrament. Baptism is the ordinance that provides entry into the fellowship by defining what a true Christian is. And communion is the ordinance that preserves and protects the fellowship by calling Christians to live consistently with the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

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Well, we're going to talk about communion next week because we're going to have an opportunity to celebrate the Lord's Table together. For today, we want to get some clarity on the ordinance of baptism, the ritual that provides entry into the church.

Jesus instituted the ordinance of baptism after he had risen from the dead, just before he ascended into heaven. In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to do, to observe all that I've commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age."

We all know that as the Great Commission, right? That's the charter statement of Christ's church. It defines our mission and clarifies our purpose here on earth, and the single imperative in that Great Commission, the one command, make disciples. The word, go, is a participle. It's called a participle of attendant circumstance for all you grammarians out there, and it picks up

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the mood, there, of the great, of the, the main verb, go and make disciples.

So it sounds like a command, but the main verb points us here to a disciple-making task. And that task requires two activities, baptizing and teaching. You know, since, since I've come here, we've talked a lot about the church's duty to teach its members. We keep hammering that over and over and over. That's where we started last fall, going through Ephesians 4:1-16. That teaching ministry of the local church is the fundamental task of leadership because that's how the membership becomes equipped to do the work of the ministry, right? That's not unfamiliar to you.

What we haven't talked about very much, and listen, what I find is an all too often neglected and trivialized aspect of local church life is the indispensable ritual by which a person enters the local church. Baptism is the very gateway to the church, and we need to treat it with the dignity and the importance that's demanded by our Lord's Great Commission.

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Inasmuch as we need to emphasize teaching, and we do need to, need to emphasize baptism, too.

It's troubling to see how many churches, to see how many Christians, individual Christians, are either ignorant of or indifferent to the ordinance of baptism. Frankly, baptism has fallen on some hard times. And that goes hand-in-hand with the lack of clarity in this country and around the world about the Gospel. When there are so many false gospels cluttering up the evangelical landscape, as an ordinance that pictures the Gospel, I guess it makes sense that baptism would be distorted too.

There are some today who baptize each other just as individuals, one guy baptizing the other guy in a backyard swimming pool or a beach or whatever. They're completely apart from the corporate gathering of the local church, totally independent from any duly constituted church authority. Some churches trivialize baptism, relegating it to like some kind of a family thing, like a family rite of passage, fathers and mothers baptizing their kids in the pool, and it's a big family celebration.

Is that what it is? One kid made a mockery of baptism by running, jumping, and making a cannonball into the baptismal pool. What's up with that? To his credit, the pastor said that was the first and the last time that would ever happen. He said that on the video, but his congregation was laughing hysterically. Not good.

Steven Furtick, a Southern Baptist pastor, has been criticized recently for profaning baptism. He uses baptism as a metric of his success, his church's success. The more baptisms recorded each year, the more evidence of success. His Elevation Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, is making a run at a new record of baptisms per year. In a report obtained by the NBC affiliate in Charlotte, North Carolina, Elevation Church went from 289 baptisms in 2010 to 2,410 in 2011. Took a little dip in 2012 to 689, but it was back to 3,519 for the first eight months of 2013.

Furtick called those numbers "nothing short of miraculous," and he explained the phenomenon as a fresh outpouring of the

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Holy Spirit on his church. And he would have gotten away with it, too, if it hadn't been for them meddling kids. Someone leaked a document written by Furtick, called *The Spontaneous Baptism's How-To Guide*. Actual title. Turns out the Holy Spirit was using the principles of crowd psychology and group dynamics to create this revival.

To achieve high baptism numbers for your church, you're going to need about a hundred or so volunteers to form a number of different teams. Got a celebration team, a registration team, dry changing team, host team, tank team, wet changing team, media team, and VHQ team take care of your volunteers. For example, the celebration team is made up of people who are planted in the audience. These are insiders. They're planted in the audience, planted at the doors, in the hallways, and using crowd psychology, conformity, group dynamics, that celebration team encourages people to go forward, to get up out of their seat and go forward.

Here's a quote from the how-to guide. I've got a copy in case we're interested in trying to do this here. Here's what it

says, quote, "Fifteen people will sit in the worship experience," not a service, an experience, "worship experience and be the first ones to move when the pastor gives the call. Sit in the auditorium and begin moving forward when Pastor Steven says go. Move intentionally through the highest visibility areas and the longest walk." End quote.

