

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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Baptism: The Reality Behind the Picture
Romans 6:1-5

This morning, I'm going to test your ability to distinguish between two different things. We'll start with something simple. Let's see if you can differentiate between Pastor Richard and the piano he was playing. Since I know you didn't come prepared to take a test, let me make it even easier for you. There is the piano. And, up there on the screen will be a picture of Pastor Richard (you're welcome guests and all the people who don't know Pastor Richard). Now, let's test your ability to differentiate between the two.

- Point to the piano Pastor Richard was playing this morning.
- Point to Pastor Richard, who was playing the piano.

Most of you did a pretty good job with the piano. But many you didn't do well with Pastor Richard at all.

If you pointed at the screen, you weren't pointing to Pastor Richard. You were pointing to a picture of Pastor Richard. I told you the test was to see if you could differentiate between two different things. And there's a big difference between Pastor Richard and a picture of Pastor Richard. That picture can't play that piano. It can't sing. It can't be my friend and encourage and pray for me the way Pastor Richard has for so many years. There's a big difference between a picture and the real thing.

Pictures are still important and valuable. My office is filled with pictures of my family. Those pictures are precious to me and often stir powerful emotions in me because of the people they represent. But those pictures are only powerful and precious because of what they represent.

This morning, we are taking a break from our summer series to focus on baptism. Next Sunday evening is our annual ocean baptism. It's one of my favorite nights of the year. I love it. And every couple of years, we teach about baptism in connection with ocean baptism just to make sure we all understand what is so powerful about it. I normally use the same text and that same illustration because it's one of the clearest ways I know to reinforce a vital truth about baptism.

Baptism is a physical picture of a spiritual reality. It's precious and powerful because of what it represents. It would be a shame to have the picture and miss out on reality. It would also be a shame to misunderstand how powerful and precious baptism is because of the spiritual reality it represents. So, let's look to our text for this morning and see the spiritual reality that is portrayed in the act of baptism.

Romans 6:1–5

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 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. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

This passage begins with a question that might seem strange to many of us. ***1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?***

Why would Paul anticipate someone asking that question? Well, it stems from what he's just said in chapter 5.

Romans 5:20

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

One of the reasons God gave Israel the laws of the Old Testament was to expose just how sinful people are. The laws are like lines on the road of life. Every time we swerve across the line, it becomes more and more plain that we can't drive perfectly. If you drive in a big, empty field without lines, you might not realize how poor of a driver you are...there's no standard to compare yourself with. And the truth is that we all have crossed the line of sin...a lot. We have abounded in sin.

But verse 20 says that God's grace abounded all the more. Where we have lots of sin, God has even more grace. The word "grace" is a reference to every gift God freely gives us through Jesus. That's what Paul was unpacking at the beginning of Romans 5.

Romans 5:1-2

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand,

Through faith in Jesus, God gives us access to all the gracious gifts that come through the person and work of Jesus. One of those things is mentioned there in verse 1 – we are justified as a gift of grace through faith in Jesus. The word "justified" is a legal term that means "to declare someone not guilty." It's connected to forgiveness. When we place our faith in Jesus, our sin is forgiven, and God considers us to be "not guilty." We don't earn that standing. We have it as a free gift of God's grace through our faith in Jesus.

And listen, friend, there's more grace in Jesus than there is sin in you. No matter where you've been or what you've done, your sin is no match for the grace of Jesus. When you trust in Jesus, you are swimming in an ocean of grace that's greater than all your sin. That's why Paul said that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." You may be great at sinning, but Jesus is even greater at saving.

Which led to the question Paul asked at the beginning of our text. If God always has more grace for us than we have sin, should we just sin more and more in order to show how great the grace of Jesus is?

Notice how Paul responds in verse 2:

Romans 6:2

By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Paul says the reason followers of Jesus should not live in a lifestyle of sin is because we have died to sin. When we come to faith in Jesus, the power of sin is broken in our lives. We are dead to it. We are as cut off from the power of sin as a dead person is cut off from living in this world.

How does that happen? What is Paul talking about?

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.

The way we died to sin is by being baptized. The way we live a new kind of life is by being baptized. Baptism is the basis for the entire Christian life. It's through baptism that our sin was crucified at the cross so that it could be punished, and we could be forgiven. And it's through baptism that we have the ability to live a new kind of life that is dead to sin, or completely free from the power of sin.

