



For some of you who are new to Christianity, or at least new to attending a Baptist church, Baptism must seem like a strange thing. We stop our services to bring people down into a tank of water and then after asking them a couple of questions stick them under the water. The other day I was thinking back to a few Baptismal services I have been part of. I had a request to Baptize a man who loved the outdoors (whose background was full of some pretty hardy partying), so he requested to be baptized in the North Saskatchewan River early one spring. So I sent 2 men down stream just in case I lost him in the fast current. He had given his testimony and then just as I placed him under the water a beer bottle floated past over top of him. That day I almost heard God laughing from heaven. Another time I baptized a Pentecostal man in a freezing lake early one spring. He had said that he was going to come out of the water and speak in tongues in front of us Baptists. As he came out of the water, he raised his hands but he was so cold that nothing came out of his mouth. That day I saw God take his 'tongues' away. One day as I baptized a huge lineman for the Eskimo football team and as he hit the water he caused such a tidal wave that the water went over the top of the tank and splashed onto our grand piano. Then as I pulled him out of the water I felt a sharp pain in the groin area which led to a hernia operation a while later. Now that is a real Baptist pastor's war wound. I still remember one Sunday during another Baptismal service; a lady appeared in the baptistery who normally wore a wig, without her wig. I had no idea who she was. I remember looking down the list of baptismal candidates and hoping it was Mrs. Pegan we were baptizing. And yet on another Sunday, back when I used to wear the fisherman's hip waders during baptisms, as I was putting a fairly large lady under the water, she went stiff and pulled me under. This caused the water to pour into my waders., which was a problem, because I hadn't brought a change of clothes and I was on to preach in a couple minutes.

Funny stories aside, in the baptistery I have also heard fantastic stories of lives changed, faith found, hope renewed and watched as people began a new and more profound walk with God. So this morning, I want us to walk through what the bible teaches about Baptism. Before we do though, let me say that one of the glorious things about Brentview is that we come from many different geographical and denominational backgrounds. Because of that know that, I do not want to knock or demean anyone's experience in baptism. Some of you have been Baptized as infants- your parents in faith had you baptized with the dream that you would walk in faith with Jesus. Others of you have been 'poured' as Mennonites. Please know that I want to celebrate with you how meaningful and precious your baptism was. However, when it comes to what we should do concerning Baptism here at Brentview, my mandate can't be just our church tradition, the NAB doctrinal statement or what our parents taught us. Our soul authority needs to be the Word of God. So let's look at what the bible says about Baptism this morning.

## **I. History Lesson**

2000 years in 2 minutes. In the time of Jesus, Baptism was already part of the Jewish faith. It was used when a Non-Jew wanted to convert and follow God. The man would make a sacrifice, then he was circumcised so he would have on his body this irreversible symbol of being a Jew and then a while later he was baptized. He was fully

immersed into the water as a symbol of renouncing his old life, his previous nationality and allegiances and when he came out of the water he was 'fully a Jew'. Often they even changed their name and put on a new set of cloths to show that they were now a brand new person before God. Followers of Jesus picked up on this tradition of Baptism (without the circumcision) as a sign of becoming a fully devoted follower of Jesus. There is no disagreement among scholars that for the first 300 years after Jesus' resurrection, the method of Baptism practiced by the Early Church was immersion. The earliest church buildings, dating back to the 2nd century, were built often with Baptismal tanks (some have been found in the shape of a cross). However, a change happened around the 313 AD when Constantine was the Roman Emperor. He was influenced by his mother's faith and then he had a dream, just before a huge battle, that if his soldiers painted a Christian cross on the front of their shields they would be victorious. It was a phenomenal victory, so he became a believer. Later in his life when he was very ill, he decided that he needed to be baptized. The problem was that with his high temperature, he would die if he was Baptized in the river. So, his baptism took the form of pouring as he lay in his bed. Later as Christianity became popular, for convenience and with the precedent being set by the emperor, pouring or sprinkling became the mode of baptism. That is how Baptisms were practiced for centuries until, with the printing of the bible in the language of the ordinary people, questions started to be raised concerning baptism. While the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican churches still baptize infants by Christening, by the 1550's the early Mennonites started to pour at Baptism. Then by the early 1570's we see Baptism by immersion happening in a few groups in Holland and England and by 1639 under the leadership of men like Roger Williams and John Smyth we find Baptism by immersion happening in North America.