Furtick stations people at the doors telling them to quote, "Smile, clap, showing people you're excited that they came forward." End quote. Another 30 to 60 people are in the halls to, says here, quote, "create a critical mass as people are moving through the hallway toward registration area."

Evidently, this contrived spontaneity works. People love to follow the crowd. They love to do what their peers are doing. And they plan on an average of between 30 to 45 seconds to baptize each person. This includes entry into the baptistery, the announcement of their name, baptism and exit. As one reporter observed, writing for the newspaper, quote, "Think of the room in terms of a NASCAR pit stop. Quick in and quick out." End quote. And poof, 3,000 baptisms per year.

Listen, whatever your view of baptism, that's clearly making a mockery of Christian baptism. Beloved, no Christian should treat baptism in such a trivial fashion. Baptism is not a gimmick. It is not a metric of success. Baptism is a holy ordinance, and it ought to be respected, treated with dignity and honor. We can start to honor the ordinance of baptism today by understanding it, and that's what we hope to do right now. We want to understand the significance of baptism as the initiation rite, the initiation ritual by which the redeemed enter into the fellowship of the Christian Church.

So let me give you a little outline to follow for this morning. We're going to ask and answer four questions about baptism, which is, which are going to help us understand, as you can see in your bulletin, the definition, the implications, the demonstration, and the function of baptism. The definition, implication, demonstration, and the function of baptism.

Let's start at our first point, the definition of baptism. What is baptism? Where'd it come from? What is it, where'd it

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come from? Simple question, right? The word, baptize, comes from the Greek verb *baptizo*, and you could turn to Matthew Chapter 3. We'll get there in a moment, but turn to Matthew Chapter 3 because that's where it's first used in the New Testament.

Baptizo comes from an even shorter verb. It's built off an even shorter verb, *bapto*, *bapto*, and *bapto* means to dip, as in dipping a bite of food into a sauce. That's the word used when Jesus dipped the morsel of bread on the night of his betrayal. "He dipped his morsel into the sop," John 13:36, "and he gave it to Judas Iscariot." That morsel was dipped in the sop, and it was, it was soaked. It was immersed.

Bapto was also used of dipping a garment into dye and, and dying a fabric. In Revelation 19:13, Jesus is clothed in a robe stained with blood. That's the word *bapto*. The fibers of the fabric had been fully saturated in the staining liquid, in this case the blood.

Now, the word baptize, *baptizo*, that's an even more intense word than the word *bapto*. Back in the classic era about 500

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years before Christ, *baptizo* originally referred to the sinking of a ship, or, or drowning or perishing at sea. To be baptized meant to plunge to your death in a watery grave, like going down to Davy Jones' locker.

That, that root concept, *hap, baptizo*, that root concept, the association with immersion, in water, saturation even with water, that remained with the word *baptizo* into New Testament times, and it means, just as we understand it today, to immerse, to plunge. Sometimes it takes on a tone of ritual washing head to toe, but it's a thorough washing.

We first find the word *baptizo* used in the New Testament in association with John the Baptist. All four Gospels feature the preparation ministry of the forerunner. It's Matthew 3 and Luke 3, and then Mark 1 and John 1, all of them talking about John the Baptist's preparation ministry. He came as the forerunner to the Messiah, baptizing the people getting them ready for the Messiah ministry.

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His baptism was what one scholar, one New Testament scholar called, quote, "an initiatory rite for the gathering messianic community." End quote. That's right; it's a rite of initiation for him, too. John's baptism was connected to the meaning and the symbolism provided by Gentile proselyte baptism. The word, proselyte, that comes from the Greek word *proselytos*, and it means simply a newcomer, maybe like a new convert. It's just a word for convert, proselyte.

So when a Gentile wanted to join himself to the Jewish community, join in the worship of Israel's God, he, he could become a proselyte in one of two ways. A Gentile could become a, a righteous proselyte, which gave him full privileges in Israel as a full convert to Judaism. But that meant he had to submit completely to Mosaic law, including the initiatory rite of circumcision. That wasn't the most popular route for most Gentiles for obvious reasons. Very painful.

So Gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism and wanted to avoid that whole thing, they became gate proselytes, gate, G.A.T.E, gate proselytes, which meant they were kind of like

resident aliens, like green card holders living inside the gates, so to speak. They didn't have to go through circumcision. So they retained their Gentile ethnic identity. But they did submit themselves to the rest of the Mosaic law. That's what they wanted to do anyway. They identified with the Israelite community in a, in a spiritual and an, and in a cultural sense. They joined themselves to Israel. You find a number of proselytes like that in the New Testament. Sometimes they're called God-fearers, God-fearers. You've seen that term.

So whether they became righteous proselytes or gate proselytes, Gentiles converting to Judaism went through a full-body ceremonial bath, a ritual washing called proselyte baptism. And it was immersing in water by bathing a Gentile made a public judgment about his former defilement. He acknowledged before everyone, he acknowledged publicly that his Gentile-ness needed to be completely washed away, left behind forever. He was entering into an entirely new life in the Jewish community.

It's that proselyte baptism that provided John the Baptist with his conceptual imagery for his baptism. In fact, that was

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precisely what he required Jewish people to do. Take a look at Matthew chapter 3, Matthew 3:1-6. Says this, "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 'Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. But this is he who was spoken of by the prophet

"Isaiah when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locust and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan confessing their sins."

Stop there. In preparation for the Messiah's ministry, for the Messiah coming, preaching, John called the Jews to repent and be baptized. They could no longer trust in what had previously defined them, that is their, their Jewish heritage, their culture in the Mosaic law, their external demonstrations of righteousness like Sabbath-keeping, dietary observance, sacrifice. He was calling them to disassociate themselves with

all those external marks of fidelity to God and admit that they were nothing more than a Gentile.

You have to realize, folks, what John was doing was absolutely radical. He was telling Jews that they had to identify with Gentiles in order to participate in the messianic program. They had to declare publicly that they were a defiled people in need of a full and complete washing away of their defilement.

There were many, many Jews, as it says here, many who submitted to John's baptism. But not everyone. Not everyone. For some Jews, John's baptism was just too much to handle. Luke 7:24-30 records that. Jesus taught about the significance of his cousin's preparatory ministry, and in verse 28 of that section, this is what Jesus said, Luke 7:28. He says, "I tell you, among those born of women, none is greater than John. Yet he who is the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he."

John the Baptist was the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets. He came just before Jesus' coming, and he had the

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highest revelation to speak and point to Jesus Christ. That made him the greatest. And yet the infant in the Kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist. Why? Because he understands the fullness of salvation. He understands the fullness of what John pointed to. Verse, says in verse 29, Luke 7:29, where all the people heard this, and the tax gatherers, too. They declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John.

You get it? They were humble, repentant. But verse 30, "the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him." Hmm. Interesting how it's the religious establishment, the old guys, those with a lot of skin in the game, those who had invested a lifetime building their positions of influence in Judaism, for them, John's baptism was a total offense. You mean everything in my former life, everything I've done? You can't affirm any of it?

But for the humble of heart, their eyes were open to the righteous judgment of God represented in John's baptism. "God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble." That's John's baptism. Just a brief look.

It was based on Gentile proselyte baptism, and both Gentile baptism and John's baptism, they signified an end of an old existence, as in a death, and the beginning of an entirely new life, an entirely new existence. Those proselytes separated forever from their heritage, forever from their history, their people, their religion. Baptize, baptism, symbolized their, their cleansing from that former defilement. And the proselyte then embraced the culture and the religion of Is, of Israel, embraced Israel's God. John's baptism did the very same thing. Very same thing. Preparing Jew and Gentile alike to meet the Messiah. So when Jesus commanded us to make disciples, to baptize them into the fellowship, those elements were already present in that ritual.

Now, just a footnote. John 3:23 says that John chose to baptize at the Jordan River because "water was plentiful there." That's one reason we know the mode of baptism is full immersion in water, not sprinkling. Because if it were sprinkling, and if John were just sprinkling everyone, he wouldn't need a river. He'd just wandered the streets of Jerusalem and Judea with a bucket, sprinkling water on the faces of everybody who's

repenting, right? You need a river. Because the river had the waterflow to bring people down into it.

