

The Story Church - 5.7.23

Down to the River: *The Purpose and Power of Baptism*

Part 1 of 4: *Baptism as a Beginning*

SERIES INTRO: “By baptism, we enter into a covenant with God, an everlasting covenant, we are admitted into the church, made members of Christ, made children of God. By the water of baptism, we are born again.” - John Wesley

The movement of Jesus that has swept over the entire world was born in blood and water. For thousands of years, believers from every nation and race, whether rich or poor, male or female, young or old, having been redeemed by the blood of Christ, were initiated into Christ’s Church through this mysterious water rite called baptism. What is the meaning of this strange, ancient ritual, and why does it still matter today? Join The Story through the month of May as we explore the purpose and power of baptism!

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Have you been baptized? If so, what do you remember about your baptism? If not, what are the reasons or obstacles that have prevented you from doing so?

Acts 2:37-47

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, 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

We run to Baptism with _____

In Scripture what relationship do we see between faith in Jesus and baptism?

How is baptism our first step of obedience?

Baptism isn’t _____

Who are your faith mentors? How have they supported you in your relationship with Jesus?

How is baptism really a picture of God's faithfulness to us?

Baptism is the _____

NT Wright calls baptism *the starting point for the Christian pilgrimage*. Do you agree or disagree? How have you seen this play out in your life?

In Acts 2:42-47 we see the birth of the Church. What is the relationship between the Church and baptism and the Holy Spirit?

How does baptism serve as a commissioning service?

Organize these three concept below in the order in which they occur in the christian life

Baptism, Discipleship, Faith,

1 _____ -> 2 _____ -> 3 _____

Acts 22:16

And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

How is God calling you to respond **today**?

Your Notes:

The Story Church - 5.14.23

Down to the River: *The Purpose and Power of Baptism*

Part 2 of 4: ***Are You Born Again?***

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REFLECTION QUESTION: Do you consider yourself a “born-again Christian”? If not, why not? If so, do you acknowledge your born-again identity publicly? Why or why not?

Do you believe that everyone who’s been baptized is “born again”?
Has everyone who is “born again” been baptized?

Let’s talk about the intersection of baptism and born-again Christianity by reading John’s Gospel.

John 3:1-2 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

Who were the Pharisees? Who was Nicodemus? Why might he have come to see Jesus at night?

John 3:3-8 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

How did Nicodemus’ super-literal retort to Jesus expose the state of his heart? What was he missing?

What did Jesus most likely mean when he said “...unless they are born of water and the Spirit”? How do other passages from Scripture support this?

Ezekiel 36:25-27 I will sprinkle *clean water* on you, and you will be clean; I will *cleanse you* from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and *put a new spirit* in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and *give you a heart of flesh*. And I will put *my Spirit in you* and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Biblically speaking, what does God do to us with WATER? ...and with SPIRIT?

Putting aside modern-day stereotypes, what does it actually mean to be *born-again* according to Jesus and to the entirety of God's Word?

2 Corinthians 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

1 Peter 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

James 1:17-18 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth...

What is so important to understand about the idea of being BORN (versus being *good*, for example)?

John 3:9-18 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in 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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Why would Jesus' message of salvation by grace through faith have been so shocking to Nicodemus?

What do we know about Nicodemus' life after this late-night encounter with Jesus? (see *John 7:45-52 and John 19:38-39*) Do you think he was born-again? Why or why not?

What difference does it make in a person's life when God makes them a new creation?

How has this message, these Bible passages, and/or God's Spirit changed your understanding of what it means to be a born-again believer? If you haven't considered yourself "born again" in the past, are you open to being born again by water and the Spirit? Why or why not?

*Who has seen the wind? Neither I nor you.
But when the leaves hang trembling, the wind is passing through.
Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I.
But when the trees bow their heads, the wind is passing by.*
- from ***Who Has Seen the Wind?*** by Christina Rossetti (1872) based on John 3:8

Your Notes:

The Story Church - 5.21.23

Down to the River: *The Purpose and Power of Baptism*

Part 3 of 4: *Why Do We Baptize Babies?*

SERIES INTRO: “By baptism, we enter into a covenant with God, an everlasting covenant, we are admitted into the church, made members of Christ, made children of God. By the water of baptism, we are born again.” - John Wesley

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REFLECTION QUESTION: OK, let’s cut to the chase. Prior to hearing this message, what was your opinion of infant baptism? How did you reach your conclusions?

What are the two largest schools of thought when it comes to Christian baptism, and how do they differ?

How many examples of infants and young children being baptized are found in the Bible?
Is that alone reason enough to reject infant baptism? Why or why not?

How should Christians proceed when disagreements arise among believers that are not clearly resolved in Scripture?

Genesis 17:3-12 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised...”

What was circumcision meant to signify?
At what age were Israelite males to be circumcised?

Genesis 21:1-4 Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him.

Why did Abraham circumcise Isaac as an infant instead of waiting until his son was old enough to choose it for himself?

Luke 2:4-7, 21 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them... On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

At what age was Jesus circumcised, and why?

Whereas in the Old Testament, circumcision was the sign of the covenant, baptism became the sign of the new covenant in the New Testament. Read Jesus' *Great Commission* below. What did he tell his disciples to do? Notably, especially for a group of devout Jews, what did he *not* tell them to do?

Matthew 28:18-20 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 of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

While both circumcision and baptism are described in the Bible as signs of God's covenants (old and new, respectively), there are some important differences between the two rituals. What are they?

Because circumcision (under the old covenant) and baptism (under the new) are *signs* of our salvation (and not the *substance* of it), neither sign has the power to *save* us (see passage from Romans 2 below). Why is this an important clue to understanding the biblical case for infant baptism?

Romans 2:25-29 Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

At what point did the Christian Church begin baptizing children and infants? How do we know? If baptizing infants is so clearly unbiblical, as some might say, then why is there no evidence of church fathers criticizing this practice as they so often did when heresies arose among the churches?

Whenever we baptize infants, what are we doing? And what are we *not* doing?

Are you (and your children, if you have kids) baptized? If so, what does that mean to you? If not, why not?

Your Notes:

The Story Church - 5.28.23

Down to the River: *The Purpose and Power of Baptism*

Part 4 of 4: ***Baptism of the Holy Spirit***

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REFLECTION QUESTION: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? How has that affected your relationship with the Holy Spirit?

What, specifically, does Scripture tell us that baptism by the Holy Spirit is not?

1. Baptism by the Spirit is not a _____
2. And it is not just _____

Matthew 3:11 - “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Romans 8:9 “And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”

John 3:5 “Truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.”

Now that we’ve cleared up what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is *not*, let’s think about what it is:

1. _____ by God

Acts 2:2-6; 12-13 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken...12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” 13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

Why is it important to understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit as initiated by God?

2. Through belief in the _____ of _____

Acts 19:1-5 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples 2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." 3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied.
4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them...

What is the gospel of Jesus and how does it bring fire and the Spirit?

3. It yields certain _____ and _____.

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

1 Corinthians 12:8-10 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

Romans 12:6-8 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

When someone claims to have the Holy Spirit, how can you know whether or not they are telling the truth?

4. For all _____

How is this encouraging? How is this challenging?

Luke 11:9-13

9 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

What is the relationship between vulnerability and receiving the Holy Spirit?

Where have you not been vulnerable with God? How can you bring that to Him today?

Your notes: