

The Blessing of Baptism
Mark 1:9-13
Dr. David O. Dykes
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, TX

Timing is very important in everything. Brooks Hayes, who was a U.S. Representative from Arkansas, liked to tell the story of a prisoner who received this letter from his wife, “Honey, I’m just lost without you. I don’t know when to plant the potatoes and I can’t even plow the garden to plant the potatoes.”

This prisoner wrote a letter back to his wife, “Honey, don’t worry about planting the potatoes, but whatever you do, don’t go anywhere near that garden and don’t dig in it, because that’s where I’ve buried the money.”

She wrote back, “Honey, I think someone is reading our mail, because the day after your letter came, four FBI Agents showed up and dug up every square inch of our garden and they didn’t find any money.”

He wrote back, “Now, darling, plant the potatoes.”

Timing is very critical with God. Why didn’t Jesus begin his ministry when he was 18 or 21 or 25? Why did he wait until he was 30 years old? Galatians 4:4 says, “When the time was just right, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, to redeem us from the law.” Jesus waited until he was 30 years old to launch his ministry and he begins his ministry by being baptized.

“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John [that’s John the Baptist] in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’” (Mark 1:9-11)

Why did Jesus have to be baptized? He had never sinned. He didn’t have to repent of his sins. In John’s gospel he says when Jesus approached John and said, “John, I want you to baptize me.” John said, “Oh no. I’m not worthy to baptize you. In fact, you ought to baptize me.” And Jesus pleaded with John and said, “John, you baptize me. I must be baptized to fulfill all righteousness.” Which means, “I need to be baptized because it’s the right thing to do.”

As we think about the baptism of Jesus, let’s talk about the topic of baptism. That’s why we are “Baptists.” That’s part of our name. Today we’ll learn where we got our name.

I. THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

What does it really mean? The word “baptize” itself means to submerge, to plunge or to dip. It was not originally a religious word; it was a common word in the Greek language. It was a word used to describe a piece of cloth dipped in dye to change its color or when women who took their dishes and “baptized” or washed her dishes in the river. Through the years, that word “baptize”

has come to mean something strictly religious, when to begin with, it was just an ordinary word, to plunge, to dip.

In the Bible, there are different kinds of baptisms. Hebrews 6:1-2, says, “Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death and of faith in God.” In other words, as a Christian, once you become a Christian, you should move on to maturity and not keep rehearsing over and over again repentance and faith. Those two doctrines are foundational and they’re primary but the Bible says you ought to move on.

1. Instructions about baptism

To become spiritually mature, you’ve got to understand some other things. Number one, instructions about. Do you know the different baptisms in the Bible? Do you feel like you understand what the Bible teaches about laying on of hands? Do you know about resurrection of the dead? What if I asked you to stand up and explain what’s going to happen at the resurrection, the first resurrection, the second resurrection? What do you know about eternal judgment, the final thing? There are some things we need to learn as we mature as believers.

If you take a concordance and go through the New Testament, you’ll discover there are at least seven different kinds of baptism or uses of the word “baptism.”

(1) John the Baptist’s baptism in water

John the Baptist’s baptism in water was not a Christian baptism, because those who were baptized by John later had to undergo Christian baptism. It was a baptism for repentance.

(2) Jesus’ baptism in water

There was Jesus’ baptism in water that we just read about. His baptism was not John’s baptism because he didn’t need to repent. It was not exactly Christian baptism. It was unlike anything before or after.

(3) Jesus’ baptism in suffering

The Bible talks about Jesus’ baptism in suffering. That word *baptiso* can mean to be overwhelmed by something, to be covered up. In Luke 12:50, Jesus said, “I have a baptism to undergo and how distressed I am until it is completed!” He said to James and John, “You two guys are going to be baptized with the same baptism.” When Jesus died on the cross, he was literally immersed in pain and suffering.

(4) The Jews’ baptism in the cloud and the sea

The Bible speaks of the Jews’ baptism in the cloud and the sea. What’s that talking about? I Corinthians 10:2 talks about when the Children of Israel were coming from Egypt to the

Promised Land, that as they went through the Red Sea, it was a picture of baptism, through the cloud that led them and through the sea.

