

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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Biblical Baptism
Acts 8:35-40

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Not long ago, I heard one of my favorite country music artists tell the story behind a song he wrote that talks about Jesus. I'm sure there is more to the story than he had time to share, and I don't pretend to know his relationship with Jesus. However, the story he told left me saddened and concerned.

Here's the gist of what he said:

A friend of mine invited me to church. I don't go to church very often, but on that day I had "a profound religious experience." At the end of the service, the pastor said something like, "If anyone is lost, please raise your hand." And without thinking much about it, I raised my hand. Then the pastor invited us to come down front and, without thinking much about it, I found myself walking down front. When I got to the pastor "I really don't know what he said to me. Something like, 'are you ready to receive Jesus?' I said, 'I don't know.' I didn't know what I was doing there. The pastor [put his hand on my shoulder] and had me go down on my knees. I can't even remember what he was saying...but whatever he said, I found myself weeping in public and felt this forgiveness that I didn't even know I needed."

It was "a profound religious experience." Again, I don't know this man's relationship with Jesus, but I pray there is more to that story. It saddens me to think of someone saying things like "I don't know what it meant to do what the pastor asked me to do." Or "I didn't really think about it."

The reason I share that with you is because we are taking a break from our study of the miracles of Jesus to talk about baptism. In just a few weeks, August 2, we are planning our baptism service at the beach. It's one of my favorite nights of the year. There's something special about having baptisms out in our community. But we never want people to look back at their baptism and say they didn't understand what was going on or what they were doing. We don't simply want profound religious experiences. We want clear understanding of the profound truths about Jesus and His gospel.

And that brings us to our text for today. We are in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. This book records the first 30 years or so of Christianity, starting from just after Jesus rose from the dead. It traces how the Apostles and early disciples of Jesus were used by God to spread the message of Jesus from Jerusalem to cities all over the known world.

And our text is one of those stories. An angel told a man named Philip to travel down a road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. On that road, Philip encountered a high-ranking member of the Ethiopian government. This man was reading a book in his chariot. And it wasn't just any book; it was the Old Testament book of Isaiah. And it just so happened that the section he was reading was Isaiah 53, which is perhaps the most vivid prophecy in the entire Old Testament about the work of Jesus on the cross.

When Philip hears him reading that passage, he asks him a great question: do you understand what you're reading? He didn't want him to have a profound religious experience. He wanted Him to have a clear understanding of the profound truth about Jesus.

That's where we will pick up the story. And before we do, let me give you the big idea we see from the passage we will be reading...

BIG IDEA: BAPTISM IS A SIGNIFICANT FIRST STEP FOR FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

Acts 8:35-40

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. 36 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?" 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

This passage emphasizes the significance of baptism. Philip tells this man the clear, full gospel of Jesus and the man clearly believes. And the very first chance he gets, he asks to be baptized. That's because baptism is a significant first step for followers of Jesus. And that isn't unique to our text. In Acts 2, 3,000 people came to faith in Jesus and all of them were baptized that same day. In Acts 16, a jailer came to faith in Jesus in the middle of the night. Immediately, he and his family were baptized as a display of their faith in Jesus.

As I study the New Testament, it seems unthinkable that a first century Christian would say they were a follower of Jesus and not be baptized.

Baptism is a significant first step for followers of Jesus. And because it is so significant, all of us should be able to go to the bible and explain what baptism is and why it's important. Sadly, far too many people tell a story like that country music singer. They've been baptized but had no idea what it meant or why they were doing it.

So, in our time together, I want to answer three big questions about baptism.

- How do we baptize?
- Who do we baptize?
- Why do we baptize?

QUESTION 1: HOW DO WE BAPTIZE?

ANSWER: WE BAPTIZE BY IMMERSION INTO WATER.

There are several reasons we practice baptism by immersion.

The Biblical Examples of Baptism Suggest Immersion

Acts 8:36-39

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?" 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 And when they came up out of the water,

This new follower of Jesus wants to be baptized. And what he understood about baptism caused him to wait until he saw enough water for him and Philip to go down into the water. If baptism was by sprinkling or pouring water, he wouldn't have had to wait for that amount of water. He is on a 1,600-mile journey from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. Since Buccee's didn't exist back then, travelers rarely knew where the next reliable source of water was going to be. So, they traveled with enough water to sustain them from one source of clean water to the next. This man would have had plenty of water to be sprinkled or poured over. But he doesn't ask for that. He waits until he sees enough water for him and Philip to go into.

And you find this same dynamic in other biblical accounts of baptism. Mark 1:10 says that Jesus came up out of the water after He was baptized. John 3:23 says John the Baptist chose the location where he baptized because water was plentiful there. He needed enough water to do something more than sprinkling or pouring water onto people. The examples of baptism in the New Testament at the very least imply that people were baptized by immersion into water. But that's not the only reason we practice by immersion.

The Word Baptize Means Immersion

The English word "baptize" is not really an English word. It's a Greek word that has been adopted into the English language. The Greek word is baptizo. In Greek, baptizo means to immerse or to dip. In classic Greek literature, baptizo is used to describe a sunken ship. We don't say the Titanic sank because it got rained on. It sank because it went under the water. So, we don't sprinkle people, we immerse them. That's what the word means.

