

What Does Baptism Mean?

Making the gospel visible



What Is The Meaning Of Baptism?

Baptism is an outward sign of the inward experience of new birth. It represents the realization that a miracle has taken place. It means you can say: "I once was blind but now I see...I once was lost but now I'm found...I once was dead but now I'm alive—ALL BECAUSE OF JESUS. Going under the water symbolizes our connection with Jesus in his death and burial—the end of our old life. Our rising from the water signifies our union with Christ in his glorious resurrection—the old me has passed away, behold all things have been made new (2 Corinthians 5). Baptism makes the gospel visible- serving as a visible testimony of our faith in Jesus' saving work for us in his death and resurrection.

Baptism is also a public profession of faith—demonstrating our admission to the world that we are a sinner, guilty before God and without hope of making ourselves acceptable or righteous in God's sight. Baptism is the exclamation point at the end of the sentence "I am no longer defined by the sins of my past, or the sins of others against me, or of my besetting sins in the present, or of my struggles with sin in the future! My hope of standing righteous before God *lives*—not because I am not a sinner, but because I am a sinner for whom Christ died and rose again. "Jesus commands my destiny" as the old hymn says! The cross has the last word. In other words, because Jesus received the penalty for our sins in his death we now know we have been saved from God's judgment in the future. Flowing from the good news of our justification (righteous standing before God and forgiveness of sins through the

grace of God in Christ) flows the good news of our sanctification (Jesus died to sin so we can put sin to death). There can be no acceptance of Jesus' salvation without a previous forsaking of sin (repentance/renouncing our sinful ways) and an unqualified commitment to follow Christ as Lord (Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:23-27; John 12:24-26; Luke 14; Matthew 13:44). This document emphasizes the gracious gift of the new heart to encourage Jesus' sheep to lean into their deepest desire to honor Him by recognizing that their every impulse to do good comes from God's gift of a new heart. Without this supernatural enablement from the Holy Spirit we cannot love the Creator more than his creation (Jeremiah 2:11-13, Romans 1:18ff; Ephesians 4:16-22).

Baptism is a statement of faith. It means you can say: "Even though I am still plagued at times by doubts, insecurities and shame-- I refuse to be controlled by these fears any longer. I am defined by Christ and Christ alone! I am defined by what Jesus says about me and Jesus's resurrection is the receipt that God has accepted Jesus' death in my place for my sins. The law condemns me no longer! I have been legally adopted into the family of God. I have a new identity, a new heart, a new purpose, a new potential through my union with Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus identified with us in our brokenness though he was righteous (2 Corinthians 8:9; Matthew 3:15). Now we get to despise the shame of identifying with him that refuses to acknowledge the victory of God's kingdom over Satan in Jesus (Genesis 3:15; Hebrews 12:1-2) and declare to a watching world that we belong wholly and unreservedly to Jesus! He is our Lord and Savior and now we get to explore our new life of freedom in Him (Matthew 6:33; Matthew 6:9ff; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; Acts 1:1-4, 28:23-31).

What is the connection between the new birth and baptism?

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." **John 3:5-8.**

"I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God." **Ezekiel 36:24-28**

"I think this is the passage that gives rise to Jesus words "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." To whom does God say, "You shall be my people, and I will be your God" (v. 28)? Answer: To the ones to whom he says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses" (v. 25); and verse 26: To the ones to whom he says, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you." **In other words, the ones who will "enter the kingdom" are those who have a newness that involves a cleansing of the old and a creation of the new.**

So I conclude that "water and Spirit" in Ezekiel 36 refer to two aspects of our newness when we are born again. And the reason both are important is this: When we say that a new spirit (or a new heart) is

given to us, we don't mean that we cease to be the human being—the morally accountable self—that we have always been. I was the individual human being John Piper before I was born again, and I have been the individual human being John Piper since I was born again. **There is a continuity. That's why there has to be cleansing. If the old human being, John Piper, were completely obliterated, the whole concept of forgiveness and cleansing would be irrelevant. There would be nothing left over from the past to forgive or cleanse.**

We know that the Bible tells us that our old self was crucified (Romans 6:6), and that we have died with Christ (Colossians 3:3), and that we are to "consider ourselves dead" (Romans 6:11), and "put off the old self" (Ephesians 4:22). But none of that means the same human being is not in view throughout life. It means that there was an old nature, and old character, or principle, or bent that needs to be done away with.

