

Baptism

Colossians 2:1-15

This morning I want to talk about baptism. We have a baptismal service coming up, and I want to talk about the importance of baptism, especially for those who haven't been baptized yet of your own choosing. Maybe you were baptized as a baby in a different church tradition, but you haven't been baptized since then, or maybe you've never been baptized. It was a big deal to the people in the NT, so I want to talk about it to help you decide if it's something you think God wants you to do.

As I thought about baptism this week, I realized once again that we treat baptism way different now than they did in the NT times. Compared to then, baptism doesn't have a very important place in our church. It's something we do once a summer, but other than that it's rarely thought of.

For people in the early church, it was the way they demonstrated a decisive commitment to God. It was the way they declared they were all in. When John came baptizing people, he was preaching that people needed to repent because the kingdom of heaven was near – the Messiah was coming – and people lined up to get baptized in the Jordan river as a demonstration of their desire for repentance. It went right along with their decision. Jesus and his disciples did something similar with those they baptized. Repentance, commitment and baptism all went together.

The people were familiar with the idea of baptism because of ceremonial washings that took place at the temple in Jerusalem. When I was in Jerusalem I took some pictures of the purification pools that they unearthed from the time of Christ. **(Picture)** When people would go to the temple to worship and offer sacrifices they first walked down a stone staircase into a pool of water, immersed themselves completely, then walked back up again. It was a prescribed mode of purification for worship that was required before entering the temple. So when John and Jesus' disciples came baptizing people in the Jordan River, they were familiar with it and had some idea of what it meant. They were choosing to purify themselves and consecrate themselves to the Lord.

The early church continued this practice after Jesus ascended into heaven, only it had a different significance. As they preached the good news and people decided to follow Christ, they were baptized to signify their commitment. They wanted to

get baptized to demonstrate the seriousness of their change of life and devotion to Christ. So it was a very regular occurrence that accompanied the preaching of the gospel and the spread of Christianity.

So even though baptism isn't as prominent here as it was back then, we think it's very important and want to give you the opportunity to do it. It's not some legalistic hoop you have to jump through to get saved. It's something you willingly do to publicly declare your decision to follow Christ with your life.

This morning I want to look at why it's so special based on what it symbolizes so we can remember again why we do it. And if you haven't been baptized based on your own commitment to follow Christ, I'd like you to consider doing it at Clear Lake in a couple weeks. It's up to you – something for you to do willingly out of your own desire and devotion to Christ.

There are a number of passages that speak of the significance of baptism and this morning I want to use Colossians chapter 2. Colossians is a letter from Paul to the church in the city of Colossae. Paul didn't actually plant that church, a man name Epaphras did, but Paul was writing them a letter to help fill up their understanding of Christ and the Gospel and how to live out their faith in their daily lives. It appears that there were false teachers and false teachings that were present and putting pressure on the people to veer away from the core truths of who Jesus was and how they would be saved and how they should live as followers of his, so some of what Paul wrote was to expose those things and help people see the truth more clearly.

For our purposes, I want us to look at the first 15 verses of chapter 2 where Paul references baptism and what it symbolizes.

Read Colossians 2:1-5.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

So Paul lets them know that even though he hasn't been with them in person, he has been with them in spirit, and cares very deeply about them. He was rejoicing to hear how well they were doing, but he also struggled greatly for them, wanting to encourage them in the faith by filling up their knowledge and understanding of God's mystery, which is the gospel of Christ. Jesus Christ unlocked the mysteries of God's plan of redemption that were hidden for so long – they're like a treasure of wisdom and knowledge waiting to be opened, and Paul had the strong desire to share that treasure with them. He didn't want them to be led astray or away from Christ and the treasures of the gospel by false teachers with fine-sounding arguments.

So after sharing his heart and intent he begins to teach them in verse 6.

Read Colossians 2:6-7.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Paul begins by pointing out that when they received Christ it was only the beginning of their life of faith – as they received him, they must also walk in him. They must grow deeper and stronger so that they would be established in the faith that they were first taught by Epaphras. Deciding to follow Christ is great, but it's critically important to continue in him and not veer away.

