

The Life-Changing Package
Baptism: What's the Point?
Acts 2:37-39
9/4/16

- What would you think about a woman who is dating someone and he has taken her to meet his family and his close friends, but she hasn't done the same. She tells him that they are exclusive and heading toward the next step in their relationship. But, what's the point of introducing him to her friends and family? It will just get more people involved in their relationship and she's not ready for that. She's not sure when she will be ready to introduce him to her friends and family, definitely not now.
 - o Well, according to the movie "The Ugly Truth," (if you've ever seen that movie), - and not just that movie, but relationship experts says this as well, that if the one you are dating has not introduced you to their friends and family, you are not that serious to them. You may not even be the only one.
 - o If he or she is serious about you and desire to take your relationship to the next level, they will want to introduce you to those who are closest to them. If they don't want to introduce you to those closest to them, they just aren't that into you or don't see it as a long term relationship.

- Or, what would you think of a husband who didn't wear a wedding band because he stated that he didn't think it was necessary for everyone to know that he's married. He affirms that he loves his wife and all, but why does he have to put it out there that he's married by wearing a wedding band? What's the point? His identity isn't all wrapped up in being married. He is a separate person from his wife. A wedding band is an archaic symbol.
 - o I know what I would think! Old boy is leaving his options open!

- Or, what would you think about a parent of young children whose phone only has selfies. You know what selfies are – pictures of yourself. So, instead of taking pictures of their kids, they are only taking pictures of themselves – in the bathroom mirror, eating, going out, making duck faces. They say they love their kids, but they don't want their identity to be all consumed with being a parent and having kids. What's the point of having pictures of their kids? They want their own identity and they want to do their own thing, without always having to think about the kids.
 - o You would probably question their commitment to their kids and to being a parent. Right?

- See, these are symbols of what is going on in our hearts and minds. These, and other symbols in our culture, reflect our commitment, our seriousness, our identity, and the status of our relationships.

- Today, as we continue to unwrap the life-changing package of salvation that Jesus gives us, we are going to open a symbol of our commitment, our seriousness, our relationship and our identity as Christ-followers.
 - That symbol is baptism.
- Last week, we started a sermon series entitled “The Life-Changing Package.” This package is a gift given to us by Jesus. This package is salvation. However, there is not just one gift in the package of salvation, but more. Salvation is much more than just a one-time experience.
 - **Acts 2:37-39** are the verses we are using to show us that salvation is a package of gifts. Let’s read it.
- Last week, Pastor Wil spoke about the first gift – repentance. Repentance is where it all starts. Until we realize that we are sinners and admit that we are sinners in need of a Savior, salvation is impossible.
 - We have to confess with our mouths and believe in our hearts that Jesus is Lord and is the Lord of our lives and then we turn from our sin and turn to God. That is repentance. Repentance isn’t just saying “I’m sorry” for sinning and doing wrong. Repentance is confessing your sin (which is a matter of the mind) believing that Jesus is Lord (which is a matter of heart) and turning away from sin and turning to the things of God (which is a matter of our will and action).
 - Repentance is a full body experience!
- Yet, even though it is a full body experience, and even though repentance does bring salvation, there is more. There is more to experience the full package of salvation. The next thing Peter tells those who wanted to seek salvation through Jesus Christ to do was to be baptized in the name of Jesus to show that they have received forgiveness for their sins.
 - Now, there are lots of different ideas about baptism. There are different ways to baptize. There are even thoughts about if it is really important or necessary. Today, we’re going to answer those questions.
- Obviously, it was important enough for Peter to tell those who wanted to be saved that they should be baptized after repenting of their sins. We’re going to look at other indications of it’s importance as well.
 - But, first, what kind of baptism was Peter talking about? Peter was talking about a water baptism of being fully immersed in water as a response to receiving salvation.
 - Now, we all know people who have different ideas about baptism. Our Catholic brothers and sisters and those from other denominations baptize infants by pouring water on their heads. There are others who baptize through sprinkling, whether those be infants, children or adults.
- But, we believe that baptism is not something for infants, but for those who have come to an age where they realize their sin, their need for Jesus and act upon that by confessing and repenting. We call this a believer’s baptism. This is what the Church of God practices.

