

The Meaning of Water Baptism

by Zac Poonen

This sermon focuses on the significance of baptism, explaining that it symbolizes our unity with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the meaning of baptism and the intention to live a life aligned with Christ, acknowledging that baptism does not signify perfection but forgiveness of sins and a commitment to walk in Christ's ways. The sermon also addresses the age at which a person can be born again and baptized, highlighting the need for understanding and maturity in making these decisions.

Scripture: Romans 6:3, Ephesians 1:4, Colossians 3:1, Romans 14:1, 1 Peter 3:3

Topics: "Baptism", "Unity with Christ"

Description

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Transcript

Now, I want to say a few words about baptism, because I'm going to have a baptism today. Baptism is, first of all, let me say, it's a word that has come from the Greek language baptizo, which only means immersion. It's an ordinary word, which saying the Greeks would say, I baptize my hand in the bucket of water.

What does that mean? I dip my hand fully in the bucket of water. That's all it means. So, it's an immersion, and when we immerse a person in the name of Jesus Christ, you know, Jesus himself was immersed by John the Baptist in the river, went completely underneath, and then came up.

It's a testimony to what was going to happen in his life. He would be dead, buried, and his acceptance of that without resistance, that when John the Baptist was putting Jesus into the water, he didn't fight, he didn't resist it, no. He submitted, symbolizing that when he went to the cross, he would just submit to people crucifying him, burying him, and God would raise him up.

God raised him up. So when we testify in baptism, we're saying, I'm united with Christ. See, God knew you and me from before the foundation of the world.

You read that in Ephesians 1, 4, that we were chosen before Genesis 1, verse 1. It's amazing. God who lives in eternity knew all of us by name and knew us, and that's why he could put me and you into Christ, who came much later into the world. From eternity, he knew our names.

He knew we are going to be his children. He had chosen us, and he put us in Christ so that when Christ died on the cross, I died with him. That's what Romans 6 says.

And when he was buried, I was buried with him. And when he was raised up, I was raised up with him. And when he ascended to heaven, I was ascended to heaven with him.

That's why Colossians 3 says, you're seated with Christ in the heavenly places. So in baptism, I'm testifying to the fact that I was crucified with Christ and I'm buried. I became aware of it only at a certain age.

I became aware of it when I was 19. Some of these young folks have come to know me even better, even earlier, aware that I was placed in Christ. My whole life is buried, and I testified it.

That's the way I want to live. It's not a testimony I'm perfect now. It's not a testimony I've become like Christ, but it is a testimony that I want to live like Christ.

There's a difference between saying, I'm living like Christ, and I want to live like Christ. The day you're born again, there may be a thousand areas where you don't have light on unchristlikeness in your life, but you say, I want to live like Christ. I've finished with my old way of life.

It doesn't mean I'm perfect. It just means like I got into the kindergarten. You ask a child who's finally got admission to a school, desperately wanted to be in that school and got admission in the kindergarten.

And you ask that child, do you know multiplication, division? No, no, no, I don't know anything. I still don't know how to spell bat or cat. No, it's just join the kindergarten.

So that is, I'm testifying in baptism, I've entered the school. It's important for all who are baptized, especially young people who are baptized. Other people think you must be perfect.

I've heard of stupid parents who sometimes have told in India, a child who got baptized, hey, you got baptized, why are you behaving like this? Those are foolish parents who talk like that. They themselves are not perfect. And they expect their child to be perfect.

Baptism is not a testimony I'm perfect. Baptism is only a testimony. My sins are forgiven.

Christ, I am identified with Christ now. And I'm walking another way now. I'm seeking to be like Christ.

That's all. So then the other question is, at what age can a person be born again? At what age can a person be baptized? There can be a lot of controversy on this. And the Bible doesn't tell us anything.

There's not a verse in the New Testament that tells us at what age a person can be born again. I remember meeting a missionary lady in India who was the age of 80, I think 83 or 85, told me, Brother Zach, when I was three years old, I got converted. And when I was five years old, I heard a missionary

from China come to my country and preach about China.

And I felt a call in my heart to go there. Five years old. And seeing her life now at the age of 85, one of the saintliest women I met, missionaries I met, she did go to Japan and China to preach the gospel.