So **the way to think about your new heart, new spirit, new nature is that it is still you and so it needs to be forgiven and cleansed—that's the point of the reference to water. My guilt must be washed away. Cleansing with water is a picture of that.** Jeremiah 33:8 puts it like this: "I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me." So the person that we are—that continues to exist—must be forgiven, and the guilt washed away.

The Need To Be New

But forgiveness and cleansing are not enough. I need to be new. I need to be transformed. I need life. I need a new way of seeing and thinking and valuing. That's why Ezekiel speaks of a new heart and a new spirit in verses 26-27: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

Here's the way I understand those verses: To be sure, the heart that was unfeeling and unresponsive to spiritual reality—the heart you had before the new birth-- It could respond with passion and desire to lots of things. But it was stone toward the spiritual truth and beauty of Jesus Christ and the glory of God and the path of holiness. That is what has to change if we are to see the kingdom of God.

So in the new birth, God takes out the heart of stone and puts in a heart of flesh. **The word flesh** doesn't mean "merely human" as it does in John 3:6 ("that which is born of the flesh is flesh"). It **means soft and living and responsive and feeling, instead of being lifeless stone.** In the new birth, our dead, stony boredom with Christ is replaced by a heart that senses the worth of Jesus.

Then when Ezekiel says in verses 26-27, "A new spirit I will put within you...And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes," I think he means that in the new birth, God puts a living, supernatural, spiritual life in our heart, and that new life—that new spirit—is the working of the Holy Spirit himself giving shape and character to our new heart.

The picture I have in my mind is that this new warm, touchable, responsive, living heart is like a soft lump of clay, and the Holy Spirit presses himself up into it and gives spiritual, moral shape to it according to his own shape. By being himself within us, our heart and mind take on his character—his spirit (cf. Ephesians 4:23).

Receive Him As Your Treasure

So now let's step back and sum up what we've said so far. **What happens in the new birth?** *In the new birth, the Holy Spirit supernaturally gives us new spiritual life by connecting us to Jesus Christ through faith. Or, to say it another way, the Spirit unites us to Christ where there is cleansing for our sins (pictured by water), and he replaces our hard, unresponsive heart with a soft heart that treasures Jesus above all things and is being transformed by the presence of the Spirit into the kind of heart that loves to do the will of God (Ezekiel 36:27).*

If your heart is drawn to the truth and beauty of Christ, receive him as your life. John holds out this amazing promise: "To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

WHAT NOW YOU MAY ASK?¹

Whatever God does to you, he intends to do through you, that's how it works. And when he gives you a new name it's to say this is now who you are, this is what I will do through you. So let's look at our baptismal identity.

BAPTIZED INTO THE NAME OF THE FATHER

We've been baptized into the name of the Father -- God is Father. What has he done? Well let's make sure we don't miss this: what were we apart from Jesus? The Bible is very clear: we were sons of the devil; we did what our father did; we were just like him. We were children of wrath ... by nature. We were not children of God -- we were enemies of God.

But God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ. He sent his Son to die for us, and in his death he has made us, by faith, the very children of God.

We are family. We are the family of God. And if you are the children of God, dearly loved by God when you were enemies, what do you do? If you are beloved, if you are children of God, what do you do? The Scriptures say if you are his beloved, you will love one another. This is how they'll know you're my disciples, Jesus says in John 13:34 and 35. This is how they'll know your my disciples: by your love for one another. 1 John 4 says, 'If you know God, who is love, you will love your brothers. If you fail to love one another, it's because you do not know God, who is love.' So if you know God has loved you, you will love others. And you'll love them like family.

