

Baptized into Christ Jesus

Romans 6:3-11

Easter Sunday

April 16, 2017

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—

⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:3-11 (NIV)

He is risen! He is risen indeed! This morning we celebrate Easter, the culmination of God's plan that he set into place to save the world from its sin even before He created the world. God knew the sin in every human being, a result of the free will that He has given all of us, even before every single one of us was born.

David wrote in Psalm 139:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb...My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body...Before a word is even on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.

God knew what each of us was going to be like before we were even born. And He knew it wasn't going to be good. Yes, we are told at the very beginning that God created us human beings, both male and female in His image. He started with Adam & Eve, created in His image, but given free will, with one command:

"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Genesis 2:16-17 (NIV)

Enter sin and the fall. Ever since, all mankind, men and women, have been born with both the image of God within us and the sin nature. And without any divine intervention from God, the sin nature will always win out. Perhaps on occasions, that which is the image of God within us wins out, but overall the sin nature wins. Without intervention from God, we might win some battles, but we will always lose the war.

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 3 that all people are alike and under sin:

*There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands,
No one who seeks God [on their own]. All have turned away, they have together become
worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.* Romans 3:10-12 (NIV)

That seems to be pretty explicit. Paul was not known for beating around the bush. That is our human condition without any intervention from God. That's the bad news! The Good News is that God does intervene.

He begins by calling a people to be His. There was nothing that qualified them to be His people other than God choosing them. God says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exodus 33:19). Think about that for a moment. God could have called the Egyptians just as easily as he called the Israelites. But he chose the Israelites and he starts with Abram, who would become Abraham. He says,

*"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will
curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* Genesis 12:2-3 (NIV)

God chooses them to follow, by faith in Him. He made a covenant with Abram, "*Do not be afraid Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.*" This was all before the Ten Commandments and the law. Then God gave the Israelites the law, laying down for them how he wanted them to live. It has never been about keeping the law perfectly or earning our way to salvation. We humans have proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that we cannot live God's law perfectly. The entire Old Testament is the story about God's people trying to live their lives under God's law perfectly, but failing and falling, picking themselves up and starting over again. The Old Testament ends in human futility. We can try and try all we want, we just can't get there. We can't earn our salvation.

God was not surprised by any of this. He knew it from before He even created the earth and everything in it, including human beings. God knew Jesus was coming to earth even before He created the earth.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He
was with God in the beginning.* John 1:1-2 (NIV)

So Jesus is sent to earth, in human form, through the birth of a virgin pledged to be married, all prophesied hundreds of years earlier. These words from the Priest, Zechariah, whose own son, John the Baptist, was chosen to prepare the way for Jesus:

*"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.
⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
⁷¹ salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—*

⁷² *to show mercy to our ancestors*
and to remember his holy covenant,
⁷³ *the oath he swore to our father Abraham:*
⁷⁴ *to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,*
and to enable us to serve him without fear
⁷⁵ *in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*
⁷⁶ *And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;*
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
⁷⁷ *to give his people the knowledge of salvation*
through the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸ *because of the tender mercy of our God,*
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
⁷⁹ *to shine on those living in darkness*
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.” Luke 1:68-79 (NIV)

That, otherwise known as Zechariah’s Song, is not only a Christmas or Advent song, it is also an Easter Song.

The Old Testament ends, with God’s chosen people at that time, the Israelites, waiting for the promised Messiah. Then we have Jesus who is born in Bethlehem but for thirty years he mostly flies under the radar. Then we have John the Baptist, the one who God sent to prepare the way for the Messiah, appear on the scene saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near . . . I baptize you with water for repentance but after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:2,11).

