

**Baptism Promise of the Holy Spirit (Immersed in Jesus)
Colossians 2:9-15, Acts 8:26-39**

Brothers and sisters, back in 2010 or 2011 my sister was getting married and my daughter was going to be a Jr. Bridesmaid at her wedding. Very exciting! So, after a few months of eager anticipation, we packed up and set out to the airport to fly out to Minneapolis to go to the wedding.

However, as we were checking in our baggage and confirming our tickets – the attendant behind the counter told us that our daughter’s passport had expired.

That was it, we couldn’t go – without a valid passport she couldn’t travel and enter into the U.S. - we had to turn back...

Brothers and sisters, as we are all aware, passports are important documents. They confirm that we are who we say we are; they prove that we have citizenship from a particular country; they allow us to gain access to certain rights and privileges – like the right to simply show up at an airport and board a plane to travel and enter the United States.

But, the story does have a happy ending – expensive, after we paid to have a passport renewal expedited and purchased new plane tickets...but happy, nonetheless.

And I learned a valuable lesson that I need to make sure I pay attention to our passports and not just take them for granted – which is why it was really surprising that only a year or so later I found myself stranded down in Uruguay, South America with an expired Canadian passport – but that’s a story for another time 😊

Now brothers and sisters, Baptism is very similar to a passport, it confirms who we say we are, proves that we have citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven and gives us certain rights and privileges – and it’s also very easy to forget about it and take it for granted.

So this morning – as we have administered the sacrament of Baptism I want to do some in-depth teaching on it, and look specially at what the bible teaches us about it so that we grow

in our understanding of it, have our faith nurtured through it, and live our everyday lives out of it.

So where do we start looking to discover what the bible has to say about Baptism? Well - some people might suggest Matt 28:19 where Jesus says *“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 others might say that Jesus himself was baptized - in Mat 3:16 – that would be a good place to start, since we’re supposed to be like Jesus... right??

And there would be other who would just say “let’s just look up all the instances of the word baptism in the bible” and punch that in to their Bible app and look at whatever scripture passages come up.

But brothers and sisters, as well intentioned as these approaches might be – they are not the right way to go about understanding what the bible teaches about baptism.

You see the bible is a complete story – it’s not just sixty-six individual books with their chapters and verses that we can just cherry-pick for footnote references. To understand baptism we must look at it in the context of the overall Covenant framework of the bible.

Now we’ve done lots of teaching on the Covenant and the various administrations that were put in place throughout history – and I’m not going to go into all the details about that this morning – maybe in the coming year I’ll review that Christ of the Covenant series again since it been a while...

But this morning as we trace the development of why the sacrament of Baptism came about, we’re going to start back in Genesis chapter 3 where the pivotal event that changes the course of the world occurs.

Adam and Eve rebel against God and the rest, as they say...is history.

Now- one of the most significant consequences of Adam and Eve's rebellion and breaking of the original Covenant of Creation was that it alienated them from God.

The faithful covenant relationship between God as the creator and ruler over the creation and human beings made in His image as his obedient representatives on earth was broken

Humanity would rule over and develop the earth as intended but they would do so without the benefit and guidance of a close, intimate covenant relationship with their Creator – and they would do so while being warped and twisted by Sin.

And over the history of the world, we've seen the sickness, disease, violence, destruction and sorrow that this has caused.

But this was not ok with God – He wasn't about to give up on what He had originally intended for His creation, for us. So that meant He wasn't going to wipe everything out and start over again – rather God was going to find a way to redeem it and restore it.

And this is where God instituted what we call the Covenant of Commencement – the beginning of his plan to restore His original Covenant of Creation.

Now the thing about the Covenants is that they always have a sign, a symbol which represents them – think about the Covenant of Preservation with Noah and how God set the rainbow in place as a symbol of that particular covenant.

And for the purposes of understanding baptism we're going to skip ahead from Noah to Abraham, when God had appeared to him and revealed himself and established the Covenant of Promise with Abraham – which defined God's relationship with him.

We read about this in Gen17:6-7 where God says *"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."*

And God gave Abraham a sign to remind him of this covenant relationship and the promises and blessings it contained. In vs.10-11 God says *“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.”*

Why circumcision? Well not for medical reasons brothers and sisters. It was because the foreskin of a man represented a barrier to fertility – and God’s covenant promise to Abraham was all about being fruitful and having many children.

So do you see how the sign fit the promise – as the foreskin was removed so God would remove barriers and enable Abraham, and his descendants, to become a great nation of many people.

This is also why only males received the sign of the covenant, since it was evident that they produced the seed which bore children.

Now we’re going to skip over the trials and the challenges that Abraham endured as he waited for God to make this promise a reality for him, and pick up the story where Abraham’s descendants, as the nation of Israel were delivered from slavery in the land of Egypt so that God could bring them back to the Land that He had promised to Abraham.