There's a continuity in the concept of baptism, running from proselyte baptism to John's baptism to Christian baptism. It's continuity running all the way through there. Baptism pictures the end of an old life, washing and cleansing from defilement, and the beginning of an entirely new life. Death, burial, and resurrection, that picture is painted best by immersion into and emergence up from water.

We already read Matthew 28:18-20, but go ahead and turn there just quickly, there at the end of Matthew, Matthew 28, and I just want to point out a couple of things to you there. In Jesus' Great Commission, you're very familiar with this, I know, but Jesus said, "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations," and then the two things, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and number two, "teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you."

Now, you understand that's not a suggestion from our Lord. That's not like a good idea of maybe something you want to try in your church, another way of doing church. That's not that. This is his command. And every new convert to Christ must submit himself to the Lord's baptism and to his teaching.

The call to discipleship, as you can see there, "go and make disciples of" what? All nations, right? The call to discipleship transcends national interests, cultural backgrounds, your ethnicity, your geography, all of it. None of that matters when it comes to learning the universal, transcendent truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christian discipleship transcends it all.

Jesus commands us to do two things with these disciples. We're to baptize them and we're to teach them. And these disciples, to become disciples, must be of a mind to learn from Jesus. Disciples are learners. They are lifelong followers. They're devoted to Christ, to his teaching, to his ways.

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Notice there's content involved in that Great Commission. In both baptizing and teaching aspects of disciple-making, there is content involved. We baptize them, what does it say there, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." You know what that is? Trinitarian language, which means a person coming forward as a candidate for baptism, that person needs to understand the Gospel well enough to apprehend the triune nature of God. That's deep stuff.

Now notice I said, apprehend, not, comprehend. New converts aren't theology professors. We get that. But they do need to understand the Gospel well enough to make some basic affirmations and some basic distinctions. The convert has to have a basic grasp both of the unity of God, that God is one in essence, as well as the three distinct persons of the Godhead, distinguishing Father from Son, Son from Father and Spirit, and Spirit from Father and Son.

So basic knowledge of God is required at the time of baptism, but also the new convert must understand that Christian discipleship is a commitment to lifelong learning. Jesus said we

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make disciples by baptizing them, and then it says there, "teaching them to" do what? Not just "all that I've commanded;" it says teaching them "to observe all that I've commanded." They have to be doers of the Word, not just hearers. "All that I've commanded you." Boy, that encompasses a lot, doesn't it? It's enough for a lifetime of discipleship.

Now, can infants make that kind of a commitment? No. Do babies have that basic level of understanding about the Trinity or about the Gospel? No. And this is where we differ with our Pre, Presbyterian brothers and sisters. This is where we differ with the Lutherans, the Anglicans, those who practice infant baptism. We don't believe that.

We understand even in childhood salvation that sometimes children just don't understand very well. It takes some time. It takes some, maybe some time for their minds to grow and to mature where they can grasp some of these concepts and be able to make distinctions.

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Not setting an age on that. We don't know the age of accountability, but we do want to talk about the condition of accountability. The practice of infant baptism and maybe even little, little childhood baptism, it's really not warranted biblically when you consider the full import of Jesus' Great Commission here.

When you take a look at the record of the early church in the book of Acts, you find the first Christians practicing exactly what we've learned here. Turn over to Acts 2:38, just as a start there, Acts 2:38. Peter said to the people, you know, he'd been preaching day of Pentecost. There are Jews from all over the Roman Empire visiting Jerusalem on that day. So Jerusalem was clogged with people.

And Pentecost happens. The Holy Spirit comes on that early church, those 120 disciples gathered in the upper room. And you know what? They break out onto the streets and they start preaching, and they're preaching in the languages of all those visitors, all those different visitors. The Holy Spirit gives

them the ability to speak in tongues that they did not study before. They preached to them.

And Peter says to the people there, this is kind of a summation of what they were all saying, all the Apostles were saying. Peter said, "Repent," verse 38, "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." Now look at verse 41. "So those who received his word were baptized. And there were added that day about 3,000 souls."

They received his word. That means they understood his word. They understood his preaching. They understood who Jesus Christ was. They heard all the stories of Jesus' crucifixion. They understood. They understood the, the rumors of his resurrection. Peter preached to them, they understood his word, they received his word.

