

The Great Commission

Sermon #3: Baptize

Matthew 28:19-20

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- January 22, 2023

I'm sure you've heard this at a wedding—tell me if it sounds familiar—the exchanging of the rings. It usually goes something like this. *Throughout history God has given us signs, memorials, to remind of the covenants that He's made with the people of God. When He has destroyed and then restarted creation in the flood, He gives the people the ritual or the remembrance of the rainbow. God promised in that covenant to Noah that He would never destroy the earth with a flood again.*

Following that precedent, Jack and Jill here will exchange rings with one another. They're using rings because of the circle and the completeness they are in Christ and the everlasting covenant that they're making with one another that can only be separated or ended through death. And the purity of the metal that is refined by fire represents the love that they've received from Christ that they now share with one another. Now Jack, face your wife Jill, and repeat after me: "With this ring I thee wed in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Have you heard that? I bet you have. The rings are a sign of a covenant that you're making with one another. And why do we do this? To remember. To help us remember. It's a token. It's a monument, in some respects. Because sometimes in marriage, or maybe there's a season in a marriage, when you just never fail to fail. And then you look at the ring and you remember happier times.

Sometimes the ring is helpful in times of trial or temptation. You find yourself on a business trip in Paris and there's not a single person there that knows you within five thousand miles. And there's somebody at the bar that reminds you of your boyfriend in high school ... no one's going to know. And you look at that ring, and it's to quench your aloneness and remind you of a covenant that you made.

The ring helps as a sign. It's a symbol. It is a promise that is made and a promise that is kept. If you look at the Bible there are monuments for every act of salvation in the Bible. Adam and Noah and David all have these monuments or memorials. And the idea is to never forget what God has done in this act of grace.

Certainly, the most famous would be the memorial for the battle of Egypt, if you remember that great war. In this corner we have Egypt, and in this corner, Israel. Israel, a nation of slaves. Egypt, the most powerful nation in the world. Israel, known for making bricks and stacking them straight. Egypt: they've never lost a war. Let's get it on.

And then what's the battle plan? God through Moses tells the people, *Here's what you're to do. You're supposed to get a lamb that's without any blemish, innocent, perfect; slaughter that lamb; get the blood and put it all over the doorjamb of the outside of your house. Now you're supposed to eat that lamb and cook a meal and eat it like you're in a hurry. Have your bags packed. Wear your tennis shoes. You have no time to add yeast to the bread—it's unleavened (un-yeasted) bread. You're in a hurry.*

Okay, okay, now what?

Now just wait. God's going to do the fighting for you on this. Just wait.

And God promised, *I will send my judgment over every house in Egypt—everyone, the Jews and the Egyptians both. And as judgment comes, you need to have faith that the blood of that lamb over that door will keep you from that judgment, and judgment will pass over you.* And that's what happened.

That's how Israel was set free from Egypt. That was their national salvation. So, after that takes place, they race out of the city limits and they stop right there and they learn that they're going to repeat this every year. *We're going to re-enact this year after year after year. We're going to tell this story again and again and again, because we need to remember the power of God's strength and the power of His grace. We're to remember that God made a promise and He kept a promise.* That's Passover. That's one of the memorials, one of the rituals, one of the monumental events.

The Sacred Acts of the Church

And the greatest act of salvation takes place in the newer Testament, but the tradition continues. Now it's salvation for our souls. And we have rituals or memorials to help us

remember, so that when we're in trials or we have doubts or we're not even sure of ourselves, we can start to remember the grace transforms us. And it helps remind us, sometimes, of the way we were, and that we are far worse than we can imagine in our standing with God, and that the salvation is greater than we could ever hope for, right now and in the future.

And so, today we're going to look at one of those two rituals—or we'll call them ordinances—and see their importance. We're going to look at baptism. We're going to define what an ordinance is and show what that word “baptism” means. And then I'm going to help you work through how to apply that. What do we do here at Grace Covenant to enjoy that simple sign of a saving truth?