And as Moses is leading them back to the Promised Land – God sets up a meeting with the people of Israel and He introduces himself to them at Mt. Sinai.

He reveals himself to them and reminds them of the promise He made to Abraham which He is keeping with them.

And God also expands on and continues that Abrahamic promise by making a covenant with the people of Israel – which defined their relationship with God as His chosen people. Remember God had said *“I will be the God of your descendants.”*

So, God says to the nation of Israel in Ex 19:5 as He begins the Covenant of Law with them *“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.”*

Now brothers and sisters, it’s important to remember that God did not choose Abraham and his descendants to have an exclusive covenant with because he was being arbitrary – no, God had said to Abraham – *“through you **all** nations on earth will be blessed”* and his intention for the nation of Israel was that they would be a light to the other nations around them, and show them the way to the one true God – as part of His plan to eventually renew the original Covenant of Creation.

So - if someone from outside Israel saw the light, if they wanted to have a relationship with the one true God, if they saw how good life could be... living according to God’s law and they desired to become a part of the people of God, they could! – and they were given the sign of circumcision to show they were now included in the covenant and had a real relationship with the true God – Yahweh.

Now the thing about Covenant relationships brothers and sisters is that they go both ways. You have to live up to your end of the relationship – and as a nation Israel showed over and over and over again that she could not.

Right from the start of the Covenant of Law Israel showed her tendencies for being unfaithful and disobedient. Just as Moses was receiving the 10 Commandments from God on Mt. Sinai – Israel was creating golden calves, and worshipping them as idols – praising them as the gods who freed them.

And later on, when they entered the Promised Land, it didn’t take long before they began to worship the gods of the nations around them instead.

So, God sent prophets to call them back to obedience and faithfulness, and for brief periods of time they listened – but as soon as the prophet died, they would go back in their old ways, worshipping false gods and being unfaithful to Yahweh.

Brothers and sisters - I want to pause for a moment in this story here and ask you. Do you know what it's like to be on the receiving end of unfaithfulness?

Have you ever had to put up with something, or someone that never lived up to their promises?

A car that was always breaking down on when you needed it most. A dog that would not obey no matter how much time you spent training them... A friend or a parent who says they will be there when you need them but then isn't... A spouse who doesn't keep their wedding vow to forsake all others....

If you've experienced any of these then you know how much unfaithfulness hurts...and a little bit about how God feels.

But brothers and sisters, let me ask you something else, do you know what it's like to be the one who can't stay faithful?

If you do, then you truly know yourself and the sin we are capable of.

Because no one truly knows themselves until they have owned up to their own sinfulness – their own orientation to be unfaithful to God and to others. And we all need to get to that place where we can admit to God and to others that we are unfaithful to our Creator.

Now to pick up the story again, this is exactly what the nation of Israel was struggling with when Jesus came along. They believed that if they could be good decent law-abiding, covenant keeping people of God – that they could restore the covenant that had been broken and God would restore the all their covenant blessings. But they were unaware of how this self-righteous attempt made them unfaithful and unaware of how sin truly affects us.

You see if had been aware of it, then they would have understood that God had sent Jesus Christ – the promised Messiah - the Word of God made flesh... to be the one who would faithfully keep the covenant in their place because He was perfect.

Jesus Christ was God, and God always keeps his promises. They would have understood that Christ had come to offer his obedient and his life in their place.

You see brothers and sisters, in the ancient world when two parties made a covenant – it was a serious thing, so serious that it was always sealed in blood.

Animals would be taken and cut in half – and the two parties would walk between the halves of the animals to seal the deal – essentially saying, if I am unfaithful in this covenant may it be done to me as to these animals.

So, when Jesus comes to keep the covenant as the Messiah and He offers his life as a sacrifice on the cross, two things are happening simultaneously...

First, Jesus body is broken and his life taken so that the penalty for the broken covenant between Israel and God is fulfilled.

Second, at the same time his body is broken... His blood spilled to renew or make new the covenant which God had made with Abraham so that those promises can be fulfilled on an even greater level.

Remember God had said it would be an everlasting covenant – which means it will continue forever. Through Jesus Christ, God makes this an everlasting covenant because Jesus has been a perfectly faithful human partner and His faithfulness can never be undone. Jesus will never break covenant with God the Father.

So, Jesus Christ secures a permanent relationship between humanity and God which will last forever. God has finally and fundamentally overcome the separation between human beings and himself which resulted from Adam and Eve's rebellion.

And the good news is that this is available to all people – if anyone wants an unbreakable relationship with God, it is available through Jesus Christ!

God's covenant promise to bless all nations – all peoples – through Abraham has been fulfilled by Jesus. What is more blessed than to be able to have a restored relationship with the Creator!?