BAPTIZED INTO THE NAME OF THE SON

We've also been baptized into the name of the Son. And in Matthew's gospel, the Son is the king; he's the one who has all authority in heaven and earth. If you understand what that means, we know that the Son did not come to be served but to serve. And give his life.

I love this about Jesus: you think about how he could have showed up -- the King of all the Kings, the means by which all things came into existence, the Creator of the world, the Creator of the universes -- and what does he do? You know, most kings show up and there's fanfare and there's glory, there's purple gowns, there's horses, there's chariots, there's armies, there's everything. And what does Jesus do? Jesus shows up in the form of a little baby born into a feeding trough. The only ones that notice him are a bunch of shepherds that the angels encouraged to go check him out. *The king of the universe*

¹ This section comes from a training by Jeff Vanderstelt entitled Gospel Identity

moves into the neighborhood and nobody notices. Why is that? Jesus came in humility because that is the way we are suppose to live before God and man -- as humble servants.

So Jesus comes as the most humble of them all. Of all the ones who should be served it's Jesus, and instead he doesn't come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

And then, here's what's amazing: Jesus moves in the neighborhood and no one takes notice for 30 years. So for 30 years, he's just doing the normal stuff.

Think about this: if there's anybody who can understand our existence – it's Jesus. He comes in and he does work: just normal everyday work. He's not a paid pastor. He doesn't go to the greatest schools for rabbinical thought so he can be lifted up high amongst everyone else. He is a carpenter born into a poor family into a small little hick town. And what does he do? He lives a humble existence for all of those years. He learns what it's like to be a human submitted to God in everything. The Bible even says 'He learned.' That's a crazy idea.

Can you imagine being the Creator of the universe and the angels are up there in heaven and they're going: 'You're not really going to do this are you? You're going to become a little baby and people are going to have to wipe your butt, and you're going to have to learn to control your bowels, and you're going to have to learn a language, you're going to have to learn thought, and you're going to have to learn theology, and you're going to have to learn all of these things -- why would you do that? Why would you submit yourself to that kind of life? *You know everything! You are the Author and Perfector of faith -- you are it. Why would you humble yourself like that?*'

I can just imagine the conversation: "I must because they won't. They won't help themselves so someone must. So I will go and humble myself and be for them what they can't be. I will be the humble servant that they were called to be underneath me, and instead, I will put myself underneath them so that ultimately they can become what they were always intended to be -- servants of all.

And so Jesus comes. And I love it, because most of the kings of the world, when they show up, they're like: I need land. In order to get land I need to get armies because I need to go take the land. But I can't get armies without money so I need to get some rich people. In order to get rich people I've got to get some wise people in order to convince them I've got something going on up here so they'll convince them to give me money so I can get armies so I can get land. And once we get land, we'll just take everybody and make them our slaves and then we'll have a kingdom.

And what does Jesus do: He shows up and he says, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit for they will inherit the kingdom (Matthew 5:3).' Jesus doesn't say I need you to give me what you've got -- he comes in and says you need me to give you what I've got.

You don't have land; I'm going to go prepare a place for you. *You're poor; I'm rich. I'll become poor so that in my poverty you can become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).* You're entrapped in sin; you're slaves to it. So you know what I'll do? I'll go to prison in the chains of sin and death so that you can be set free from sin and death. I will give you what you don't have so you can live a way that you never could have without me. I'm going to give you a new world; I'm going to give you a kingdom. And my kingdom will be your kingdom.

I'm going to come and I don't need wisdom to convince a bunch of rich people to get me armies: I am the wisdom of God, and you can have me in you.

I love it when James says: 'Any of you who lacks wisdom, let him ask of God and he'll give it to you abundantly.'