The Spiritual Reality Portrayed In Baptism Requires Immersion

Romans 6:3-4

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.

Remember, the word "baptize" in the New Testament is simply the word "immerse." And water isn't the only thing you immerse something into. You can immerse your Oreos in milk. You can immerse waffle cones into chocolate. You can immerse chicken wings into buffalo sauce.

The point is that Paul isn't talking about being immersed in water in Romans 6. What does he say we are immersed into? He says we are immersed into Christ!

Romans 6 is all about our spiritual union with Christ that occurs when we place our faith and trust in Him. When we come to faith in Jesus, we are miraculously united with Jesus.

(For a more thorough treatment of Romans 6 and its connection to baptism, click the following sermon link ["Baptism: The Reality Behind the Picture"](#))

Throughout the New Testament, there are about 75 references to believers being "in Christ."

2 Corinthians 5:17

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

2 Corinthians 5:21

"For our sake God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Galatians 3:26

"In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."

Our entire salvation rests on the miraculous work of God that unites us to Jesus through our faith in Him. Union with Christ is how Jesus was able to die on the cross for our sin – we are united to His death. Union with Christ is how Jesus raises us up to live a new kind of life – we are united to His resurrection.

And that's the spiritual reality baptism portrays. We are immersed in water as a way of portraying our immersion into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We are immersed into Him completely. We were buried with Him completely and raised with Him completely. Only immersion accurately portrays that spiritual reality.

So, we practice baptism by immersion because of the biblical examples, the meaning of the word, and the spiritual reality baptism portrays.

QUESTION 2: WHO DO WE BAPTIZE?

ANSWER: WE BAPTIZE PEOPLE WHO HAVE PLACED THEIR FAITH IN THE GOSPEL OF JESUS.

Acts 8:35

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

Philip told him the good news, or the gospel, of Jesus. And this man clearly believed it. Don't overlook this - his baptism came after his belief in the truth about Jesus. We often refer to this as "believer's baptism."

And that pattern is embedded all throughout the New Testament teaching on baptism.

Acts 2:41

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Who was baptized? Those who received Peter's message about Jesus. In other words, those who believed the gospel and placed their faith and trust in Jesus were baptized. Notice the order – faith in Jesus then baptism.

Acts 8:12

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

When did they get baptized? Once they had personally believed the good news about Jesus and placed their faith and trust in Him. Believers were baptized.

This stands in contrast to the practice of infant baptism. Infants can't place their faith and trust in Jesus. Their baptism is an expression of their parents' faith, not their own. And we aren't saved by our parents' faith. We are saved through our own personal faith in Jesus.

So, we reserve baptism for believers.

QUESTION 3: WHY DO WE BAPTIZE.

ANSWER: BAPTISM IS A SIGNIFICANT FIRST STEP FOR FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

You see this implied in our text.

Acts 8:35-36

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him 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?"

How did the Ethiopian know about baptism? The only two viable answers I can think of are that this man was in Jerusalem when 3000 people were baptized on the same day, and he found out about it or Philip told him about it when he shared the gospel with Him – or both. And this implies something about the significance of baptism in the minds of early followers of Jesus. They saw Baptism to be a critically important act associated with following Christ. This man clearly understood it to be significant enough to want to be baptized the first chance he had.

And as you go through the rest of the New Testament, you find several reasons why baptism is such a significant first step for followers of Jesus.

Baptism is an act of obedience to Jesus.

Matthew 28:19

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,

Jesus commands his disciples to be baptized. Obedience is part of what it means to trust Jesus as your Lord, or the One who has the authority to tell you how to live. So, baptism is one of the first ways we can actively express our obedience to Jesus.

Baptism is an act of following the example of Jesus.

Matthew 3:13–15

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

Jesus was baptized. And followers of Jesus follow the example Jesus provided for us of a righteous life. We are called to live like Jesus. And that includes baptism.

Baptism is an act of identifying ourselves with Jesus.

Matthew 10:32–33

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Clearly, Jesus is talking about more than just baptism here. But one of the first ways we are able to publicly profess our faith in Jesus is through the act of baptism. It's a external, public display of our internal, personal faith. When you are baptized, you are publicly acknowledging your allegiance to Jesus, and you are publicly portraying the gospel truth you believe.

As I was preparing for this morning, I listened to a message on baptism by Adrian Rogers. He told a story about a little boy who placed his faith in Jesus. Someone told him he needed to tell his pastor

that so he could be baptized. That Sunday, he went to his pastor and said, “Pastor, I’m trusting in Jesus and now I need to get advertised.”

That boy might have misspoke but he wasn’t completely wrong.

Baptism is one of the first ways a follower of Jesus can tell this world that they are a follower of Jesus. That’s one of the reasons why the New Testament so often connects believers with baptism. It was the way believers made their faith publicly known. In Acts 2, the apostles knew that 3,000 people placed their faith in Jesus because 3,000 people made their faith in Jesus known through baptism. Baptism is a significant first step for followers of Jesus. And there’s been so much confusion surrounding baptism that it’s important for us to clarify something else about baptism – it doesn’t save us.