Ordinance defined: An outward rite instituted by Christ to be administered in the Church as a visible sign of the saving truth of the Christian life.

This is how it's defined. It's an outward rite instituted by Christ, administered in the church, as a visible sign of the saving truth of the Christian faith. The idea of an ordinance is to take something that's rather ordinary and transform it into something extraordinary. It's the vehicle that makes it into something more. So, in the context of baptism, it is regular water, H²O. But in that ritual of baptism it becomes mysterious. It becomes supernatural.

In communion (that's the other ordinance) we take simple bread, simple wine, say certain words, and it becomes a window, a display, into the experience of the original Lord's Supper in the Upper Room, but also into forgiveness itself.

And we do this because we need these monumental events, we need these rituals, because we tend to be spiritually learning impaired. And rightly so. We don't know what's happening in the spiritual war because we can't see it. And so, we need something to visualize what's already taken place in a nonvisual world. The physical helps us understand the metaphysical. Sometimes it's difficult to grasp the depth of our forgiveness and the greatness of God's love.

Another reason these ordinances are required of us is because Jesus told us to do them. And one of the effects of that is that He's asking us to connect the body of Christ, the brothers and sisters that together form the family of God with us. But not just the people in this room or in this denomination, but think of this: because of these two ordinances, baptism and communion

(the Lord's Table), we are connected with every believer all over the world, brothers and sisters in Christ, at all times for two thousand years. Believers have been doing these two ordinances because they're responding to the obedience of God and we are somehow connected with each other. We're united in some way.

So, He asks us to do these two ordinances so that we can grasp in every culture, every continent, every tribe, we're all doing something together. We have a family ritual that we enjoy.

Baptism

Matthew 28:18-19

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Today we're going to look at baptism. In the great battle of death, in this corner we have Jesus, the Lamb of God. And in this corner, death. And after Jesus conquers death upon His resurrection and the cost of sin, He says this. "And then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and in the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'"

All authority has been given to me. Go and do this. And they did. If you look at the Book of Acts and throughout the Bible, this is exactly what they were told to do, and so they did it. In Acts chapter 2, Peter gives this barn-burning sermon. It's as if the people are cut to the quick. And they cried out for application. *What do we do, knowing now that we helped participate in the crucifixion of the Messiah that had been promised for thousands of years?* And Peter said, "Repent and be baptized." And so, they did. They repented.

Look how it goes. You repent, you come to faith, and then you get baptized. They're just three dominoes that are falling—bing, bang, boom. All three thousand of them did that. Repent and be baptized.

The Meaning of Baptism

1. Connection with Jesus

Baptism primarily has two meanings. The first one is that we're connected to Jesus through baptism. Baptism is a ritual that unites us with the experience of Jesus. We get to experience the death and the resurrection of Jesus in a very easy way. Paul is going to explain this and show how it's more than just a sign; it's a symbol. It's kind of a reenactment like Passover. When he talks to the Romans about their temptation to continue to sin, the answer to the problem "Why don't I just keep sinning?" is "Well, remember that you were baptized." So, when he says these words, keep in mind there are two things that are assumed: one, that every believer has already experienced baptism, and that baptism was a real picture of what had taken place spiritually in their souls.

Romans 6:1-4

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? ² May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

So while we read through this, I want you to take a special interest in the life and death references that are being used here. In Romans 6:1-2: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might even increase? May it never be! How shall we who DIED to sin still LIVE in sin?"

And then he's going to say, *Watch, this is what happens spiritually; I want you to see it physically.* Verses 3 and 4 say, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His DEATH? And therefore we have been BURIED with Him through baptism into DEATH, in order that as Christ was RAISED from the DEAD through the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of LIFE."