Don't you understand? Our King is giving us everything for free! It's incredible. And it's really not free is it -- because it cost him his life. It came with the most costly price tag: the life of Jesus. For us. And therefore, God highly exalted him, Philippians 2 says, and gave him a name that's above every name.

WE ARE SERVANTS SENT TO LOVE THE LEAST OF THESE

Paul says, 'Have this mind which was in Christ Jesus'; *it's your mind, you can have it.* You can be servants too. Just as he came and served you, you are now servants of the King. Paul refers to himself and says, 'we are servants of Christ.' Well, what is he saying? *Not only are we the family of God, but we are servants sent to serve the least of these. Just like Jesus served us.*

It's interesting that Jesus, when he talks about the parables of these end times, one of the parables he gives is of this king who is on his throne and the Son of man is sitting on his throne and he's going to divide people to the right and to the left like the sheep and the goats and he's going to say to the sheep, 'When I was naked you clothed me, when I was hungry you fed me, when I was thirsty you gave me drink, when I was in prison you visited me,' and they're going to go -- what? And it says the righteous say then, 'When did we see you like this and do this to you?' And *I love it that it says 'The righteous say' because what is it saying? The people of God are the ones that did it. They're identity led to their behavior.* The righteous will say, 'When did we see you hungry and feed you and thirsty and give you drink and in prison and visit you...' and such and so on.

And Jesus says, 'Whatever you've done to the least of these you did unto me.' Enter into my Father's kingdom.

And he turns to the goats and he says, 'When I was hungry and thirsty and naked and sick and in prison you didn't feed me, you didn't give me drink, you didn't clothe me, you didn't visit me, you didn't do anything to me.' 'When did we not do that?!' He said, 'Whatever you did not do unto the least of these, you did not do unto me.'

Here's what Jesus is trying to get across: in an earlier passage he says, 'Depart from me -- I never knew you.' *What he's saying is if you knew that I was the king who came and served you when you were the least of these, you would serve others,* but you don't do it because you don't know me. Because if you knew me you'd know that you were naked and I clothed you with my righteousness. You were sick with the disease of sin and I went to the cross and I was made sin so that you could be set free from its destructive power over your life. And you were imprisoned to the chains of sin and death and I took them on myself so that you could be set free. And you were hungry and I fed you with my very body; I am the bread of life... come to satisfy the longings of your soul. I died so that you could be satisfied. You didn't have anything! And I died so you could have everything! And if you know that and if you experience that and if you know that you were the least of these and I did this unto you, then you will do it unto others as a way of doing it unto me. And whatever you've done unto the least of these you've done unto me. This is your act of worship

PICTURES OF RESTORATION

Do you hear what Jesus is saying? Our faith in who he is and what he has done will change what we do. And so we serve the least of these. I want to encourage you in your MC: *love people like family, but serve the least of these, and especially do it in such a way that they get to experience the King... coming and reigning in their world.*

I want to encourage you. Maybe you've got some people that God is saying to love them like family but give them a taste of the kingdom of God. *Give them a tangible expression of his rule and reign with your real hands and your real feet because we are the body of Christ.* The rule and reign of Christ gets to break in to the world and people get to experience what's it like to have Him be in charge.

That's what we are as an MC that represents Jesus. That's what your baptism is all about. *Your baptism is in the name of the Father* so you're family -- love one another like family. *You were baptized in the Son.* He's your king who served you so you could serve others like He served you. Bring his reign and rule to the world and that reign and rule is a servant reign and rule: the greatest in that kingdom are the least. The highest places in the kingdom are the ones who are willing to put themselves below and serve others. That's what our King did.

BAPTIZED INTO THE NAME OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

And then lastly: we are baptized into the name of the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? Jesus says in John 20:21 that 'As the Father has sent me so I send you' and then he breathes on them and says 'receive the Holy Spirit.'

In Acts 1:8, Jesus says 'Wait for power from on high, and when you receive it [he's referring to the Holy Spirit], you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth. To Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the outer most parts of the world.'

