

“Sign of Salvation”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 8/25/19

Text 1 Peter 3:18-22, at FBC of Newport, NH

//18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 19 After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— 20 to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.//

—1 Peter 3:18-22 (NIV)

We have a baptism today. What a glorious—and strange—thing is a baptism. We’re used to other significant acts and ceremonies marking important events in life. We celebrate birthdays with flaming cakes and a song with five words in it. We celebrate weddings with a wedding dress, tuxedos, another cake (without flames this time) and a meal. And we understand these things.

But imagine if birthdays or weddings or graduations or whatever, imagine if the central symbolic act was to get yourself immersed in a pool of water. You might get used to it over time. But somewhere along the line, someone would have to ask, Why? What’s with all this water? And getting immersed in it? What’s going on there?

I’m glad you asked.

Let me start right off with the easiest part. “Baptism” is not an english word. Nor is it french or german. It’s greek. It’s taken right out of the New Testament without any translation. If you translated it into english you come right back to the word “immersion.” Baptism simply means “immersion.” I’m not saying this in order to disparage other ways the church has done baptisms without immersion. I’m saying this so we, as baptists, can appreciate the fundamental nature of our way of doing baptism, strange as it may seem to some people. People back in the first century went down into the water, all the way through to immersion.

The greater point, though, is to ask why? Why did they do it? Why is Doris Smith getting baptized, immersed today? Why did I get baptized 46 years ago? Why did many of you get baptized yourselves?

The answer can be put a number of different ways, but they boil down to this: **We get baptized because this is how Jesus told us to confess him as Savior from our sins and declare him as Lord of our lives.**

I don't think any of us would come up with this idea by ourselves out of the blue. "Hey, how about I express my new faith in Jesus by having the pastor dunk me under water during the church service!"

There is, actually, some sense to it, but not the kind we would come by naturally. For that we need some connection to its history.

In Jesus' day the Jews were already using water to ceremonially purify themselves, on a temporary basis, by going down into a pool called a "mikvah". This is why they had pools near the temple in Jerusalem. It was not a bath for removing dirt. It was a ritualized form of cleansing. It starts back in the Torah when God instructs Aaron how he is to ready himself to enter the Holy of Holies (see Leviticus 16:4). And there's an allusion to the Mikvah in Jeremiah 17:13.

*Yahweh, the **hope** of Israel, all who forsake you will be disappointed.
Those who depart from me will be written in the earth,
because they have forsaken Yahweh, the **spring of living waters**.*

The word "hope" here is "mikvah," which can also mean, among other things, gathering together, plenty of water, and pool. A mikvah was best if it was connected with naturally flowing, or living waters.

John the Baptist was also using immersion in the Jordan River. But not for ritual cleansing like the Mikvah. His baptism was a sign of repentance from sin. It didn't cleanse from sin, though. It was symbolic of the person's repentance and readiness for the coming Messiah.

So you have a sign of hope for ritual cleanness and you have a sign of hope for forgiveness.

But then, when Jesus came he brought with him a new meaning for baptism. In the Great Commission to the church Matthew ends his Gospel with this:

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

—Matthew 28:18-20

This is an immersion into God's own name!
And Peter says in our text today

*... and this water **symbolizes baptism that now saves you also**—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you **by the resurrection of Jesus***

—1 Peter 3:21

This is an immersion into the death and resurrection of Christ. It is a sign of our salvation strong enough to be called our salvation by Peter. Like the sign of your wedding ring practically being your marriage. Even if it's not, it's so very close most everyone treats it as if it is.

To get the importance of baptism, it helps to go to Peter's example of how the waters of God's judgment in the flood of Noah's day, was also the instrument of salvation for Noah and his family. Those same waters that brought the wrath of God down upon the earth, lifted up the ark with Noah and his family inside. There will come a day when God's wrath will be poured out again upon the earth. However, there is an Ark. There is a protection for anyone who would enter that Ark.

At the cross of Christ the wrath of God was poured out upon God's own Son, Jesus Christ. And though he died, he lived. His very death secured all the purity and forgiveness anyone could want and need for entering the presence of God. And on the third day he was raised up, never to die again.

But what good does that do us?

It is our salvation. It is our protective Ark of God. It is the difference between being overwhelmed by the judgment of God and being forgiven, cleansed in our conscience and given new life in Christ.

Just think of the difference between being outside that Ark in Noah's day and being inside it. Just a matter of a few feet of wood being between you and disaster.

But how does anyone enter such an Ark as Jesus Christ? How does his death and resurrection become ours?

By believing it to be the truth that it is.

This is really the same for so many other truths. When your doctor tells you you need surgery on your heart, before anything else can be done with that truth, you have to believe it. And once you believe it, then you need to allow it to come to pass in your life. Or, on the more positive note, when a man proposes his love to a woman, before anything else can be done with that truth, the woman has to believe it. Once she believes in him, they enter into a new life together. And they do it officially by way of a marriage ceremony.

Baptism is much the same. It isn't salvation itself, but it is the sign of that salvation. Our salvation is in the cross and resurrection of Christ. But we enter into Christ by our personal faith and show it by our public baptism.

Baptism is the sign God appointed to point to the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross and in the resurrection.

1) **Water** ---> reminds us of the deadly flood of God's judgment against sin and the salvation found in that same water.

2) **Washing** ---> of a clean conscience before God.

3) **Rising from the water** ---> the resurrection of Jesus, our rising above the flood waters of death itself, our salvation.

Are you inside or outside God's provision for your salvation? This isn't something you can do for yourself. It isn't something you could ever come up with on your own. It's strange to your ear and eye of faith. But, in a strange way, it makes sense to your soul. There is a reason and much history behind it. And most important of all—it works. Because it's true.

Jesus Christ died for your sins. He paid your debt in full. Then he rose from the dead, never to die again. And he calls you to believe it and follow him by entering into this truth by faith . . . and by starting with baptism.