And then it says they were baptized. That's believer's baptism. They received his word. That means they embraced it. They believed it. They were baptized after that, and they were

added that day about 3,000 souls added. Added to what? Added to that local church right there in Jerusalem.

Baptism was the initiation right into that local church. Turn over to acts Chapter 8. Two instances of baptism in Acts 8. The first is when the Samaritans believed the Gospel, and Philip had them baptized in verse 12. Turn to Acts 8:35. But in verse 12 Philip baptized the Samaritans. It says, "When they believed Phillip as he preached the good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." See, there's content, they believed it. "They were baptized, both men and women."

But I want you to see Philip's second encounter, the one with the Ethiopian eunuch, starting in Acts 8:35. It says, "Beginning with that passage," and it's talking about Isaiah 53:7-8, "Philip told the eunuch the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What prevents me from being baptized?' And he commanded the chariot to stop. And they both went down into the water." Notice the preposition there, "into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And

when they came," again, prepositions matter here, "up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord carried Philip away." Stop there.

Notice the eunuch. He believed the teaching, the word that he was reading out of Isaiah 53. Have you read Isaiah 53 lately? Wow, that is some powerful stuff, all on the substitutionary atonement, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, offered to satisfy the wrath of God the Father for the sins of his people. That is some heady theological stuff in Isaiah 53.

Phillip explained it to him. The Ethiopian eunuch understood it. He believed it, and immediately he wanted to be baptized into this new body of believers. Notice again, no sprinkling here, either. There would have been enough water on the chariot or the accompanying caravan to splash a little water on the Ethiopian's face. But they went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch. He baptized him, and then they came up out of the water.

That's water baptism by immersion, folks. I won't take you through all the passages, we don't have time, in Acts, but let

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me just list some of them for you very quickly. In Acts 9:18, Saul or Paul was baptized after putting his faith in Christ. In Acts 10:37, Peter commands the baptism of Cornelius after he and his household believed. Act 16:14-15 and then later in verse 33, Paul and Silas bapt, baptized Lydia, and her whole household who believed, and then they also baptized the Philippian jailer and his whole believing household.

See a pattern? Here's Crispus, Acts 18:8, Crispus, the chief ruler of the Corinthian synagogue, and his whole household. At Ephesus, in Acts 19:5, there's some di, disciples of John who had been baptized with John's baptism, but they hadn't known the full Gospel message. Very interesting passage. They didn't know about the Holy Spirit. So how would they understand a Trinitarian baptism?

But Paul explained it to them. He brought them into the fullness of the message, and he baptized them as well after they embraced the fullness of the Gospel message. New Testament is absolutely clear: believer's baptism, that is, believe first,

then get baptized. That was the entry point into the early Christian community.

Baptism was the initiation ritual that brought a new convert into the fellowship of the local church. It pictured the nature of their conversion. It pictured the substance of the profession that they were making publicly.

Now all that was point one. The next three points are shorter, I promise. But we needed to take that time to lay down a foundation, a definition of baptism, understand its origins, see a picture of it throughout the Scripture to inform everything else we cover.

Let's get into that. Point two. Point two is the implication of baptism. The implication of baptism. And the question we're asking here, is what were the implications of participating in the baptism ritual for those early Christians?

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Listen, baptism had massive cultural and social implications for Christians in the first and second centuries, those who entered into fellowship with their local church. Christians suffered greatly, then, when they identified with Jesus Christ and baptism. Culturally, baptism meant you were turning your back on your heritage.

Socially, it meant you were cutting yourself off from your family and your friends. Why? Because you were making a theological judgment about your fellow Jews when you entered into baptism. You know what you were saying, here's how they interpreted that when you got baptized as a Jew. Christian baptism was interpreted, rightly interpreted, by the way, as a judgment against anyone who condemned and rejected Jesus Christ.

That is the whole Jewish nation. The whole Jewish nation was under this condemnation because they condemned and crucified Christ. "His blood be on our heads and on the heads of our children," is what they said. People then didn't have a live-and-let-live attitude about that. They took religious matters seriously. They still do in the Middle East.