## **II. Why do we Baptize?**

i) Example of Jesus; turn to Matthew 3:13-17. We are Christ's followers and it seems only right that we should follow his example. If it is proper or necessary for Jesus to do it, it is something I need to do as well. Look at verses 16 & 17. When Jesus came out of the water, we have this amazing moment happening between Jesus and His Heavenly Father. First, the dove descended from heaven and it was almost like the Father physically placed His hand on His son's shoulder and then with His voice He said 'this is my son whom I love'. There is very few things more profound than when a dad places his hand on his son's or daughter's shoulder and then says 'know that I love you and am so proud of you'. I believe that at Baptism, the Father wants to touch us and whisper to us 'well done, know that I love you'. Baptism is a precious and life changing experience.

ii) Evidence in the New Testament. If you look in the New Testament, you will see that when people became believers, they almost immediately were Baptized. For example, on day one when the Christian church was founded, Peter preached in Acts 2:38 'repent and be baptized' and that day approximately 3000 were saved and baptized as a profession of their faith in Jesus. That pattern of Baptism continued throughout the New Testament. When you ask who was Baptized, you will find that in Acts 8:12, Philip preached and 'when they believed Philip... they were baptized both men and women'. Something very profound happened there. Don't miss that in a culture where women were not allowed in the Temple building and where they weren't

taught from the scriptures, that on Pentecost women were Baptized just like the men and in so doing they become fully a part of the church. They were in the service with the men taking communion, praying and in equality with men, filled with the Holy Spirit and given gifts with which to minister. What we see is that when a person became a believer they were Baptized. For example, in Acts 8:35-39, the Ethiopian Eunuch. Acts 9, Saul is Baptized by Ananias. Acts 11:16, Peter preached in Caesarea and they were baptized. Acts 16:14,15, 33, Lydia and the Philippian jailer were baptized. Acts 18:18 Paul was Baptizing in Corinth. As I study the New Testament, I need to say that I see no such thing as an un-baptized believer. What I see is that if a person decided to follow Jesus, they nailed down that faith by publically being baptized so all those around them knew that they were a follower of Jesus. Why did that happen? I think it was because of the command of Jesus.

iii) Command of Jesus. Turn to Matthew 28:18-20. As Jesus was leaving His followers and was about to ascend into heaven, He gave them one last command. That command was that we need to go into the world and tell people about how to become Christ followers. In the Greek, literally it says in the going we are to help them grow into disciples and 'baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit'. The way the Greek is written here, this is not just a suggestion, it is a command. I need to say that I was brought up believing and hearing that it was good to be baptized, but it was optional. This passage is very clear, that if you or I are followers of Jesus, then we need to do what He says, and what He commands us to do right here is to be baptized. Why?... two comments. Firstly, it doesn't matter why. If Jesus is our Lord, then we need to do what He tells us to do. Secondly, we have noticed that as we grow in our faith, Jesus will from time to time ask us to do something. If we obey, then we grow deeper in our faith walk with Him. If we do not obey Him, then our walk with Him will be stifled. In a former church I served, a young girl came to me and said she felt God was calling her to be baptized. So we made preparations for her baptism. Just before the service, she came to me and said that she was afraid of water so she couldn't be baptized. Then a year later, she came again and then bailed at the last minute. What I noticed was that as she kept coming closer to obedience and taking off spiritually, she kept hitting that place where disobedience stifled her from experiencing a more victorious Christian walk. So why do we Baptize? It is because of the example of Jesus, the evidence of the New Testament church and because of the command of Jesus. My promise to is is that I will not push anyone into being Baptized - that is between you and God. So take your time and think it through, but if Jesus is telling you to be baptized, then get after it – because obedience is a prerequisite for His blessing us.

### **III. What does Baptism Mean?**

i) Personal Testimony. It is a chance for you to tell others that you are a Christ follower. Romans 10:9,10 'If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and with your mouth you confess and are saved'. For me, it is like the time I asked Kathy to marry me. There was just the 2 of us there as I express my love for her. But, there also needed to be a time when before others and God, at our wedding, I told the world I loved her. For me the day I asked Jesus into my heart

was like the engagement and my baptism was like the wedding day, when I told the world about my love for my Jesus.

ii) The Picture. There are two important pictures being displayed at a Baptism. The first is concerning Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. A while ago at a baptism, Pastor Wally explained it this way 'Baptized into the likeness of His death, raised into the likeness of His resurrection.' Now look at Romans 6:3, 4. Here is a second picture of what needs to be happening in our lives as we follow Jesus. We are saying that we want to set aside the old way of living and increasingly become a new person in Jesus. When I put you under the water you had better hold your breath (a picture of our death to the old way and things of our lives). Then when I raise you up, it is a picture of things becoming new and 'Jesus like' as we become a new person in Jesus.

iii) The Promise. Last week, I sat and watched as my Kathy had her Induction service to become a Chaplain at Bethany Care Society. I went expecting it to just be another service. But it was more than that because as Markus Lemke spoke, Jerry Proppe sang and Kathy's boss Dr. Jean Morris set her aside for the ministry, it was very moving to watch as she was challenged to Pastor with the love and passion of Jesus to her residents. I saw an affirmation of her calling and a greater determination in her eyes to live out her faith with new fervor and passion. To me, Baptism is like an Induction or Ordination service where we are promising to be 'ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ'. That is why we ask each Baptismal candidate if they want us to lay on hands and set them aside for ministry at the end of the service in which they are Baptized. When you are Baptized, you are promising to be an obedient follower of Jesus Christ.

