

## “Being Baptised As A Believer”

So far in this series of talks I've spoken about two essentials for followers of Jesus – repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. Today I want to talk about baptism of believers.

If you get a group of Baptist Pastors together and get them talking about baptisms gone wrong, you will get to hear some pretty funny stories. I have a few of them myself. One memorable one was a baptism I attended where the young man being baptised had been in an Anglican tradition and wanted to be baptised as a believer, by immersion, by his Vicar. The vicar had never conducted a baptism by immersion before. He grabbed Tim by the throat, held him under the water while he said the words “I baptise you in the name of the Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit.” The look on Tim's face when he came up out of the water was a sight to behold. He said to me afterwards that he thought he was going to be held under long enough for him to meet Jesus!

I had a memorable baptism where I Michael wanted to be baptised in the Waimakariri river in Christchurch. It was midwinter and the water was freezing. No wetsuits in those days. Michael was a pretty big guy, and we had to go a fair way out into the river where the water was deep enough to baptise him. The water was so cold as he went under the water, all the breath went out of him. I was desperately praying he wouldn't die while we were so far from any help.

So why do intelligent people who are otherwise in their right mind, do such a thing? Tim was a university graduate with a responsible job. Michael was a forensic scientist. These were not people given to irrational acts. I'll get to that question in a minute, but first I need to talk about believers baptism as opposed to infant baptism.

If you were brought up in the Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Nazarene, Orthodox or Reformed traditions, then baptism for you means something different than what I'm talking about. For you, baptism means the parents bring their baby to church, and the Priest either dips the baby's head in water, or will sprinkle water over the head of the baby. For a few parents, this is just a ritual, where they talk about “getting the baby done”. But for many parents, this is a deeply spiritual and meaningful event, for they want the very best for their child. However, for the baby, it has no meaning because the child is too young to understand or even remember. In many traditions, baptism of babies is followed by confirmation, when the child is old enough to understand what a commitment to follow Jesus really means.

What we see in the New Testament over and over again is followers of Jesus repenting of their sins toward God, putting their faith in Jesus Christ, declaring that faith by being baptised as believers, and being filled with the Holy Spirit. It's those who were capable of repentance and belief who were baptised. The first time we read of the baptism of a baby is not until the end of the second century. The major reason why the church began to baptise babies hundreds of years after the resurrection of Jesus was that they believed that baptism saved babies from hell. But it's not the practice of baptism that saves you. It's repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.

Up until the time of Jesus, baptism was for non Jews who wanted to join the Jewish faith. Then, along comes John the Baptist, who called on people to repent of their sins. For the most part, the people he was baptising were Jews. Jews didn't think they had any need to be baptised, but John called on them to be baptised as a sign of their repentance toward God. That was huge for a Jewish person.

In the last two weeks I've told you of people in our church in Switzerland who came to faith in Christ. One of these was Tom. Tom is a Jew. Through the equivalent of mainly music, Tom's wife Cathy rediscovered her Christian faith and started coming to our church. At that time Tom was an American diplomat who was sceptical about Christianity. She asked him to come to church, and Tom agreed to come if he could stay out of sight. So for seven years, Tom came to church and ran the data projector, always making it clear that he was a Jew who didn't believe that Jesus was the Son of God. For seven years, Tom listened to teaching about Jesus until finally he came to the conclusion that what the Bible said about Jesus was true. This all happened before I arrived as Pastor of the church. By the time I arrived, Tom was Vice President of a huge international organisation. I talked with Tom about believers baptism and asked him when he was going to

declare his faith by being baptised. He smiled and said to me. "I'm a Jew. When I get baptised I want it to be in the Jordan river in Israel, where Jesus was baptised." Because the previous Pastor had led him to faith in Christ, Tom flew the previous Pastor and his wife in from Ireland, and Alan and Pauline, Cathy, Tom, and their son Jonathan flew to Israel where Lan baptised Tom and Jonathan in the Jordan river. Tom went back to work the next week and his colleagues asked him "What did you do in the weekend?" He told them that he went to Israel to be baptised in the Jordan river, where Jesus was baptised! As you do!

### 1. How should we be baptised?

The New Testament was written in the Greek language, and the Greeks had some very specific words to describe specific events. The word used to describe baptism means to sink, to immerse, to dip, or to plunge. It is the same word used of a ship that sinks. Or the dipping of a cup in a bowl of wine. It's the same word used to describe soaking a cloth in a vat of dye. The descriptions of people being baptised in the New Testament are descriptions of people going down into rivers or pools of water where they are immersed right under. That's in keeping with what is taught in the Bible about what baptism means.

### 2. What is the meaning of baptism?

- **Baptism is a bath for those who are dirty.**

Those who repent of their sins, and put their faith in Jesus Christ, want to be washed clean. They want to show that that what has happened in the inside, is expressed on the outside. Baptism is an expression of a clear conscience before God, and a demonstration that the blood of Jesus spilled out at the cross, has washed us clean. Before he met Jesus in such a dramatic fashion, the Apostle Paul spent a huge amount of time and energy persecuting Christians. He would put them in prison, and was party to having some of them killed. He had a lot on his conscience. God sent Ananias to him with this message **"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."** (Acts 22:16 NIV) That's what baptism is for. It's for washing away of sins. Peter describes it in different language. **"And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God."** (1 Peter 3:21 NIV) The cleansing action of baptism is not an outward cleansing of the body, but an inward cleansing of the conscience.