Ephesians 2:8–9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

There is no work that we do in order to be saved, including baptism. We are saved from our sin and made right with God by His grace alone through our faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

2 Timothy 1:9

[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

Titus 3:4–5

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy...

We are saved by God’s grace and mercy through the work of Jesus, not through any work we can ever do – including baptism.

So, while baptism is a significant part of the Christian life, it isn’t what makes us a Christian. We are saved through faith alone in Jesus alone.

Twenty-three years ago, Emily and I stood at the front of a church. We placed rings on each other’s fingers and said, “with this ring, I thee wed.” Now, we didn’t mean that those rings were magic marriage rings that had the power to turn single people into married people. What we meant was that those rings were symbols of our marriage. They were outward visible expressions of something she and I were committing to in our hearts. These rings are precious to us, not because they make us married but because they represent the reality that we are in a covenant of marriage for the rest of our lives. Putting these rings on was the first step we took after committing our lives to each other through the vows of marriage.

And that brings us all the way back to our big idea: Baptism is a significant first step for followers of Jesus. It isn’t an elective. It’s a command. It’s a critical expression of our faith in Christ. And there are 3 primary ways to respond to this message.

1. Place your faith in Jesus.

If you have never placed your faith and trust in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, do not leave this place without doing so. There is no other way to be saved. In just a few moments, our pastors and prayer partners will be down front. I want to invite you to come speak with one of us about your

relationship with Christ. Nothing is more important than knowing your sins are forgiven, that God is your Father, and heaven is your eternal home.

2. Take the step of Baptism.

If you have never been baptized by immersion as an expression of your personal faith in Jesus, take that step. Make your faith known. Obey the command of Jesus. Come speak with one of our pastors or prayer partners. They are ready to talk with you today or help you set up a time to talk in the future. Out in Main Street, our children's pastor (Justin) will be available at the VBS table to talk with parents and children about take the step of baptism. Our Ocean Baptism service is August 2. That's the perfect opportunity for you to take this significant step.

3. Celebrate the Significance of Baptism

If you've already trusted Christ and been baptized, don't treat baptism as a distant memory. This message isn't about something that may have happened to you decades ago. It's about something that is true for you today. God has shown you amazing grace when He saved you. Remember that your old life is gone, your sins are forgiven, and you belong to Jesus.

Let it renew your commitment to live openly as a follower of Christ. Baptism was your public declaration that Jesus is Lord and is giving you His power to live a new life. Are you living that new life? Are you continuing to take step after step of following Jesus? If not, you don't need to be baptized again, like the new birth, baptism only happens once. But what would it look like for you to renew your commitment to follow Jesus in every area of your life, privately and publicly?

And when we gather at the beach on August 2 and watch others take this step, don't be spectators – be celebrators. Rejoice and be glad in what God is doing. He is still saving people and changing lives through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

On Challenging Texts Related To Baptismal Regeneration

1 Peter 3:20–21

...while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Notice what Peter is emphasizing here. He specifically says that it isn't the physical act of cleansing with water that saves us, it's the spiritual act of appealing to God through faith in Jesus. Baptism is simply the outward expression of our personal faith in Jesus. Like he did in Acts 2, Peter is simply acknowledging the reality that believers outwardly express their faith in Jesus through the act of baptism. It's a way we express our appeal to God for forgiveness through the work of Jesus. Speaking of Acts 2, that's the other text that people point to as an example of baptism being an act that saves us.

Acts 2:38

And Peter said to them, "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."

Some people read that and say, "See, you have to repent AND be baptized to be forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit."

But that's not what we find elsewhere, even in the book of Acts. Just a few chapters later, you find Peter preaching again and what he says there clarifies what he meant in chapter 2.

Acts 10:43

To [Jesus] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Here, Peter makes it abundantly clear that forgiveness comes to those who simply believe and place their faith in the work of Jesus. And notice what happens next.

The Holy Spirit Falls on the Gentiles

Acts 10:44

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.

Those who heard the gospel and believed immediately received the Holy Spirit. They were saved through their faith in Jesus, not baptism. Now, skip down to verse 47:

Acts 10:47

"Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

This is critically important. These people received the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus BEFORE they were baptized. And we know from Ephesians 1:13 that the Holy Spirit is the seal and guarantee that we will inherit everything that comes along with salvation through Jesus. We also know from Galatians 3 that we receive the Holy Spirit by faith in Jesus.

So, these people heard the truth about Jesus and believed in Him and were saved and sealed by the Holy Spirit, all before they were baptized. That helps us understand what Peter was saying back in chapter 2. When he says, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus for the

forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the Holy Spirit,” we understand him to mean that we need to repent and turn to Jesus in faith to be forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit. And, if we truly repent and place our faith in Jesus, we will be baptized as our outward expression of faith in Jesus. For further reading on these and other similar texts, this has been a helpful resource to me [Is baptism necessary for salvation? by Got Questions](#)