If you are familiar with the gospel, you are probably a bit uncomfortable with some of those statements.

But hold on for just a second. I was very careful with what I just said...and what I didn't say. I said baptism, not water baptism.

Here's what I mean. 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. Baptizo means to immerse or to dip. For instance, in classic Greek literature, baptizo was used to describe a sunken ship. Is there a difference between a ship out in the rain and a sunken ship? What's the difference? Both are wet but only one is immersed.

But you don't have to immerse something in water to immerse it. For instance, you can immerse Oreos into milk. You can immerse pickles into pickle juice. Just to clarify, it's a crime against humanity to immerse Oreos into pickle juice...but I digress. The point is that the word immerse can refer to more than just water. Which means the word baptize can refer to more than just water.

And that's how Paul is using it here. He isn't talking about water. He says we are immersed into something else in verse 3.

Romans 6:3

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

What are we immersed in? He says we have been baptized, or immersed, into Christ Jesus. And that's the key to what Paul is saying. He isn't talking about water baptism. He's talking about the spiritual reality that water baptism represents.

It's through immersion into Jesus that we die to sin. It's through immersion into Jesus that we live a new kind of life. The basis for the entire Christian life is immersion into Jesus.

Look at how Paul restates that in verse 5:

Romans 6:5

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Here, Paul expands on the idea of being immersed into Jesus by using the phrase “united with him.”

Here’s the vital truth behind baptism. There’s a miracle at the center of our salvation. It’s our union with Jesus. When we come to faith in Jesus, by God’s amazing grace and miraculous power, we are united with Jesus in a way that we are in Him and He is in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It’s even more than dipping an oreo in milk. It’s like properly making sweet tea the way Mom taught me. You immerse the sugar in while the tea is still hot so that the sugary goodness dissolves into the tea and becomes a whole new thing known as liquid gold. That’s what Paul is saying happens when we come to faith in Jesus. We are immersed into Jesus and united inseparably with Him...with His righteous life and His atoning death and His glorious, victorious resurrection. We become something new as 1 Corinthians 5:17 says, “If anyone is IN CHRIST, he is a new creation.”

And that brings us to the big idea for this morning:

By God’s grace, we are immersed into Jesus through faith – so that we can die to sin and live like Christ.

This is the good news of the gospel. When we come to faith in Jesus, we are united to Jesus.

And let’s just spend a few minutes digging into this spiritual reality.

1. By grace through faith we are immersed into Christ’s death.

That’s verse 3. ***Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?***

We have been immersed, or baptized, into Christ’s death. That means, in some very real way, we were with Him when He died at the cross.

That’s how His death can provide forgiveness for our sins. Since we are united to Jesus at His death, that means our sin was united to Jesus at His death. And since God poured out the punishment for our sin at the cross, that means all our sin has been punished and we are able to be forgiven. That’s how we can be justified or declared not guilty.

But that’s not the only implication of being united to the death of Jesus. Remember, the big question Paul is answering in this chapter is why we shouldn’t continue in sin. And the reason he gave is in verse 2.

Romans 6:2

By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Our union to the death of Jesus doesn't just provide forgiveness from the penalty of sin, it provides a death to the power of sin. We are dead to the power of sin in Christ. That means you don't have to sin. You don't have to live like a slave to addiction or anger or greed or lust or lying or any other expression of sin. Through faith, the power of sin is broken, you are dead to it...

And that's connected to the next part.

2. By grace through faith we are immersed into Christ's resurrection.

Romans 6:4

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.

When Jesus died, did Jesus stay dead? He rose again to victorious life. That's a historical truth. And that's what Paul says happens to those who are genuinely trusting in Jesus. As part of our union with Christ, we came out of the grave with Jesus and are raised up with resurrection power to live the kind of life only Jesus can live.

That's why the question about continuing to sin so that grace may abound is so far off base. We will not continue in sin if Christ is living in us. And it's not because we make up our minds to stop sinning and try our best to be good Christians. It's because the power of Jesus is at work in and through us, raising us up to walk in the newness of life – we are united to Christ and Christ lives in resurrection power in and through us.

That's the good news of the gospel. That's the grace in which we stand through faith in Jesus.