But if this relationship with God is only available through Jesus Christ – how do we get at it? Friends this is where Baptism comes in, because Baptism literally means “to be immersed”.

So, if we have been baptized we have been fully immersed into Jesus Christ

Baptism is what unites us to Jesus Christ, so that we can get at the benefits and privileges of being included in this new covenant through Jesus. Baptism gives us that unbreakable relationship with God through Jesus.

Now when we hear the term Baptism, it's natural for us to think about water baptism right away– because of the sacrament of baptism which symbolizes actual baptism.

But baptism, or “Immersion” is first and foremost a spiritual reality – a work of the Holy Spirit, who is active in our hearts and minds and actually brings us to faith in Jesus Christ.

So water baptism – or being immersed in water – symbolizes and represents that spiritual reality of being immersed in Jesus which the Holy Spirit is working in our lives. Water Baptism has replaced circumcision and become the new sign of the covenant, of belonging to God's people.

As we read in Colossians 2:11-12 *“In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism...”*

So when water baptism is performed by fully immersing someone under the water – it symbolizes how we have died with Christ to sin, and have been resurrected to new life.

As Colossians 2:12-13 continues *“having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.*

But there are different ways that we administer the sacrament of baptism, right? So, when water baptism is performed by pouring water on someone – it symbolizes how the Holy Spirit has been poured out onto us in order that He may work in our lives.

As we learn in Acts 2:16-18 *“this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.’”*

This is why the sign of the covenant is now also given to women and not just to men. We need to understand there is

a biblical reason for this and not just because times have changed...

And when water baptism is performed by sprinkling water on someone – it symbolizes how we have been pronounced clean from our sins by the blood of Christ – which paid the penalty for the sins of breaking the covenant. This draws from how the assurance of forgiveness was given under the Covenant of Law in by sprinkling the people with the blood from the sacrifice for their sins.

Hebrews 10:22 picks up on this as says *“let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”*

And this is why we only need to be baptized once. Jesus sacrifice was sufficient to pay for all our sins – he does not need to make any extra payments for us. To be rebaptized is to cast doubt on the sufficiency of the blood of Jesus to completely forgive ALL of our sin – past, present and future.

Brothers and sisters, isn't this incredible? That we may have such a sign of our Covenant relationship with God – water baptism.

A sign of the unbreakable covenant which assures us that we fit into the plan which God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has been working for thousands of years so that his original plan for humans and this world can be restored – in the new heavens and the new earth.

Brothers and sisters, you know what else is incredible is that God offers this sign to anyone. All are welcome to become part of God's family through being immersed in Jesus Christ.

Maybe this morning you are hearing about this amazing story the bible tells and you believe, and you want to have that "passport" that sacrament of water Baptism which proves you are indeed a part of God's people so you can belong, so that can be assured you have a place in the new heavens and earth because you are forgiven in Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, if the Holy Spirit is working in your life and immersing you in Christ – then what's stopping you from receiving this sign? Talk to me about and let's get you wet☺

Parents, if you belong to God's people through Jesus Christ – then hear what the Apostle Peter says about the promises contained in Baptism *"this promise is for you and your children"*

You see brothers and sisters, there are many people who think the sacrament of water baptism represents the fact that we've repented of our sins – and so we wait to get water baptism for ourselves or for our children until we're certain that we're **truly** sorry, or we see that they **really** want to make a commitment to following Jesus.

And this is often why we think we need to get baptized again, after we messed up or walked away from Jesus for a period of time.

But the good news brothers and sisters, is that this is not what Baptism is about, not from the bible's perspective.

You see God didn't wait for Abraham to come Him, He revealed himself to Abraham and made covenant with Him before He ever did anything!

And the Holy Spirit doesn't wait for us to decide or feel sorry before He starts working in our life either, before He begins to immerse us in Jesus Christ. Remember Colossians 2:13 says *"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ."*

It's being immersed in Jesus Christ that brings us back to life, leads us to repent of our sins, and trust that we are forgiven from them... It is being immersed in Jesus Christ that prompts our will to make a decision to follow Jesus Christ!

So the sign of the covenant is also for our children because we trust in the Holy Spirit to work in them to bring them to faith, it's not a reflection of their capacity to repent and believe.

So what's stopping you from ensuring that you and your children have a "valid passport" that helps to assure them as they grow up that they belong to God in Jesus, that they can access the privilege of speaking directly to God through Jesus in prayer, that they can receive forgiveness for their sins?

That they have a Covenant relationship with God with all its promises and blessing.

Nothing should stop us – we should say along with the Ethiopian Eunuch, whom we read about in Acts 8:36 this morning... *"look here is water why shouldn't I be baptized!?"*

Brothers and sisters, God's covenant promises are for you, AND for your children – So believe!

Give thanks for the sacrament of Baptism which He gives us to as a sign to assure us that we belong to Him and that His promises are for real. Amen.