You died with Him, you were dead with Him, you were raised with Him. Why shouldn't you sin, in the context of temptation? He says this. *You remember your baptism, right? That guy died, the one that's longing for and looking for opportunities to sin. He's dead.*

Spiritually speaking, that's what happened. That's what the angels saw. You remember that? When your faith never fails to fail, your baptism is something to harken back to, so that you're reminded of better days.

When you're on a business trip in Boston and there's no one around—look left, look right—no one knows you in this town. There's not a person that knows your name within a thousand miles from here in any direction. And then you see that girl at the bar and she looks like your high school sweetheart, and you're thinking, *Maybe no one will see.* And Paul says, *Let the memory of your baptism quench your aloneness. That guy that used to enjoy those sorts of events? That guy died. Remember? You remember your baptism, right? You died with Christ.*

Baptism is greater than the water. It's not a water story. It's a spiritual story of something that took place in real time, just invisible to us.

2. Cleansing

One of the meanings of baptism is that we're united with Christ. Another meaning of the baptism is that we are cleansed. Before baptism takes on this rite or ritual, there were cleansing rituals throughout the Old Testament. They prepared one to be in the presence of God, so they were kind of a little baptism event. You prepared yourself for that. You changed your clothes and you changed into these white linens.

In baptism, Jesus changes that and modifies it, saying, *Yes, you're going to be cleansed.* But now the water takes on this picture of more than H₂O, but rather the blood of Jesus Christ. That's how dirty we are. And we want to cover all of our bodies. It's the idea of being regenerated, rebirthed. A whole new life is starting over again. And we do that. We participate in this idea of being completely cleansed—not like Achilles where the heel is left out and that part is not secure—a little bit like that. But the idea is that we are completely cleansed, so that when our faith never fails to fail, we harken back to our baptism, of happier times, when we feel like there is no way that God can cleanse this dirty soul. We can get fixated on the depth of our sin at times. When the Spirit reveals our true selves to us, remember your baptism. That was a complete cleansing. You were made new. You are all better.

Who Participates in Baptism?

So, that's the meaning of baptism. And now we'll discuss who is baptized. In the Bible it seems pretty clear. We have pretty strong beliefs that only believers are baptized in the New Testament. Sometimes it's even called "believers' baptism." Because if you look at the pattern that happens throughout the New Testament, a person hears the gospel, they repent, they believe, and then they're baptized. You can't find a story where people are not baptized in the New Testament. And you can't find a story where people are baptizers but they're not believers who have repented.

Certainly, here at Grace, one of our strong beliefs is that we don't believe in infant baptism. We can't find a passage that makes it pretty clear that this is a thing you should be doing. If you came from a church with infant baptism and that was your experience, one of the reasons churches do that (and it makes sense, in some respects), is because they are kind of attaching it to how in the older Testament there was a ritual of circumcision. And in the older covenant you circumcised a boy and that brought them into a covenant of faith, a family of believers. So, they've taken that ritual and put it into infant baptism. The problem is that's not in the Bible, so we don't do that here. Baptism is for believers.

One of the things we do—we certainly appreciate the value of being brought into a covenant of fellowship—so here at Grace we do child dedications or family dedications—in some respects, a church dedication—where we bring a family up here and they're holding that baby and we're saying, *Look, this baby belongs to you, Lord, and we're just being allowed and entrusted to raise this child, and we need help. We need the Spirit's help to raise this child. We need the church's help to raise this child.* And we pray as a church for that child, that God would plant a seed of faith, and that we as a family and as a church family will be part of watering that seed and bringing sunlight, wisdom, truth to that seed to make it grow.

But we don't see the purpose or understand why there would be a need for infant baptism. So, it's believers' baptism.

How old would a person need to be in order to be baptized? That's a frequently asked question. It's called the age of accountability. It goes back thousands of years. The way we answer it is we allow the discernment of parents and usually with an interview with one of our pastoral staff or someone in leadership, we negotiate, *Can this child own up to what's necessary?*

Repent and have faith to be baptized? And sometimes that varies from person to person, the understanding of sin from one person to the next.