- Peter here was talking to adults, or at least people of age, to understand his preaching and to make a decision of faith and belief in Jesus Christ. In fact, there are no indications of infant baptism in Scripture unless we stretch what Scripture says when entire households were baptized in a response of faith and salvation and so we say that must have included infants. But, that's a bit of a stretch.
- We also believe that Peter is most definitely talking about baptism by water immersion. I call it the full dunk! Where do we get that from this passage? Well, because Peter already had an image in his head of how baptism was to be done. He had already seen the Savior, Jesus, show him how it was to be done.
 - In Matthew 3:13-17, Jesus went to his cousin, John the Baptist to be baptized. John baptized with full immersion water baptism. It talks about when Jesus came up from under the water. It speaks of God being very pleased with Jesus for being baptized.
 - So, we can surmise that Peter is talking about water immersion because that is what Jesus did and, no doubt, that is the baptism all of the disciples experienced as well.
- This leads us to answer the question, "Why Is Baptism Important?" See, the fact that Jesus, himself, the perfect, sinless God-man pursued baptism and that God declared as a voice in the sky that he was well-pleased with his Son for being baptized shows us the importance of the act of baptism. If Jesus exemplified it, he did it not for himself, but to set an example for us.
 - Further, the fact that Jesus also establishes baptism as an eternal ordinance for his people, the church, calling every believer to follow in his footsteps also points to the importance of baptism. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus told his disciples to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."
 - It wasn't enough for people to confess and repent. They must also be baptized. When Jesus says this, it became an ordinance for those who are his disciples. An ordinance is a command, not a suggestion.
- Unfortunately, in our modernized, "comfort zone Christianity," we tend to take God's commandments far too lightly. We treat them as suggestions when they are not.
 - As Chuck Colson points out, "Most Westerners take baptism for granted, but for many in the world the act requires immense courage. In countries like Nepal it once meant imprisonment. For Soviet or Chinese or Eastern bloc believers or parts of the Middle East, it was like signing their own death warrant."
 - That is pretty serious stuff! Those are extreme measures for being baptized. Those are things we don't even think about because we aren't in danger of them. And because we don't have to think about it, we treat baptism too casually, even optional.
- But just as a married person refusing to wear their wedding ring or a dating person refusing to introduce their boyfriend or girlfriend to their friends or family or just like a parent who

refuses to be identified as a parent show their lack of seriousness and commitment, a believer who says they are a Christian but neglects baptism also shows a lack of seriousness and commitment.

- Baptism takes repentance to the next level. It is the next gift to bring fullness to our salvation.
 - Water baptism is a symbol designed by God to identify a person as a disciple of Jesus Christ. However, I use the word "symbol" here with caution. To say that it is "just a symbol" takes away from the depth and beauty of water baptism. Baptism is a symbol, but it is so much more than that.
- So, let's get into what's the point. It's important because Jesus did it and commands it, but what's the point of it? What does it do? Why should we, if we believe in Jesus, have confessed our sins and have repented and have made Jesus our Lord – why should we be baptized? What's the point? I'll give you several points.
- First, as I just said, baptism confirms your identity as a disciple of Christ. Disciples do what the master does. That's what being a disciple is all about – it is learning the ways of the master so well, learning the thoughts of the master so well, learning the mindset of the master so well, that you then do, think and live like the master.
- How well are you living like Jesus? After accepting Jesus as your Lord through confession, belief and repentance, the very first step that Jesus wants is for us to do what he did – to be baptized.
 - Mark 16:16 records some of Jesus' last words on earth when he said, "anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved."
- Because Jesus said that and the early believers and disciples took it seriously, you never read of an unbaptized Christian anywhere in the Bible. In fact, baptism immediately followed a person's salvation. They didn't see it as something to be delayed or put off. Let's take a look at some of the conversions described in the Book of Acts.
- We just read Acts 2:38 where Peter instructed the people who wanted to be saved to repent and be baptized. If we were to read to verse 41, we would read that all who believed were baptized – 3,000 in all. Now, that's a big baptism service!
 - Acts 8:26-40 gives us the story of Phillip leading the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. As they finish their discussion, the eunuch enthusiastically asks if he could be baptized, to which Phillip replies "If you believe with all your heart, you may." Then they come to a body of water, and Phillip promptly baptizes him.
 - In Acts 22:16, the first thing the apostle Paul is told to do after his conversion was to be baptized.
 - Time after time, when people believed, confessed and repented, the next step as a disciple is to follow the example of Jesus, the Master, and be baptized. It signified a new identity. Their identity was now one who was a follower of Jesus.
- This point of doing what Jesus did, then leads us to the next point. Baptism unites us with Christ in his death and resurrection. As disciples, we are to be united with Christ in

everything – including his death and resurrection. This uniting starts at repentance. When you are saved, you were spiritually baptized into Christ. Baptism in water is an outward representation of this inward reality.