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The first-century Jewish community rightly interpreted the actions of a Christian disciple either as an affirmation or a condemnation of what they believed. Those first-century Jews had condemned and crucified Jesus Christ. So if those Christians were right, well, the whole Jewish nation was under condemnation. If you're a faithful Jew and you have affirmed the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as some rabble-rousing, would-be Messiah, their, their condemnation against you by being baptized, someone right out of your own family, unthinkable. Intolerable.

There were only two responses to that early Christian community that was calling for repentance and baptism. A person either repented or they persecuted. They either repented or persecuted. In Acts 2:36, we see the response of repentance, a blessed, humble response. When you're wrong, you repent. Peter said, "Let all the House of Israel, therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. And when they heard this, they were cut to the heart. And they said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized,

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every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." And they repented; Three thousand of them that day. And that was without following the Spontaneous Baptism's Guide, too.

But there's another reaction recorded after the Jewish leaders heard the preaching of Stephen. The same condemnation of their actions toward Jesus, Acts 7:54 says, "When they heard these things from Stephen, they were enraged. And they ground their teeth at him. They cried out with a loud voice. They stopped their ears and rushed together at him. They cast him out of the city and stoned him."

The writer of Hebrews, he wrote to warn, to admonish, and also to encourage Jewish Christians who were facing that kind of attitude toward them. They were dealing with persecution for being identified with the Christian Church. Listen, the cultural pressure to leave the church and to return to their Jewish community was so strong. Some were really tempted to fall away.

So the writer warns them throughout the Book of Hebrews, saying, Don't do that. But in Hebrews 10:

32 and following, he encourages them. He says, "Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, sometimes being partners with those so treated.

"For you had compassion on those in prison. You joyfully accepted the plundering of your property since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward."

Wow! Those early Christians were publicly exposed to reproach and affliction. They went to prison for their faith, for being baptized in the Christian Church. They, their property was taken right out from underneath them. Christian baptism had huge consequences for Jews. The early church identifying through baptism with a man who had been condemned and crucified by the whole community, that meant something. So the early Christians

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took baptism very seriously. They did not enter into those waters without co, counting the cost of discipleship.

Unfortunately, baptism doesn't carry that same significance today. It's easy. It's pretty inconsequential to get baptized in a church here in America. But imagine if it did cost you. The secularists gain such prominence that they make sure you lose your job if you're baptized in Jesus' name. You're, you're socially ostracized. You're shunned by family and friends.

I wonder how many would go through baptism then? What if the Islamo-fascists take over, and they started killing those who want to be baptized as Christians? You think those mega-churches, celebrity pastors with their crowd mani, manipulation schemes, you think they're going to keep the water warm in their baptismal tanks?

Even if the implications and the consequences of baptism are not as severe at the moment, and listen, we can thank God for that. I'm glad to be worshiping in a country where I'm not killed for my faith. It allows us to talk freely and openly like

this. We can still do it when the pressure comes. It just costs more, just hurts a little more. But the end, the end is coming soon. Listen, baptism still carries the same weight, the same significance it always has.

We've seen, number one, the definition of baptism; number two, the implication of baptism; point three, the demonstration of baptism. What does baptism demonstrate? What does it signify? Why, why did Jesus choose baptism to be the gateway for new converts entering his church? Well, you know the answer to this.

Baptism symbolizes what happened in salvation. It signifies our union with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, and that's why it's the perfect way to introduce a new convert to the community of faith, right?

John taught the people that when the Messiah came, he was going to come with a baptism far superior to his own. If we, we're going to be more precise about it, Jesus actually came preaching two baptisms, right? One was an immersion into

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judgment called a baptism of fire. The other is immersion into blessing, the baptism of the Spirit.

Turn back to Matthew's Gospel again, and we'll just continue reading where we left off there in verse 7. John saw all these people coming from, it says Jerusalem, all Judea, the region about the Jordan, all these people were flocking to him. You think, Wow, what a revival! Look what he says in verse 7. "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them," this is not very seeker friendly to say this, but he said this, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Sounds like James chapter 2, doesn't it?

"And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

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"I baptized you with water for repentance. But he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I'm not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Wow! John didn't baptize just anyone. He baptized only the humble, the repentant. For the rest, like the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they could only expect a baptism of judgment. John says, verse 11, "He'll baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." That's Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire. In a time of grave judgment to come, Jesus will literally immerse the ungodly in fire. He will submerge them in fire, saturate them in fire. Sounds terrifying, doesn't it? Folks, we need to preach the Gospel to these people. We need to let them know.

