

ABOUT BAPTISM - SERMON 18.11.07

Note: This sermon is in two parts. The first part was before the baptism and the second part after the baptism.

Bible Reading: Romans 6: 1-14 (*The Message translation*)

Part One

Many people have questions about baptism. Can you believe in God without being baptised? Yes. Can you attend church and be involved without being baptised? Yes. Can you live a good life without being baptised? Yes. Why do some churches baptise children or christen them, and other churches, like our church, don't? We practise believer's baptism, which means that a person is baptised when they are old enough to believe themselves, not just have their parents' belief, and old enough to understand what it means

So, what difference does baptism make? Why is it important – so important that Jesus was baptised, and he told his disciples to baptise people? Why does the Bible say, 'Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, and you will be saved'? *Romans 10: 9* 'Repent and be baptised, 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.' *Acts 2: 38*

Being a Christian is not keeping a set of rules. It's not trying to do your best. It's not just being a member of a church. Being a Christian is a relationship with Jesus.

Some people say that if you are a good person and help others, and you don't commit any major sins, you are OK with God. But the Bible clearly states that no matter how good a life you live, no one is good enough to have a relationship with God. We all do things that we know are wrong. Even if we don't do them, we think them. And that's why we feel separated from God, because God is pure and holy, and we're not. Fortunately for us that is not where the journey ends.

"God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." *Romans 5:8*

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, has paid the penalty for all your sins. You may think you have to lead a good life and do good deeds before God will love you. But the Bible says that Christ loved you so much that he died for you, even before you knew Him.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." *John 3:16*

We don't have to do anything to earn God's love. He already loves us – He created you, so why would he not love you? All you have to do is ask God to forgive your sin and come into your life. That means that God becomes a part of your life. You ask him to take control of all that you are and all that you do. Ask him to help you sort

out the troubles in your life. Surrender your way of doing things to God. Ask him to show you his way of dealing with your life.

Thank him for the gift of knowing that you will spend eternity with him and that your physical death will not be the end of your life. Your life is not destined to end up with the grave having the final word.

Baptism is the very beginning of this new life and like any relationship, it will grow and deepen over time. Baptism symbolises the end of your old ways of doing things, of deciding that you know best about how to live your life, even though that means you end up in a mess at times. Baptism is the beginning of a new life and doing things God's way. This decision affects your whole life. It affects all other decisions. It is the ultimate choice that we make about where our life is headed. Those who have made that decision will never be the same again.

Baptism takes place in water because water is a significant symbol. It sustains, refreshes and cleanses all life. As we are washed with water, it is a way of a person burying their old life and being raised to new life, as a child of God. Our old way of living is left behind, and we commit ourselves to live for God.

It's like moving countries to live. Imagine packing up and moving from one country to another. You leave behind the laws of that country, the food, the environment, your work – everything. You move to a new country where you come under the government of that country. You have to get used to a whole new way of life, and it happens over a period of time. In baptism, you are transferred from the kingdom of darkness where Satan is in charge to the kingdom of God where Jesus is in charge.

That's what we celebrate in baptism. When we baptise someone, we totally immerse them – going under the water means leaving the old life of sin behind. It is like the burial of Jesus. Coming up out of the water is commencing a new life. It is like the resurrection of Jesus.

The actual baptism

When the candidate for baptism stands in the baptistery filled with water, I ask him/her:

Name of person, do you believe and confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Saviour?

Do you believe that he died on the cross for your sins and was raised to life again?

Do you promise to love him and serve him all the days of your life?

Name of person, by the grace of God and on your confession of faith, I baptise you, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The person kneels in the water and I immerse them totally.

As they come out of the water, I tell them about Jesus' baptism. After Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit came on him like a dove, and he heard God say to him, 'You are my beloved Son. I am pleased with you.' I tell the candidate for baptism that God

looks at him/her today and says, 'You are my beloved child – my son/my daughter. I am pleased with you.'

Part Two

It has been a big day for this church. An important day. We have witnessed two baptisms. It is the first day of the rest of their lives. A fresh start. For those who have been baptised, as you witnessed the baptisms, you may have recalled your own baptism and had the opportunity to reflect on your growth in faith and grace since that time.

If you have not been baptised, you may have wondered, 'What's all this about?'

There may have been stirrings within you that cause you to think about God, and whether you want to know more about him. He certainly wants to be in relationship with each one of you. Your life may seem to be together – you are coping, but at times there is a nagging feeling – 'Is this all there is to life?' What do you do about those times when you feel guilty, or empty, or depression comes upon you and everything seems dark, or a crisis happens that rocks you and you don't know how you are going to get through?

Listen to these two sentences from the Bible reading that we heard earlier. 'Sin can't tell you how to live because you're not living under that old **tyranny** any longer. You're living in the freedom of God.' *Romans 6: 14.*

I'm not going to Bible bash you about sin. I'm going to ask you to have a look at your life and see whether you are living under tyranny.

The tyranny of time – too busy to think about life and relationships.

The tyranny of work – too much to do, not enough hours.

The tyranny of addiction – trying to block out the pain and the sadness.

The tyranny of unemployment – feeling that life does not have much to offer.

The tyranny of low self-esteem – never feeling that you are good enough, and lacking confidence.

The tyranny of depression – the blackness comes upon you and holds you in a place where you feel that you can't escape.

The tyranny of abuse – either as a victim or a person responsible for inflicting abuse on someone else.

I could go on – **there are many forms of tyranny.** If any of them sound familiar and you have tried many ways of dealing with them, but none of them seem to work, I'm going to suggest that you give God a chance to help you. Because he doesn't want to spoil your life – he actually wants to exchange the tyranny that you feel you are under, for freedom and grace. Where else in the world could you go where you can experience the freedom and grace that is found in a relationship with Jesus?

Do you know what tyrannises me? I have had to deal with the tyranny of perfectionism in my life. The dreadful control of feeling that whatever I did or do is never good enough and so you try harder and harder to make things perfect – and do you know what? You never reach it. But I have found a way of dealing with this. It's called grace. It's the freedom of God. It's like he helps me realise inside I am

accepted and valued and belong in relationship with him. But if I isolate myself from God, I make myself vulnerable to all the pressures in life.

I believe there are people here today, who long to experience what Jesus offers.

But you are afraid. You think it will mean cutting out all the joy and pleasure in life. You think it means a whole series of NOTS – not doing this, not doing that, obeying a whole lot of rules. If you think that inviting Jesus to be part of your life is like that, hear these words – straight from Jesus, because he said them when he was on the earth.

Listen to his invitation to you today: ‘Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion and your ways of dealing with your life? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.’ *Matthew 11: 28-30 (The Message)*

Give Jesus a go. He is the greatest healer of human hearts and brokenness that the world has ever known. See if he offers you a better way of living than you can do on your own. You may be OK on the good days. But where do you go and what do you do on the bad days?

If you have feel that you want to know more about a relationship with Jesus, I invite you to do something about it today. Or if you need to do something to restore a relationship that you once had with Jesus, but things have got in the way and it’s no longer a living relationship, fix it today. At the end of the service; just come and say, ‘I’d like to make a time to have a talk about life. I’ve got some questions.’

Or if it’s hard to do that, take one of the cards in the back of the seats, write your name and contact details on it, and maybe a little message, give it to me or give it to someone and ask them to pass it on to me, and I’ll contact you. I’m not a pressure salesperson, but I am a listener and an encourager. This may be the first step in the rest of your life.

God doesn’t want you to live under that old tyranny any longer. He wants you to live in grace and freedom. What an offer – and it’s an offer for anyone.

Lynette Leach, Minister