Baptism is a personal testimony, a picture of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection and a promise to live our lives like Jesus and for Jesus. That of course leads us to the next question.

#### **IV. How should we Baptize?**

If we go back to scripture we find the following:

i) The WORD that is used concerning Baptism is **Βαπτίζο**. This literally means 'to dip into (Luke 16:24), to plunge under or to submerge.' It is used in other places in the New Testament for things like dipping a cloth into dye (Revelations 19:13) or dipping bread into wine (John 13:26). Nowhere in the New Testament are the words which normally would be applied to sprinkling or pouring used in any of the passages which speak about Baptism. Instead, in passages which talk about how the baptism happens, we find words like in John 3:23 where John the Baptist was baptizing in 'much water'. Mark 1:10 says that when Jesus was baptized he 'came up out of' the water. And Acts 8:38 says the Ethiopian Finance minister 'went down into the water' and verse 39 says he 'came up out of the water'. In each of the cases, we find that the descriptions used backs up the Greek meaning of the word **Βαπτίζο** which is to immerse under the water. I should also add that I think that immersion best expresses the picture that Jesus died, was buried and then rose again (Romans 6:3-6).

But, here is a question. If the word **Βαπτίζο** was so clearly to dip into or plunge under, why didn't the bible translators simply put those words in the bible translation? Well, the problem was that while they knew the word should be translated to dip into or plunge under, the king of England had not been immersed but rather sprinkled in the Church of England and they didn't want to get him angry. They also couldn't translate

the word as sprinkled because that was a different Greek word – ‘rhantizo’, nor could they translated it poured for that was the word ‘luo.’ So, they copped out and didn’t translate the word at all. Instead, they took the Greek word Βαπτίζω and pretended it was the English word Baptize and slid a Greek word into English language so they wouldn’t have to translate it. But maybe that is ok, otherwise we would be called Brentview Dippers Church or Brentview plungers. But I think if you study scripture, you will find that the bible word and picture being portrayed is best translated and acted out through immersion, plunging under the water.

Concerning who should be Baptized, I think you have seen that the bible teaches it needs to be a person who is a believer in Jesus Christ. That is what John 3:16 says, that ‘whoever believes in him will not perish but have ever lasting life’, and Romans 10:9 says ‘if we confess with our mouth Jesus is Lord... you will be saved.’ For me that means that a person first has to be old enough to have made a decision themselves to follow Jesus and second, must be willing to speak out loud a testimony of their faith. That is why we do not baptize infants for we feel that they need to be old enough to make a verbal declaration of their faith.

## **V. So What?**

To me this means that as a church, we need to Baptize by immersion. Those who are baptized must be believers in Jesus Christ and they need to be old enough to publically confess their faith in Jesus. And that is what we will do. Now, I am in no way demeaning anyone’s baptism which has happened in another form. I know that parents with full faith in Jesus and complete love for their children have had their children baptized in a different way. However, as I have read the actual creeds of churches who baptize infants, they very clearly to state that a child is not saved at their baptism. Instead, they are brought into the care of the church so that at a proper age they will develop a personal relationship with Jesus. That is why they have confirmation (they confirm that what they prayed for actually happened). However my leaning from scripture is that one needs to find faith in Jesus themselves and then confess that faith through baptism. Having said all this, what is the so what?

i) If you are a believer and have been baptized by immersion, I want to ask - Are you living like you are a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you living up to the promises you made at your baptism?

ii) If you are a believer in Jesus and have never been baptized, you need to wrestle with the fact that I see nowhere in the New Testament, people who were un-baptized believers. Jesus commanded that if you were a follower of His, you needed to be baptized. So ask the Lord if it is time you let others know that Jesus is your Lord and your Savior through baptism.

iii) If you are a believer and have been baptized by a different method, please know that we will not hassle you about it. You are a brother or sister in Jesus and we are honored that you are part of the Brentview family. We love having you here. But also know that if God is nudging you to now stand up and tell others that the prayers your parents had at your baptism as a child (that you would have a personal faith has come to pass) have been answered, we would be honored to let you publically proclaim your faith with your mouth and words by being baptized as an adult. If you do that, your first Baptism will be mentioned from the Baptistery since for many it has been a pivotal

part of your journey of faith. Why? Because that is true and we want to place honor where it is due.

My desire today has been to simply look at what the bible teaches in this area of baptism. Let me say again for the third time that if you are baptized by immersion or not we are honored to walk together and minister side by side and do life together. I present this sermon so that you and God may talk together and then He can tell you what He wants you to do and when He does, please follow His leading so you may stand directly in the middle of his blessing.

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