The other baptism, though, is what we know as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And that was a baptism of blessing for all those who belong to Jesus Christ. Turn just quickly to John chapter 1, John chapter 1, and we're just starting there in

verse 29. John is baptizing the penitent there. They're all coming toward him. Jesus sees them walking toward him.

John 1:29 says this, "The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him, and he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said after me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.'"

John bore witness. "'I saw the spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'"

First context in Matthew chapter 3, the baptism of fire, that was what was emphasized there because John was speaking to the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the brood of vipers. Here, though, what's emphasized is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There's so much here in this passage. It's beyond the scope of what we're

trying to accomplish for this morning, to develop the full theology of Spirit baptism, but it's important to say this at the very least.

When the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove, dove-like, you could say, John knew, number one, that God's new covenant, the new covenant talked about in the Old Testament, that was about to be fulfilled. And number two, John knew that Jesus was the Messiah who would dispense the spiritual blessings of that new covenant. He knew those two things, and that, those new covenant blessings were to begin with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God's people.

John's mind, the Old Testament, the people of the, of that day, the, their mind would go immediately back to the promises of Isaiah 32, Isaiah 44, Ezekiel 39, that God would pour out his Spirit on his people. Joel 2 extends the promise of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles as well. I'm thankful. So are you. Those prophecies speak of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and they use water metaphors, pouring, drenching, words that correspond perfectly with baptism.

Again, remember the definition of baptism. It means immersion, saturation, every fiber in a fabric being affected by the dye, colored, and changed. That's what it means for a believer to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. No fiber of our being goes untouched, so to speak, by the Holy Spirit. He is all in us. We are all in him, and that happens to every single believer at the moment of salvation.

The Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ, uniting us with Christ. Romans 6:3-4 says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Colossians 2:12 says the same thing by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which happens at the point of salvation for every single believer, Jew, Gentile, does not matter; slave, free, rich, poor, male, female, doesn't matter. Everyone who's a

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believer is baptized into Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Our immersion into Christ results in our union with Christ. Galatians 3:27, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." He, we are in him. He is on us. The Spirit creates a permanent spiritual bond between us and Jesus Christ, never to be broken. That's where our assurance comes from.

Now listen, if everyone who is baptized by the Holy Spirit, that is, spiritually united to Christ and his death, burial, and resurrection, if we're united to Christ through that spiritual baptism, that means, you know what that means? Means we're united to each other as well, right? Does that ring a bell? Ephesians 4:5? "One Lord, one faith, one baptism"? That's what it's talking about.

What about 1 Corinthians 12:12-13? "Just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ, for in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Jews or Greeks, slaves or free

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and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." I like that imagery there, baptized, that's it, we're immersed into the Spirit. And we're all made to drink of the Spirit. So he goes outside of us and inside of us, through and through.

So this physical act of baptism, the ritual immersing of a new Christian in water, it's the perfect symbol of our spiritual initiation into the Christian life. Baptism does not save us from our sins. I'll say that again, baptism does not save us from our sins. The Roman Catholics are wrong here because it does not produce grace. Baptism does not produce grace. If it did, that would be earning grace by works, by what you do. In that case, grace would no longer be grace, would be what's merited.

Aberrant groups that teach baptismal regeneration like the Mormons, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Church of Christ, the Cultish One, the, the United Pentecostals, all those, they're wrong for the same reasons. Regeneration is a grace of God. It's not earned by human works at all.

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Listen, everything illustrated by water baptism has happened prior to the act of water baptism. Baptism pictures, number one, break with the old life, beginning of the new. Number two, it pictures the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that inaugural promise of the New Covenant. Number three, it pictures the union with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. And number four, it pictures the incorporation with every other believer into the body of Christ.

That's why Jesus chose baptism as the rite of initiation for entry into the membership of the Christian Church. Doesn't save, doesn't confer grace, but it is significant as the first act of obedience to a clear command of our Lord and Savior. It's a blessed act of obedience that we can act out in water baptism the spiritual realities of our salvation.