Sometimes we do a thing—again, frequently asked questions—can people get baptized again? Personally—absolutely. We do that around here for a lot of different reasons. One of them is sometimes you go through a season of life or you had an experience when you were baptized at five or seven years old, and then later on, maybe even as a teenager, you think, *Whoa, I get it even more deeply now than I did before. I understand my sin and His cost and I repent again in some respects and I want to be baptized again.*

Sometimes it's when the prodigal son returns. The prodigal was the child of the Father and he never stopped being the child of the Father. But when he came to his senses and came back, he wanted to be greeted again and start all over again. Sometimes in marriages we have marriage vows renewed because someone went astray and became the prodigal. And when they come back, they decide, *Let's just start over, shall we?*

So, there are times when we have people can be baptized again, because why not? Why not just go through that experience one more time to start all over again?

Sometimes we baptize people when we go to Israel because it's fun—no other reason. It's the Jordan River. That's a little distraction from the seriousness here.

But sure, let's get baptized again. If it's something that would help you in your journey, then let's do that.

How Baptism Is Done At Grace Covenant Church

How do we baptize here at Grace Covenant Church? We believe that in our reading of the Bible it's through what is called "immersion"; that you go completely under water. Not sprinkling—in some other denominations they'll sprinkle you. And I would imagine even at times we would allow sprinkling---sure, yeah. Hospital beds, that sort of thing. But the reason that we choose to immerse is for two major reasons.

One is the word itself. *Baptizo* in Greek is used in other contexts that are nonreligious. It means "to plunge, to dip, to immerse." In some cases, it means "to drown." There's a case in extrabiblical (non-Bible Greek using of the word) writings where a ship got baptized. That meant the ship sunk. It didn't just have a bad day in the rain. So, the word itself means "to take underwater."

The second reason has to do with the two meanings of the word. Remember the meaning of the word “baptism” is to be identified with Christ in His death and His resurrection. So, the idea is that you have died with Him and your sin has been buried with Jesus. And then, you were raised again in His righteousness. That picture, that symbol—not just a sign—that symbol is best expressed in the context of immersion. And also, the idea of being cleansed by the very blood of the Lamb of God—again, not a shower, but a bath, underneath the water. So, that’s how we do it here.

The next frequently asked question is usually when or where we do that at Grace. Many of our ministries do their own baptisms. Our children’s ministry has a baptism event twice a year at least. They’ll do that in the auditorium. They’ll have a children-oriented baptism with a celebration that’s kind of like a birthday party. That’s a lot of fun.

The youth have baptisms at least once a year. They go to Mo Ranch camp in the summer and they’ll end the camp with baptisms. That’s especially significant and sentimental for some people here at Grace because we used to go to that same camp and get baptized. There are some people who went to Mo Ranch when they were in high school at Grace, and now their children are at Mo Ranch in high school and junior high and they’re getting baptized in that same river there. That’s fun. That’s one of the ways the youth do it.

In our adult ministries, sometimes home groups will baptize in someone’s backyard pool.

Here in big church we have baptisms about twice a year, sometimes more. Usually have them outside. We make a moment and a party out of that. If you remember, at the bottom of the hill near the parking lot we’ll do that. It’s usually in June. Sometimes we do it inside because of the weather, and we’re going to do that very soon.

The obvious application for today’s learning time is—what about you? Be baptized! Have you been baptized? You cannot find in the Bible, in the New Testament, an unbaptized (by immersion) believer. There’s just no such thing. Because people repented and believed and they were baptized. That’s why they did it. It is absolutely the easiest way to become like Christ. We say we should become like Christ in all of life; well, Jesus was baptized. He put it like this: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Get baptized.”

Don’t do it because your friends are pressuring you into it. Don’t do it because it’s a family tradition. This is between you and the Lord. It’s about your relationship. But don’t do it because *no one tells me what to do—not even Jesus*. Because Jesus said to be baptized.