And that brings us all the way back to the beginning. Water baptism is a picture of this spiritual reality. Water baptism doesn't save us. It doesn't make us right with God. Remember the test we took at the beginning: there's a difference between a picture and the reality it represents. Baptism is a picture. So, it doesn't have the power to save you. But it's still precious and deeply significant because it vividly portrays the truth of the gospel and the basis for our entire Christian life. And, for that reason, water baptism is precious.

I firmly believe that's one reason Jesus commands us to be baptized as a first step of following Him. He could have chosen to command us to wear a Christian t-shirt or get a Bible verse tattooed on our forehead. But He chose to command us to be baptized as one of our first steps of obedience. Why? Because it is a clear declaration of the spiritual truths we are believing in the gospel. It's a declaration that we are making a clean break from sin and it's a display of what we are depending on to enable us to live a new kind of life.

That's why, when we baptize people around here, we baptize them with a quote from Galatians 2:20. When we take them under the water, we say "Not I." As they are coming up out of the water, we say, "But Christ who lives in me." That's a way of being reminded of the spiritual reality behind baptism.

It's a picture of our union with Christ through which we die to sin and self and are raised to walk in resurrection power as Jesus lives in us.

And for that reason, it's important that our practice of baptism paints as accurate a picture as possible of the truths it represents.

So, let me give you two implications this passage holds for the way we practice water baptism.

1. We practice Baptism for Believers.

Remember, our standing in Christ occurs by grace alone through our faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. So, we only baptize people who are able to express their personal faith and trust in Jesus. That's why we don't baptize infants.

If you trust in your baptism or anything else but the grace of Jesus alone to save you, then your baptism isn't serving the biblical role for baptism. It's a religious work and not a personal profession of faith in Jesus.

2. We practice Baptism by Immersion.

Like I said earlier, the word baptize means to immerse. That's why, when you read about baptism in the New Testament, the context implies that there had to be enough water for people to go down into for baptism.

- Matthew 3:6 – John the Baptist was baptizing people “in the Jordan” not just at it, but in it
- Matthew 3:16 – Once Jesus was baptized, “he went up out of the water” because He had been down in it
- John 3:23 – The reason John was able to baptize in a particular place was because there was “plenty of water there” because he needed enough to immerse people
- Acts 8:38 – When Philip was going to baptize the Ethiopian, they “went down into the water”

Immersion into water requires enough water to immerse someone. But, even more, immersion best represents the spiritual reality of the gospel. We are spiritually immersed into the death and resurrection of Jesus. When Jesus was buried, they didn't just sprinkle a bit of dirt on His body. They put Him entirely in a tomb. And, when He rose from the dead; he didn't just stick His hand out and give the world a thumbs up. He brought His whole body out of that tomb and walked around...and that's how He raises us up, as well. He's giving resurrection power to every facet of who we are.

And the only way to portray that kind of immersion into the death and resurrection of Jesus is through the immersion of our whole self into water. So, we practice baptism by immersion.

Now, before we leave, I want to invite you to apply today's message to your life.

1. If you've never placed your faith and trust in Jesus, I want to invite you to do that right now. Jesus has more grace than you have sin. And, if you will trust in His perfect life, His sacrifice on the cross, and His powerful resurrection, you can live forever in the grace of Jesus.

2. If you are trusting in Jesus but have never been baptized by immersion as an expression of your personal faith in Jesus, I want to invite you to make the commitment to do that. Do not delay in obeying Jesus. Step into obedience today.
 - a. Ocean Baptism is next Sunday, July 28th. If you would like to be part of that, please come down front in just a few minutes and speak with one of our pastors or prayer partners. They are ready to hear your profession of faith in Jesus and help you make it known in baptism next week...or another week in the future, if you'd rather be baptized during a Sunday morning service.
 - b. If you aren't able to stay for a few minutes after this service, stop by the baptism table on your way out and give them your name so we can connect with you this week. Signing up at that table won't register you for baptism, it will allow our team to connect with you so they can make sure you understand and believe the gospel, and then they will place you on the schedule.

3. If you are trusting in Jesus and have been baptized by immersion as an expression of your faith in Jesus, then consider whether or not you are living in light of your baptism into Jesus.
 - a. Are you living in victory over sin? Are you believing Jesus to be Jesus in you?
 - b. Is there a pattern of sin in your life you need to confess before the Lord, repent from, consider yourself dead to, and step into obedience by trusting Jesus to live like Jesus in you?