- In the Bible, water represents an inner cleansing and spiritual rebirth. Both of these are central themes of baptism.
- Water baptism is, in essence, a funeral and a resurrection all together. It is an act of faith in which we testify, both to God and to the world, that the person we were before is dead and buried, and we are raised as a new creation in Christ. Scripture beautifully illustrates this.
 - Romans 6:4 says, “For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.”
 - And, Colossians 2:12 says, “For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.”
 - Just like Christ was buried in the grave, the water symbolizes the grave. And, just like Christ was raised from that grave, when you come up from the water, it symbolizes the resurrection to new life.
 - It is a beautifully powerful symbol because it is more than a symbol. It gives depth to the salvation experience.
- Which is the next point: baptism makes the gift of salvation “real.” Like I said before, it takes it to the next level.
 - Baptism is a very special way of God communicating His love to us. When we receive God’s saving grace, it is no accident that He calls us to identify with Him in a way that makes it real to us. He moves this beyond our head and heart to something we experience with our whole body and all of our senses.
 - For those who have been baptized, maybe you have experienced that feeling when you come up out of the water of being clean. There is something about being obedient in baptism and going through this outward expression, showing all those present that you are Jesus’s, you are saved, you are going to live differently that makes it more real.
- This realness, then, helps you live within the new reality that you are saved. So, maybe you are struggling with guilt over your past. Maybe you can’t seem to let go of something that you know isn’t right for you. Maybe you continue to see yourself as that old sinner who will never get it right.
 - Well, it could just be that you continue with these mindsets because you haven’t yet given the person you once were a proper burial! Water baptism is a very powerful reminder of God’s wonderful grace. The person we were before is dead forever, and we are raised with Jesus as a totally new creation
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us “anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has come.

- It doesn't get more real than putting that old self under the water and rising up new!
- And, when our salvation is real we will work harder to fully bring it to completion which is our next point. Baptism solidifies your commitment.
 - There are many instances that we can look at in Acts of baptism of those who believed and repented and took the next step to gain all of the salvation package.
 - And, if we were to look at each of them we would notice the sense of urgency that is attached to baptism. The disciples never counseled them to wait. The new believers didn't want to wait. Even though there was persecution at that time of Christian believers, they still were eager to do something so very public to show their inward commitment to Christ.
 - They didn't want to hide. They didn't have churches with baptisteries. They found a stream or a lake and were publically baptized. So, all could see their commitment and they were at risk of someone telling the authorities, bringing persecution.
 - Yet, simple faith wasn't enough for them. These people all responded to Jesus in simple faith. However, they didn't see their faith as complete until they had obeyed God by being baptized, regardless of the consequences of that act.
- Why do we struggle with this now or even want to accept a part of salvation, but not complete our faith and keep working out our salvation. We need to keep in mind what James 2:17 tells us that faith without works is dead. Our works are our actions, it is what we do with our faith.
 - A living faith produces an obedient heart and water baptism is to be our first act of obedience.
 - Do you want to know what I think? Well, it's doesn't really matter, because I'm going to tell you anyways. I believe it is the action that trips us up every time. Believing is one thing, but acting on that belief, especially if it goes against the grain or the culture or against what we want or against what is easier is hard stuff. We don't want to draw attention to ourselves. We would rather blend.
 - I want to share a video that a friend of mind posted about how we conform.
- We blend – even Christians. We sit and stand because everyone else is doing it. And, so, there are Christians who say that their faith is personal. They say, “We don't talk religion here. Faith should be kept quiet.”
 - But, if someone is talking about their faith as “religion” or wanting to keep it quiet, they don't really know what a relationship with Jesus is. Jesus never, never, never – not even once – told his disciples to be quiet, to keep things personal, to just believe and not do anything else.
 - Nope, he used action verbs all the time – action verbs like go, tell, proclaim, teach and he said things like if you deny me in front of others, I will deny you.
 - Baptism is an action that reflects your obedience. And, it is mostly certainly going against the actions of most everyone else. It is a way that Jesus wants to see right

up front how serious you are about your commitment. Are you serious enough that you refuse to blend with the actions of others in order to take on the action of Christ?

- If not, then your commitment won't last long. In fact, Christians who do not follow Jesus in water baptism for whatever reason have a much higher rate of returning to their old life (we used to call it backsliding) than those who do. That's because baptism solidifies your commitment and your willingness to obey Jesus, no matter what.
 - After all, if our walk with God didn't begin with the most basic act of obedience, it got off to a faulty foundation in the first place. This will make it more difficult to walk obediently in other areas of our lives.
 - In two weeks, on September 18th, when we do our baptism service, it isn't in our church. We don't have a baptismal pool. It's in a very public place at Tuckertown Pond. There might well be people watching us, there have been before. There might well be people trying to put their boats in the pond where we are at. It might be awkward.
 - Who cares! If we can't stand for Christ before men, we are certainly going to fall! I would rather stand for God and be judged by man than stand for man and be judged by God.