I said, I can believe that. She proved it by her life that God can convert a person when he's three years old. So I'm not here to decide at what age a person can be converted.

The Bible doesn't tell me. But when it comes to baptism, I would say there should be some measure of understanding in that child of what it means. That's all I require.

Don't go ignorant of what it means. But a child who's very sharp in school, in mathematics and science and all that, I'm sure they can understand what the meaning of baptism is. So we don't dictate an age in the church saying at this age only you must baptize people.

I leave it to the parents. I leave it to the elders of the church to decide whether this child, this young boy or young girl, is mature enough to understand the meaning of baptism. And they can be baptized.

Now, I don't go into an argument with people who disagree with me on that. Romans 14 is one of my favorite chapters on that subject. Romans 14, it says that one person believes this way and one person believes that way.

One person, verse 2, Romans 14, 2. One person believes he can eat vegetables and meat. Another person says, no, I can eat only vegetables. You should not eat meat because God did not allow Adam and all to eat meat.

Yeah, it's true. He did not allow the eating of meat till Noah's time. But the one who eats meat should not regard with contempt.

Look at this fellow. He doesn't have a light on eating meat. No, don't regard him with contempt.

And the one who does not eat meat should not judge the one who's eating. It's a very, Romans 14 is a very important chapter in building the body of Christ. Romans 12 speaks about building the body of Christ and goes on to submitting to authorities in chapter 13 and bearing with one another in Romans 14.

For example, the Sabbath. One person says you must keep the Sabbath. Verse 5, one person regards one day above another.

Saturday is a special day or Sunday is a special day. Another person says, hey, all days are the same. Verse 6, one person observes the days, observes the Lord.

And the one who doesn't do so is also gives thanks to God. Same way with eating. And so the main thing in that chapter is don't judge.

Verse 10, why do you judge your brother? Why do you regard your brother with contempt? Because he doesn't do things your way. See, for example, my wife and I always had a conviction right from the beginning that we should not wear any gold. We got that from 1 Peter chapter 3. So we don't even have a wedding ring.

But I can honestly say before God that I have never looked down on somebody who wears wedding rings or wear gold ornaments or any such thing. This is my conviction. That is their conviction.

But I've seen people who take off ornaments and then they look down on everybody else who wears it. I think they are committing a bigger sin than the people who wear the ornaments. It's so important for us.

Romans 14 is a very important chapter in building the body of Christ. Now it may not be ornaments. It may be some other thing where you have a certain conviction on something and you view someone with contempt.

Now if you are a father, you can establish a law for your family, but not for other families. If you're an elder in a church, you can teach that in the church how things are to be done. But we are not to regard anybody with contempt.

I'm not saying you shouldn't preach the standard of God's word. I would preach the standard of God's word anywhere, but I will not tell other people who've got some other convictions on that. They can do what they like in that area.

So this is very important in the area of baptism. There are some churches that say you must be at least 17 years old. Okay, I don't despise them.

But don't make it a law. There's no scripture which says that. It's very important.

And sometimes I mention this because in the back of our mind we can say, why in the world is this chap getting baptized? He's so young. And the other mistake you can make is that because some young person gets baptized, you want your child also who's young, that age, to get baptized. But your child may not be ready.

Your child may not be ready for another five years. So don't get into competition. Because I'll tell you, I saw this happen in Bangalore.

Some young person got baptized, and his friends said, hey, they went to their dad and mom and said, hey, I also want to get baptized. And they were not ready. But we were good friends.

And it looked as if the parents also supported them foolishly. But it looked as if my child is unspiritual. His colleague got baptized, so let him also get baptized.

And where are those young people today? Drifted away from the Lord. They're not following the Lord at all. I don't believe they should have been baptized at that age.

I can think of a number of cases like that. So this is not an area where we are competing with one another. This is not an area where we are just imitating one another.

Respect those who have a conviction, and don't say that you must therefore baptize your child also at that age. I just give that as a warning. Baptism means my identification with Christ is not perfect.

I want to die to living for the world and for myself. And I want to live for the Lord. Amen.

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