

The Promise of Baptism

Colossians 2:12-17

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One of the reasons Paul was writing this letter to the church at Colosse was to address what some called the Colossian Heresy.

While the term Colossian Heresy isn't used in the letter, Paul was addressing the teaching that Christ and His sacrifice wasn't enough to assure people's salvation.

Believers were being taught that the grace they had experienced through Christ wasn't enough; they had to do more and be more.

This is why Paul went back to the essentials, and one of those essentials was baptism. He reminded them of when they were baptized and why they were baptized.

If you've been baptized, today will be a reminder of what happened that day you stepped into the water.

Now let me start by saying, if you think baptism is just some church tradition or some kind of religious hoop to jump through, I want to challenge that thinking this morning, because while it is a church tradition it's so much more than that.

What we're talking about today is not about rituals. It's not about getting wet. It's not about joining a club, it's about celebrating lives that have been transformed.

Colossians 2:12, "*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.*"

Baptism isn't a bath it's a burial. Sometimes, because of the water, we see baptism as symbolic of our sins being washed away.

In fact, some ascribe this belief because of what Paul was told by Ananias in Acts 22:16, "*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.*"

What you need to understand is that this passage does not indicate that the washing away of Paul's sins was linked to him being told to be baptized.

In fact, there are two separate thoughts in this verse. One was to get up and be baptized; the other was to have his sins washed away by calling on the name of Jesus.

We don't see any evidence in the scriptures that there is any cleansing power in baptism, but we do see the concept of baptism and burial linked both here in Colossians and in the book of Romans.

Romans 6:3–4, "*Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.*"

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Baptism is symbolic of burial. The entire concept and teaching is that before we accepted the grace and forgiveness of Jesus, we were spiritually dead.

This is spelled out in Romans 6:23, "*For the wages of sin is death,...*" As well as in Ephesians 2:1, "*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*"

And again, in Ephesians 2:4–5, "*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*"

Then add to that the scripture that links our relationship with Christ to a new birth, and we see the illustration of being buried, because we were dead in our sins, and then raised to new life. Literally born again.

Which explains Jesus' famous discussion with the religious leader, Nicodemus. John 3:3, "*Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."*"

Now many of us are familiar with the term, "Born Again," even if we don't get it right. Apparently, it was new for Nicodemus because he questioned Jesus.

John 3:4–5, "*How can someone be born when they are old?*" Nicodemus asked. "*Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!*" Jesus answered, "*Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.*"

But there is another part to this burial symbolism, and that is the Christian putting their old life to death. Paul taught this in several of the letters he wrote to the early church.

Colossians 2:13, "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins."

Romans 6:11, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

This theme repeats itself time and time again, that if we are to mature and grow in our Christian faith we need to die to our old self, our old sinful nature and our old desire; being buried in baptism is a symbol of that.

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The next point about baptism is that it's not a bath but a burial. At each baptism, we're reminded of the resurrection of Christ.

Paul told the early church in Romans 6:3–4, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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."

Because of that symbolism, baptism by immersion is the most powerful illustration of that thought. You don't half bury someone who's dead.

I realize there are disagreements over what it means to be baptized and how much water needs to be involved.

William Barclay writes, "*Baptism in the time of Paul was three things. It was adult baptism; it was instructed baptism; and, wherever possible, it was baptism by total immersion.*

Therefore the symbolism of baptism was manifest. As the waters closed over the man's head, it was as if he died; as he rose up again from the water, it was as if he rose to new life. Part of him was dead and gone for ever; he was a new man risen to a new life."

This is why baptism isn't an end, it's a beginning. It would be kind of morbid if we ended with the thought of being buried, but Paul continues and tells the Colossians that not only were they buried, but they were then raised to a new life.

Colossians 2:12, "*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.*"

This isn't just about remembering the death of Christ, it's remembering His resurrection.

It's not just a reminder of Romans 6:23, "*For the wages of sin is death,*" but a reminder of the rest of the verse, "*but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

It's not just being commanded to put the old life to death, it's the promise that with death comes a rebirth, a new life, a new beginning.