This must have been a concern for Paul as he heard about them, because he brought the same thing up earlier in this letter as well. In **Colossians 1:21-23** Paul wrote: *“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.”* You can see he's emphasizing the importance of then continuing in the faith and not veering away from the gospel, similar to what he said in chapter 2, where he goes on to warn them about those who would try to lead them astray...

Read Colossians 2:8-10.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not

according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Here he warns them not to be led astray by the false teachings and empty philosophy they were hearing that would lead them away from the true Christ. Christ had to remain central to their faith and in verse 9 he begins to tell them why.

He says that in Christ “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” – this is a summary of what he already declared about Christ in **chapter 1, verses 15-20**: *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”* Hallelujah!

Christ had to remain central to their faith because in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. AND, Paul also says, because they had been filled in Christ – which means in Christ, they had been filled with the fullness of God. In **Colossians 1:26** Paul told them that the riches of the glory of the gospel is that Christ is in them, and since Christ was the fullness of God, the fullness of God was in them. This is a shocking reality of Christianity – those who follow Christ, don’t worship a God that’s just out there, they worship a God who’s in here. So Paul urges them to not veer off into some other philosophy and away from Christ. Christ must remain central to your faith. And he continues to describe their need for Christ in verse 11...

Read Colossians 2:11.

¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ...

So he brings circumcision into the picture – something that they, especially the Jews, would have been familiar with. But he brings up a different kind of circumcision – the circumcision of Christ – whereby their old sinful body of flesh had been put off or removed. They needed to keep Christ central because it was in Christ that their sinful body of flesh had been removed. He did this through his

death on the cross where he died to sin once for all. Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:21 that he who knew no sin became sin so that we might become the righteousness of God. Christ took our sins and guilt and the penalty we deserved upon himself when he died on the cross and because he paid the penalty in full, the curse of our old, sinful nature was rendered useless – dead – cut off and no longer able to condemn us any more. That’s why we need Christ, and that’s what Paul was saying to them.

But then he goes on to explain that further and this is where he brings baptism into view.

Read Colossians 2:12.

¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

So he has them remember their baptism and what it symbolized. In Christ (by faith in Christ) and through the circumcision of Christ they were buried with Christ in baptism. Now baptism was the outward sign of an inward reality that had happened to them, so Paul doesn’t just have baptism in mind, but he primarily has their faith and union with Christ in mind. When they put their faith in Christ, they were united with him in his death and resurrection. So that just as Jesus died to sin on the cross, they too had died to sin through their faith and union with him. And just as Jesus rose again to a new life to God, they too rose with him. That’s the spiritual reality that had happened to them and that’s what their baptism symbolized. That’s why they were baptized when they believed – it symbolized these awesome spiritual realities that Christ had done for them in his death and resurrection, which they received by faith and by being united with him.

So, like Paul says, they were “buried with him in baptism, in which they were also raised with him through faith” and that’s another reason why Paul says they needed to keep Christ central and not veer away from him. He goes on to further explain what Christ did for them.

Read Colossians 2:13-15.

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal

demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

So he uses this picture of a long list of grievances they had against God because of their trespasses against his law and their sinful nature. Because of those things they were spiritually dead before God, unable to please him in any way. But Paul points out that even though they were dead, God made them alive and forgave them all their trespasses. He cancelled their record of debt. How did he do that? He did it through Christ on the cross. That long list of grievances was nailed with Christ to the cross and because of that, it was set aside. It was completely forgiven. No more guilt or record of wrongdoing, and because of that there was nothing left for the spiritual forces of evil to work with in their accusations of condemnation. When Jesus died on the cross and cancelled our debt God put them to open shame and triumphed over them in him.

Christ did everything for their salvation and thus, they needed to keep him central to their faith and not veer away into false teaching. In Christ's death and resurrection and through their faith and union with him, they too had died to sin and were given new life to God. And that's what baptism corresponds with and symbolizes. That's why they did it back then when people became Christians and that's why we still do it today.

So if you've become a Christian and have never been baptized since your relationship with Christ began, I encourage you to consider doing it in a couple weeks. It's really a wonderful blessing for those who do and for those who watch. You can invite your family and friends, it's a great time to celebrate. And if you are afraid of public speaking or getting dunked under the water, don't let that hold you back! We'll figure out what we can do!

Pray.

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25