And so just as Jesus was sent by the Spirit, we are now sent by the Spirit as his missionary people. We are missionaries sent to proclaim Jesus. We are his witnesses.

Here's what's really amazing: if you have the Spirit of God in you, you have everything that Jesus had to do what Jesus did. Isn't that incredible?

Ever been with a group of people where they come back after God used them to proclaim Jesus and they're trying to explain what happened. 'I got to tell you what happened. It was, like, amazing. We got into this discussion and first it started like this and then it went to that, and then... well man, you had to be there. I can't even reproduce it.' I know because it wasn't you -- it was the Spirit.

Jesus said you'd be given the ability to have words to speak by his Spirit. The early church in Acts 4, it's recorded that they prayed: 'Would you help us to speak boldly so that we can proclaim Jesus?' And when they asked for that, the Holy Spirit fell on them and the house shook. And they went out and proclaimed Jesus boldly with signs and wonders accompanying it. It's powerful.

We have that same Spirit. When you've been baptized into the name of the Spirit, what that means is, you are in-dwelt with the very presence of Jesus. The same power that raised him from the dead. His Spirit is now in you. And you can preach like he preached. You can do miracles like he did miracles. *You*

can be a picture of the kingdom not just in how you serve, but how you display the power of God changing things with your words. You can speak and people get saved. I mean, think about that.

You can proclaim the good news of Jesus and the Spirit of God can be at work in that moment and bring regeneration. They can be changed in a moment! That's a miracle. And you get to be a part of that.

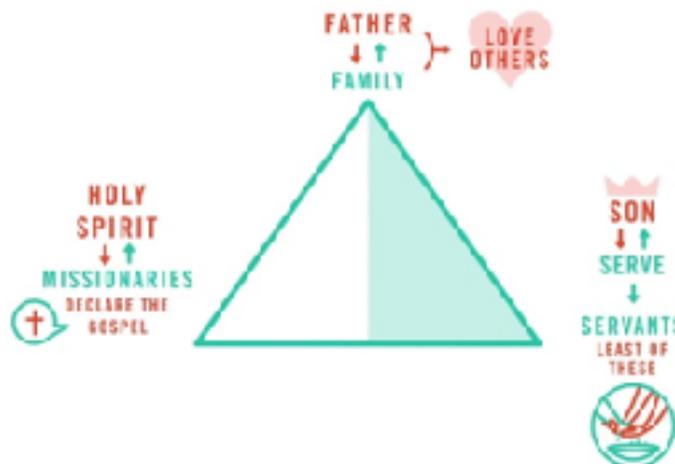
See, I want to tell you: if you're establishing an MC to be that kind of people, don't start with what they've got to do because here's the mistake a lot of people make -- they make missional community life just a big to-do list. *Don't make it a big to-do list. Make it an identity life.* Establish them in their baptismal identity in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then say because this is who you are and this is what he's done do you, this is how we live. And when you live this way it's not you living it -- it's Jesus living it through you because He's the one who loves through you, He's the one who serves, He's the one who speaks.

So I want to encourage you as an MC to ask: Who might we love as family? Who might we serve like Jesus served us? And how are we going to prepare to tell them about Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit?

QUESTIONS

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be a sinner without hope of acceptance from God in this life or the next apart from faith in Jesus Christ?
2. Do you affirm your lifelong commitment to turn from sin to trust in and follow Jesus as your Savior, Lord, and ultimate treasure?
3. Do you affirm your willingness to pay the price of following Jesus no matter what the cost by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit? [examples include rejection, persecution, and death].
4. Do you affirm your commitment to find and submit to a Bible-teaching church wherever you go as a disciple who has been called with a heavenly calling to image God's character and advance God's mission in the world?

5. Do you affirm identity and the with it to love serve the least himself and demonstrate wherever you the Holy Spirit the nations



your new baptismal calling that comes others like family, of these like Jesus declare and the gospel go by the power o for God's glory and good?