Okay, we've seen the definition of baptism, the implication of baptism, the demonstration of baptism. Let's just quickly consider a fourth point: The function of baptism. The function of baptism. If you're not compelled by the theology of baptism we've covered already, I don't think you're alive, okay, but

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perhaps you're wondering, you may be thinking to yourself, practically, how is baptism useful for the church today?

Yeah, it's a good question to ask. Why is it so important for us to continue practicing and emphasizing baptism here in the local church? And maybe some of you are thinking in your mind, you know, there's, there's actually a verse of Scripture I'm thinking about. We, we, we actually don't have any verses of Scripture that picture Jesus baptizing anybody.

Why is it so important? We know for a fact Paul didn't baptize too many people in Corinth. He says so in 1 Corinthians 1:14-16. He says in verse 17, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel."

So did I just undermine my entire sermon? Have I made much ado about nothing? No. I wouldn't have wasted all this time, your time or mine, teaching on the significance of baptism, if I didn't think that the Bible taught its role is vital and practical in, in, in every local church.

Paul wasn't diminishing the importance of baptizing new converts, especially in light of our Lord's words, make disciples, baptizing them. He was simply correcting the prideful Corinthian tendency to align themselves with celebrity people, celebrity apostles, and for their, their sake, he's glad he didn't baptize too many of them. His apostolic role was about laying the foundation of truth for the church. It's the role of church leadership to stay put and to baptize new converts into the fellowship.

Listen, you've probably already discerned how useful baptism is for examining the profession of everybody who wants to join this local church. Now that you understand what baptism is all about, you can use that knowledge to inform your conversation with anyone who has been baptized. Listen, there are many people, many people in this country who've been baptized, and they have no idea what it means, many of them baptized as infants. They have no idea, so use what you know to help them clarify the Gospel.

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Understanding the truth about baptism, what it means, what it symbolizes, how it should be administered, you're going to find that very useful for your evangelism. But more to the point of our purposes, for those who want to join our local church, we need to help people discern the truth about baptism. There are so many who are falsely informed of this. They have no idea. We need to help them.

There's no real consequence in this culture for getting baptized. So many weak versions of the Gospel, as we've said, have cluttered the evangelical landscape. I think there are many, many people who think they're Christians, but they're not. We can't let that go. We got to help them.

So having a conversation about what someone understands about baptism and its significance, it's a great place to discern someone's true condition. So you can help people understand the Gospel, maybe for the very first time. We need to ask people if they've been baptized since they came to faith in Jesus Christ because it's only those who've made a break with the old life to start a new one, those who've been baptized with

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the Holy Spirit, those who are united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, those who are therefore united to every other believer, only those kinds of people are able to join this church.

It's true that no one saved by having a right understanding of baptism. Everyone who's saved from the wrath of God for their sins is saved by grace through faith, not works, Ephesians 2:8-9. But the one who's truly saved by grace through faith will be able to articulate that well enough that other Christians can recognize him as one of their own.

After all, it's only those who are truly converted that are going to join the rest of us in fulfilling Christ's Great Commission to make disciples. It's only those who understand this who can join us in proclaiming the truth of which we are to be the pillar and the foundation of.

If for those who profess faith in Christ, but haven't been baptized, if there's some like that. They profess faith in Christ. They haven't been baptized, or they were baptized like

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as a kid, and they don't know, they, they came to faith later in life, encourage that person to obey Christ by following his command to be baptized.

Make sure that they understand what baptism means, just apprehending the triune nature of God, the God into, into whom they're baptized, committing to follow Jesus Christ as a disciple, a lifelong learner. The first command they need to learn and to obey to observe is be baptized.

Well, now you know the meaning and significance of baptism. If, after hearing all this, you're questioning the validity of your own baptism, or even questioning your salvation, please don't hesitate to talk with me, one of the elders. It's very healthy to question those things. Because eternity is forever. Talk with us. Talk with someone around you. A Christian around you. We'd love nothing more than to help clarify those things for you, okay?

Bow with me for word of prayer. Father, we want to thank you for the clarity of your Word in helping us understand the

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meaning, significance of baptism. We pray that you'd help us to be faithful to this ordinance of the church that Christ gave. He only gave us two. Help us to be faithful to what we've read here, what we've understood. We asked for your glory to shine through all of it in Jesus' name. Amen.