Throughout the New Testament, the Christian experience is described with verbs. We're to be walking in the light. We're to be growing in Christ. We're to be running the race. We're to be fighting the good fight.

Nowhere are we told to sit and stagnate. No where are we told, or is it implied, that our salvation is simply a one and done. We're commanded to grow, to mature and to become more and more like Jesus.

Baptism isn't an end, it's a beginning. Baptism is the first step of obedience. John R. Rice writes, "*God's people should be baptized because God commanded it, not because some church requires it.*"

Max Lucado says, "*Baptism is the initial step of a faithful heart.*" However, what you need to understand is that it's the first step, not the final step.

Colossians 2:13, "*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.*"

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Baptism is an outward statement of an inward change that you're declaring for the world to hear that you've made a commitment. But, without Christ, it's not a commitment that could be made.

Here at Grace Fellowship we celebrate believers' baptism. This isn't just something that I, our church members or friends think is a good idea, this is your decision. It's about the relationship that you have with Jesus.

We're told in Ephesians 2:4–5, "*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*"

And just a few verses later Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8–9, "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*"

Salvation isn't a reward for the good things we've done. It's acknowledging that we've disappointed God by our sinful behavior, then asking Christ to forgive us and make us a new person.

Baptism isn't saying, "*Look how good I am.*" It's declaring, "*Look how good God is. He offered His only son for my salvation.*"

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Now, I've had people ask me if they could have a private baptism. Just them and me. They've always had a variety of reasons.

Maybe they're shy, or maybe they don't like the way they'll look when they're wet, but the bottom line is they wanted it to be private.

I tell them, I'll marry you privately, I'll bury you privately, but I will not baptize you privately. The entire premise and purpose of baptism is that it's a public declaration.

Throughout the New Testament we see baptism as a public statement of someone's intention to follow Jesus, and usually it'd happen quickly after that decision was made.

We see that repeated over and over again in the book of Acts. Paul accepted Jesus, and he was baptized. Lydia accepted Jesus, and she was baptized.

The Philippian jailer accepted Jesus, and he was baptized. They weren't baptized inside a church building, because there weren't any.

You might remember the story in Acts 8 of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch, and how the man had questions for Philip about the Bible.

We pick up the story in Acts 8:34–38, *"The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him."*

Some have pointed to this story as being a private baptism, it happened on the side of the road, in the middle of nowhere.

But we're told that he ordered the carriage to stop, so there was someone to order. He was a government official, travelling on official business, I can't imagine that he was travelling alone.

Now, there are things we don't know from the story. We don't know who else was present. We don't know how many people were present, but we do know that Philip and the eunuch were not alone.

There's no saving power in baptism; it is a declaration, and because of that very thing it's to be done in front of people.

I read an analogy the other day that baptism is like a wedding ring. The ring doesn't make you married, but it tells the world that you are married.

Baptism is the outward sign of an inward decision. It's how we go public with our faith. Being baptized doesn't make you a Christian, but it tells the world that you are a Christian.

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Conclusion

In the early church, baptism wasn't a quiet event tucked away in a church building. It was loud. It was public. It was risky. For many believers, getting baptized meant putting a target on their back.

It meant they might lose their job, their family, or even their life.

Today, you probably won't lose your life for getting baptized, but it still matters. It tells your friends, your family, and your church, "*I'm all in.*"

I'll tell you something else. Your story matters. Your baptism might be the encouragement someone else needs to take their own step of faith.

There are people watching your journey who're wondering if Jesus is real. When they see the difference He's made in you, it might just lead them to Him.

If you've already been baptized, today's a reminder. This is your story.

You've been buried with Christ. You've been raised to walk in newness of life. So don't go back to living like you're still in the grave.

If you haven't been baptized—maybe you've been thinking about it. Maybe you've been waiting until you "*have it all together.*" I can tell you that you never will. That's why Jesus came.

Baptism isn't about being perfect—it's about being His.