- The final point is that baptism makes us part of something bigger than ourselves – we are part of God's church. There is a reason why we all gather together to watch those and celebrate with those who are following Jesus's command to be baptized. In a very real way, it is a celebration to welcome that person into the family of God.
 - You know, some organizations or fraternities have initiations, the church has baptism. It identifies us as the body of Christ, the church.
 - 1 Corinthians 12:13 states this when it says, "we have all been baptized into one body (which refers to the church) by one Spirit and we share the same Spirit."

- Just like our faith isn't supposed to be personal, it isn't supposed to be individualistic either. We are to be the church, together, as those who are disciples of Jesus, as those who have repented, have turned to God and are baptized.
 - After Peter told the people what to do to be saved, they repented, they were baptized and those two acts added them to the church. As the church, then they grew as followers. They grew in knowledge of Jesus. There was a progression of their faith in Jesus as the church.

- Here at Peace Dale First Church of God, we want to grow people as disciples of Jesus Christ through this life-changing package of salvation. It is what our purpose statement up here is all about. We've been talking a lot during module viewings and during deacon meetings about this and asking questions like, "what does a disciple look like? What should a growing disciple do that shows they are growing?"

- In looking at our purpose statement and the five purposes that every believer should be growing in, we have identified four action steps that put those purposes to action and that determine the growth level of every disciple.
- So, assuming that someone has come to believe in Jesus through faith and by repenting of their sins, we want to see that disciple grow and do four things.
 - First, every disciple should worship together with the body, the church on Sunday.
 - Second, every disciple should be involved in a LIFE Group where there is fellowship and the opportunity to grow more in the knowledge of Christ and His Word.
 - Third, every disciple should serve in some way in the church.
 - Fourth, every disciple should be involved in outreach to proclaim the gospel of Jesus in some way.
- Now, these are progressive. Typically, you don't skip from the first one to the last one overnight. It is a process. Where are you in the process?
 - Baptism starts the process as you are baptized into the body, the church. You then worship together with others who are united with you in that baptism. Corporate worship is so very important because it is the time that we set aside to come together to worship our Savior and to learn together as well.
 - How can we think to stay united if we never come together?
- All you have to do is turn on the news and you will quickly see what Satan's agenda currently is. He isn't very subtle about it, but it sure is working – even among Christians.
 - His current agenda is to divide us. This is always his agenda, but he has really ramped it up now. Divided, we are much, much easier to conquer. He just pits us against one another based on race or sexual orientation or religion or political association. The two big ones right now are race and politics.
 - So then, you even get Christians arguing among themselves about whose side there are on – the police or black folks? Do you support what that NFL player did by sitting during the national anthem to denounce oppression or do you think he is evil and a hypocrite? How can you be a Christian and vote for Clinton? How can you be a Christian and vote for Trump?
- My question is - how can you be a Christian and not be united with those who are also in Christ?? Do we not know that the war is not against one another? It is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers that are doing a really good job tricking us into thinking that we are supposed to fight one another!
 - Baptism is an active reminder that we are involved in something that's bigger than us – it's bigger than the color of skin we were born with, it's bigger than our political leanings, it's bigger than our culture, it's bigger than our doctrines. We are a part of God's Church!!
 - As God's church, united, we must come together to worship him, to grow in the knowledge of him, to encourage each other to grow in him and to be like him. We must come together to be a family, regardless of anything that threatens to divide

us. That was always God's design. Our corporate worship dispels anything that threatens to divide us as we worship in the name of Jesus, united by our faith and baptism.

- So, what's the point? Well, my point is - Have you been baptized? If not and you have confessed that Jesus is Lord and repented of your sins, what are you waiting for? Take the next step and open the package given to you more fully.
 - o Maybe you have been baptized, but you walked away from the Lord for a time and feel like you want to be baptized again. Or, maybe you didn't fully understand baptism the first time – you were young or did it to please someone else. You can get baptized again. It is a way that you, again, state publicly and outwardly that you are a disciple of Christ. It is an encouragement to you and to the church.
 - o Or, maybe you have been baptized, but you haven't fully seen the point of it in your life and now you do. Now, you can live as a disciple who knows what the point is and you can tell others as well.

- Finally, maybe you have been baptized and you got the point. Then, church, we need to gather at the side of Tuckertown Pond in two Sundays and celebrate whoever is getting baptized. It truly is a celebration! It is a celebration that someone gets the point of having a new identity, of being committed fully to Christ, of being a part of the body of Christ, and acting in obedience to him.
 - o And, all of heaven will be rejoicing!