Have you ever been in a situation where you have had no opportunity to wash or shower for several days? Your hair feels greasy. Your skin feels sticky. You just feel dirty, and long to be clean. Other people may not notice, but we have to live with ourselves, and we know how we feel about ourselves when we are not clean. It's the same with cleanliness on the inside. Sin pollutes us from the inside out. We feel dirty. We feel guilty. It doesn't matter how much people tell us we shouldn't feel guilty about our sin, we still have those feelings of guilt inside. We just know there is something wrong. We need a bath. And baptism is Gods bath that deals with what's wrong on the inside. Baptism is the bath God has made for us so that we know we are clean.

- **Baptism is a burial for the dead.**

Baptism is the funeral service for the Christian. It's the vital link between our death to the old life, and our resurrection to the new life in Christ. It's not just a public testimony of our faith in Christ, or some sort of wet witness. It's a means of God's saving grace. It's a complete identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus. In many countries of the world, baptism in the name of Jesus is a very dangerous thing to do. You can call yourself a Christian, and people might not take too much notice, but when you get baptised, that's when the opposition and the persecution starts. Because family members and friends recognise that you are serious about identifying with Jesus. In some countries of the world, when people decide to be baptised as believers, they get cut off from their families, thrown out of their job or university, and sometimes get beaten up or even put to death. It's a radical and risky thing to get baptised. Baptism is dying to your old life. It's a burial of the old life in the same way that the body of Jesus was buried in a tomb.

Let me explain this a bit more. When someone dies, we bury the body as soon as we can after death, because we know that decay sets in right away. When we bury the body, we don't leave an arm, or a leg, or the head sticking out of the ground. We don't lie that stinking, smelling corpse on the ground, and sprinkle a bit of dirt on it. We bury it. We bury it deep. We cover it right over

because it stinks. It's decaying. It's dead. It's rotting away. That old life is no use any more. No one wants to keep a dead body.

That's why we baptise those who have repented toward God and put their faith in Jesus Christ. Because their old life stinks, and smells, and is rotten, it has no place with the new life of Christ. It needs a proper burial. All our sins that make our old life stink and smell, get buried with Christ in baptism. We have a funeral service, and leave it all behind. The water we drain out of that pool is a lot dirtier than the water we put in. If you have never been baptised, it's time to take a bath. It's time to bury your old life with Christ.

- **Baptism is a resurrection for the living.**

When we are baptised, we are baptised into Christ. We are baptised into his death. But we are also baptised into his resurrection. Here is how Paul links baptism and resurrection when writing to the Christians in Rome.

***“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Romans 6:1-4 (N IV)***

When you die, what's going to go into the grave? Your old worn out, decaying body will. Your false teeth will. Your glass eye will. So will your artificial hip and the steel pins that hold your broken bones together. All that will be buried. Now, when Christ raises you from the dead, how many of you expect to be raised with the same old worn out body, false teeth, glass eyes and artificial hips? How many of you want to take your pacemakers and hearing aids to heaven? I hope not! We expect to have brand new bodies. A new kind of body, just like the resurrection body of Jesus. Jesus' resurrection body looked like the old one, but it wasn't the old one. He could walk, eat food, touch, and speak, but he could also travel anywhere in a moment. He could travel through locked doors. He could even ascend straight upwards.

When we are baptised into the resurrection life of Christ, our new life looks a bit like the old life, but it is something absolutely new. It can never die.

### **3. Baptism is a central part of the whole salvation package.**

Do you see now why the New Testament makes baptism a central part of the whole salvation package? In the New Testament, repenting of our sins, putting our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, dying to our old life and having the funeral service, and being raised up into the resurrection life of Christ, are all joined together. To repent of your sin, and put your faith in the Lord Jesus, but not be baptised, is as crazy as not burying a dead person, but leaving their stinking, rotting, body lying on the ground. Apart from the dying thief on the cross, I can't find any record in the New Testament of someone who repented of their sins, put their faith in the Lord Jesus, who didn't then straight away have the funeral service, and be buried with Christ and raised with him.

I want to say something to those of you that were baptised as babies, but have never been baptised as a believer. Being baptised as a believer doesn't minimise what your parents did for you then. I believe it's actually endorsing everything they wanted for you. They wanted you to be saved. They wanted you washed clean from your sin. They wanted you to be part of the covenant community of God. Making your own decision to be baptised as a believer according to scripture isn't undoing any of that. It's affirming the desires of your parents. If you were confirmed in your teenage years, it's reinforcing all that was meant in the act of confirmation, and expressing that in the way Jesus prescribed for us.

Baptism is a very joyful event. It's the happiest funeral service you will ever be a part of. There is such joy in celebrating the death of your old life and the embracing of the resurrection life of Christ. Don't short change yourself of all that God intends for you. Repent of your sins toward God. Put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Be baptised as a believer in water, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Don't settle for anything less than all that God has for you. If you have never been baptised as a believer, and you believe that this is what the scripture teaches us to do, and you know the

Spirit of God is prompting you to do this, I want to invite you to publically declare that today. In the weeks ahead, we will arrange a place and a time when you can be baptised.