Finally, Jesus himself shows up on the scene and has John baptize him and as he’s coming up out of the water, heaven is torn open, the Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove, and God basically declares Him to be the one whom He had promised:

“You are my Son whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Mark 1:11

Then Jesus is sent out into the desert where he is tempted by Satan and then he begins his ministry proclaiming the good news of God:

“The time has come, the kingdom of God is near, repent and believe the good news!”
 Mark 1:15

The Good News that Jesus was ushering in is that God’s promise of redemption, still only available by faith, was now available to not only the Jewish people, but to all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, best captured in Jesus’ words from John 3:16:

“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.”
 John 3:16

Those most famous words from the Bible for Christians were initially given to the Pharisee Nicodemus who came to Jesus at night and Jesus said to him:

“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he or she is born again, born of water and the Spirit.”

On Friday Jesus fulfilled God’s plan for Him and He gave his life on the cross for the forgiveness of all mankind’s sins, for all who repent and put their faith in Him. Though Jesus had risen, and he started appearing to His closest disciples that first Easter Sunday, most of them wouldn’t really get it until the sending of the promised Holy Spirit on the first day of Pentecost. That was really the “aha moment” for Jesus’ first disciples.

It says in the Book of Acts that “they were cut to the heart,” and asked “what should we do?” Peter, the representative disciple, 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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call...Those who accepted his message were baptized.”

For 2,000 years the church has debated and even fought over when and how a Christian should be baptized with water, but ultimately baptism is something that God does through the Holy Spirit.

All those who repent of their own sinfulness, acknowledge it and agree to try and turn from it, and put their faith in Jesus Christ as the only source of their salvation, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and are “baptized into Christ.” Baptism in water, no matter how it is done, is a sign that baptism by the Spirit has already taken place.

What does it mean to be “baptized into Christ?” Our Scripture passage for today, Easter Sunday, tells us. The apostle Paul is really expounding on what Jesus meant when he said “you must be born again.”

To be “born again” or to be “baptized into or with Christ,” and those two prepositions “into” and “with” are found no fewer than ten times in those eight short verses, to be “baptized into or with Christ” involves three very important elements:

1. Upon baptism, Christians are baptized into Jesus’ death. Paul says, “united with him in a death like his.” What death are we being baptized into here? The life here in earth as we know it before we come to Christ. Death to ourselves. The passage we looked at last week as we were closing out our series on discipleship:

“Jesus said to them all, ‘whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever want to save their life [here on earth] must lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.” Luke 9:23-24 (NIV)

The death that we are being baptized into is the death of our sinful nature, or at least being controlled by our sinful nature. A few verses later in Romans 6 Paul writes:

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 6:11-14 (NIV)

If we are “baptized into Christ” sin should no longer have mastery over us. “Baptized into Christ’s death” also means that we are no longer under the law but we are under grace. We have died to the law!!!

If we are “baptized into Christ” we die to ourselves, we die to sin, we die to the law, and we even die to death.

2. The second thing that we are “baptized into” when we are “baptized into Christ Jesus” is that we are “baptized into the resurrection.”

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

Romans 6:5 (NIV)

That is our ultimate hope and God’s ultimate promise for those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus –

“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.” John 3:16

3. The third thing that happens when Christians are “baptized into Christ Jesus” is that we can walk in the newness of life right here and now.

Not only do we die in baptism. Not only do we come alive in the resurrected life to come in baptism. That new life emerges now! “We who have been baptized in Christ should no longer be slaves to sin, we have been set free from sin.” Our true lives which are already bound to the risen Christ in the eternal life to come are empowered through the Holy Spirit to live that new life now. A little further ahead, in Romans 6:16-18, Paul says we now live for righteousness and holiness. In fact we become “slaves of righteousness.”

Because Jesus Christ’s death to sin on the cross was “once for all,” and we share his death through baptism, we now can cease “living in sin,” that is in its deadly power. That is why Paul can say, “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus,” and it’s nothing that we can do on our own. That is really the Good News! Through God’s sovereignty, mercy and grace we have been freed from one master and claimed by another. Sin is no longer lord because Jesus is Lord. Baptism in Christ forever links our dying, our rising, and our living to Jesus.

We do not die alone and we do not rise alone. It is all by the grace of God through Jesus, for His glory, honor and praise, because He paid it all!!!