It's not necessary for salvation. It can't be. It's by a gift alone that we're saved. And the fact that it's not necessary for salvation is what makes it such a beautiful expression of obedience. It's not needed.

It is the non-essentiality of baptism that makes it important to obedience.

--- Charles Spurgeon

Spurgeon put it this way: "It is the non-essentiality of baptism that makes it important to obedience." If it had to be done, then you'd do it. You don't have to. There's no other reason to do it except this: to obey.

"All that I've commanded you"—can you do this one thing? You could sign up today. You could go to Grace360.org/baptism. We're going to have a baptism here the first week of February, so we'll do it inside because it's cold outside. We'll do it inside each service. I think we're working out the details, but when we do it in here we'll do it right down here. We'll try. And if you want to be baptized, go and sign up. We'd love as many people who have not been baptized or who would like to be baptized again to fill out those forms, and let's get in touch and do that.

The purpose of baptism is to remember the power and the grace of God; to remember that promises were made and that promises were kept. And it's events like baptism and communion, the Lord's table, that help us navigate and walk the balance beam of faith. It's so easy to fall off on one side or the other. Walking and living by faith is an act of disciplined balance. It's easy for us to find ourselves falling off one side when we're feeling hopeless and in despair and we feel like every morning's sunrise is ruined by the darkness of our temperament coming over us, and we're wondering, *Why has God left me? Where has He gone?*

And baptism helps us remember that we are identified with Christ. He has cleansed us of all unrighteousness and has said He will never leave us or forsake us. We died with Him and we were raised with Him.

Sometimes it's not our ego or our circumstances that are driving us down and that knock us off the balance beam of faith, but rather it's ego expansion—when we get proud, when we

forget about our righteousness that is imputed to us, given to us from an outside source. When we get so full of ourselves that we start showing our value system by being greedy or self-righteous and judgmental toward other people, baptism brings us back. It helps us remember that we were so bad we had to be killed. We had to be crucified with Christ. *[Dunking noise]*—stay down. We are worse than we could imagine. And then our salvation is greater than we could ever hope for. There are times when we need to realize that everything we have is a gift from God. And that would cause us to be grateful and gracious and forgiving and humble. Baptism helps us stay on that balance beam, and the Lord's Supper does as well.

Baptism—by immersion—because Jesus commanded it. It gives glory to God. It is good for your soul. It helps us remember what God has done for us in the past. It helps us live in the very present, that He has never left us, He is still with us. It helps us dream about the future of His return and the final judgment and justice that will prevail. Baptism does that for us.

So, the water's great. Do you need to be baptized?

Let's just spend a moment thinking and remembering our own baptism and what that means to us as we close in prayer.

Lord, we are grateful that, first and foremost, you left us these two commands of ordinances or memorials of baptism and the Lord's Supper, because we are spiritually impaired. We don't understand what happened.

And you brought these vivid pictures to us of remembering the fulfillment of the real Passover, that You are the Lamb of God and that our faith is in You as judgment passes over us.

And also, in baptism, that we completely died with You and we were raised with You; that our sin was laid in the grave and a new me was resurrected. Lord, we are grateful that You know how frail our faith can be, that You would cause us to be required to enjoy these two ordinances. And so, Lord, we now celebrate that by doing that.

I ask that You would help us in times of need, when we feel like we could be tempted to do something we shouldn't do, to be reminded that we have died with You. And when we are tempted to become proud and arrogant, thinking we have something that has not been given to us by Your very grace, that baptism and the Lord's Table would humble us and remind us of the depth of our sin and the grace of every breath. For that, we're grateful, Lord. You know us better than we know ourselves, that You'd require these things of us.

Let us celebrate the baptisms of people in this covenant community as we express our obedience to You—not because we need, but because we enjoy it. We love to obey.

We pray this as followers of Christ. In Jesus' name. Everybody said ... Amen.