

## WHY BE BAPTIZED?

I was holding my grandson recently. He's 10 months old. Diane and I were watching him and his two year old brother Leo. We had gone for a walk, but now Sonny was tired, grandpa was tired, so we went back and sat on the steps. And Sonny was falling asleep in my arms. He looked so pure and innocent. How could he ever possibly be anything less than perfect? My grandson? It was about this time that Pastor Jayneann asked me to speak today. It got me to thinking about why it is that baptism is so central and important to us Christians. This is a huge topic and I guarantee that I don't have all the answers. I'm not going to talk about **when** a person should be baptized, just **why**. Why be baptized at all?

Today we're looking at a passage from the Book of Acts, Chapter 2 where a whole bunch of people come to realize why they need to be baptized. The action takes place on the Day of Pentecost. What is "Pentecost"? Pentecost is a Greek word that means "fiftieth day." So Pentecost is the fiftieth day after Easter.

After his resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days showing himself alive and in the flesh to his disciples. Then he gave them this command, *"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*

Now Pentecost also coincided with the Jewish Feast of Harvest, so there happened to be many "God-fearing Jews" in Jerusalem at this time. So when the Holy Spirit came down—with the blowing of violent wind, tongues of fire, and the disciples, a bunch of former fishermen and tax collectors, talking to people they didn't know, in their own languages--it must have been a chaotic scene. "They're drunk," some people joked.

Peter, the leader of the disciples, stood up to set the record straight. *"They're not drunk, it's only 9 in the morning!"* He then goes on to quote from the book of Joel, *"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. . . And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* He continues,

<sup>22</sup> *"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.*

<sup>23</sup> *This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and **you**, with the help of wicked men,<sup>[d]</sup> put him to death by nailing him to the cross.*

**You.** You and the Romans. You God-fearing Jews. **You** killed Jesus.

Wait a second--this is supposed to be about baptism; I know. First we need to establish the need for baptism at all. To do that, we need to look at a couple of human problems implied in this passage.

The first is death—that's pretty self-explanatory. We all die. Yes, even Jesus died.

The second is wickedness, evil, sin. That's more complicated. To understand that, we should go way back to the beginning, according to the Bible.

The book of Genesis describes the beginning. I will summarize the first chapter: God created everything, and it was very good. The dry earth was created, and God sent water- rain and streams, and the beautiful Garden of Eden had a river flowing through it, with all kinds of trees, pleasing to the eye and good for food. And the Lord God walked in the Garden with them. The God who created us provided an environment for all of us to grow and thrive. And God wanted to have an intimate relationship with us. But as we know it didn't take long for Adam and Eve to disobey God's one rule and eat from the tree of good and evil. They thought they could be just like God. But they're not. We are not little gods. And look at the very next generation: Cain murders Abel out of jealousy, and we go downhill from there.

Whether you believe the Adam and Eve story or not, it is obvious that something has gone wrong with the human race. We know the difference between good and evil. We were given free choice, and we often choose evil, in small and in large ways. It started early and continues to this day. Even though we were originally made very good.

I had a friend in high school. His nickname was Helmrod. He was the nicest guy in the world. I remember going to Menominee Park in the summer, cranking up the car stereos, and listening to Wishbone Ash and Foghat and hanging around. Good times. Helmrod would never hurt a fly, good guy. Fifteen years after we graduated, I heard a report on the radio. I couldn't believe my ears. Helmrod had found his wife with his best friend, and the next day went into the guy's workplace and shot him dead. Adultery and murder.

On a lighter note, there was another time when Leo and Sonny were over and Grandma and Leo were outside doing chores. Sonny was crying, and I discovered he needed to have his diaper changed. Being a typical grandpa, I had no idea where we might have diapers. There were none in the diaper bag that mom sent. Not that I panicked or anything, but I was really glad when Grandma and Leo came back to the house! But it got me thinking—Sonny has two loving parents. They take great care of him and his brothers. And then I thought, what if he had been born somewhere else. What if he had been born in terrible poverty, unclean conditions, homeless? What if we didn't have access to diapers, or enough food or water or medical care. I saw a frightening fact recently- that just 2,153 of the world's richest billionaires have as much wealth as 4.6 billion of the poorest. What are we doing??

We were created good, and good is done every day, but it's like there's a few drops of poison in the water and we can't ever get rid of it. All of us, put in a situation, are capable of great good, but we're also capable of great sin. We hurt others, we hurt ourselves, we hurt God. I think that's sin in a nutshell. Paul writes in Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So how do we get ourselves back to the garden? What shall we do? Let's go back to the Word of God and pick up where Peter left off. . .

With some good news. . .

*<sup>24</sup> But God raised Jesus from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*

Then jumping ahead to verse 29 and following:

*<sup>29</sup> “Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. <sup>30</sup> But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. <sup>31</sup> Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. <sup>32</sup> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. <sup>33</sup> Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. . . <sup>36</sup> “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*

*<sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

*<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, “Repent (turn your heart back to God) and be baptized (that is, be born again), 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. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

*Three thousand accepted his message and were baptized that day.*

So why should **you** be baptized?

I think of my friend Helmrod. I don't know what's happened to him, or what the condition of his soul is. But I do know what happened to Jeffrey Dahmer—remember him?--the notorious serial killer? He was baptized in prison before he died. I know what happened to Kobe Bryant, the famous but flawed basketball player who died recently—he was baptized and was a faithful lifelong Catholic. No matter how low you go or how high you fly, God loves you.

Have you been baptized? Do you remember your baptism? I was baptized as a baby, confirmed when I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and reaffirmed my baptism by full immersion when I was 27, and that was a pretty powerful event.

But listen to the Gospel of Matthew's account of a baptism:

*“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.*

*As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3:13-17*

Wow! You also are a child of God. You have a relationship with God, your parent. God is in every fiber of your being. And God loves you. Love him back. Why be baptized? Baptism with water is an outward sign or symbol of loving God back. It is your commitment to accept God's love. Jesus was baptized with water and God said, "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Now, my baptism was nothing like Jesus' baptism! And yet, it was. Because Jesus' baptism is my baptism. And your baptism. God pours out the Holy Spirit on you.

Don't just remember your baptism; rejoice in your baptism!

AMEN.