(5) Baptism in the body of Christ

There is what the Bible calls a Christian's baptism in the body of Christ, into the church, the body. I Corinthians 12:13 says, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body." The moment you are born again, the Holy Spirit of God baptizes you, immerses you into the body of Christ.

(6) Baptism in the Holy Spirit

There is the Christian's baptism in the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). It appears in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and twice in the book of Acts. In Acts 1, Jesus says, "John baptized with water but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit. He was talking about what happened on the day of Pentecost. Then later, it happened to the Christians at Samaria. It happened to Cornelius. When a Christian is totally immersed and filled with the Spirit, he is living in the very life of God Himself.

(7) Baptism in water

There is a Christian's baptism in water. When we say "baptism," isn't that what most of us think about—water? We think about going into a baptistery and being baptized. In Acts 2:38, Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." That's what the word "baptize" means, and it refers to *much more* than simply being dipped in water. We will focus on a Christian's baptism in water.

II. MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT BAPTISM

There are some strange ideas going on around about baptism and I hope to clear up two grave misconceptions.

1. Misconception #1: Baptism is necessary for salvation

Some believe baptism is necessary for salvation. I've been hearing that all my life. There's a group of people who love Jesus and are very committed to God's Word who are convinced you must be baptized in order to go to heaven. They really love Jesus and believe the Bible and they're convinced of that. But we need to understand the truth of the matter is baptism is necessary for fruitfulness in your life and blessing, but it is not necessary to go to heaven. What is necessary to go to heaven when you die? Repent of your sins, place your faith in Jesus and make Him your Lord.

Do you remember a few years ago when a DC10 jetliner lost its tail engine, the hydraulic systems ceased working and it had to be guided down to a crash landing in Iowa City? Movies have been made about it. There were about 20-30 minutes from the time they lost the engine until they landed. If you remember, the plane landed and flipped over in an inferno. It was a

miracle only about 70 out of the 300 passengers were killed. Eyewitnesses on board the plane said from the time they learned there was an emergency until the plane crashed landed, there were many people who were literally on their knees on that airplane, praying, begging God to save them.

Imagine there's a tough-nosed businessman on board that airplane who never had time for God, but he's heard the gospel. (It's hard to live in America without hearing it) On his way down in that airplane, he bows his head and says, "God, I'm a rotten, dirty sinner. I've had no time for you in my life and now I know I'm wrong. I repent of my sins. I turn from my sins and Lord Jesus, I believe in you. You are the Son of God. Right now, Jesus, come into my life. Forgive my sins. Make me a Christian." Then he is one of those unfortunate ones who, when the jet flips over, he dies and he stands before Almighty God.

What do you think is going to transpire? Do you think God the Father is going to look at him and say, "I see you repented of your sins. I see you placed your faith in Jesus, but OOPS! Sorry. No baptism. You're out." Do you think God's going to do that? No. The Bible says in Romans 10:13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." It doesn't say, "Whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord and be baptized will be saved."

Salvation is not achieved by works; it is only by the grace of God and our faith. Baptism, as good and as important as it is, is a good work and we are never saved by works. I'm not saying it's not important. If you want to be fruitful in your life and want to have the blessing of God on your life, you ought to be baptized. Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

2. Misconception #2: Baptism is not necessary for salvation

Some people say, "It's not necessary for salvation," or they say, "It really doesn't matter how or when one is baptized." I am not preaching against any other group of Christians, I'm just preaching what I believe is Bible doctrine. We all know there are many Christians who say, "Well, you Baptists, you baptize by immersion. We don't and that's okay. It doesn't matter how you do it." They say, "You Baptists, you baptize only believers and we sprinkle little babies. It doesn't matter when you do it."

What is the truth? Ask yourself, "How did any group start sprinkling and why do we immerse?" Let me give you a quick study of church history: Without a doubt, the early church, in the book of Acts, baptized believers by immersion. For the first 300 years, there were no church buildings. The church was a family that met in homes, house to house, and they would gather in public places for worship services. They had their baptism services in lakes and rivers and other public places.

In the year 313 A.D., the Roman Emperor, Constantine, who thought he saw a vision of the cross in the sky with the words, "By this conquer," gave the Edict of Constantine, making Christianity the official religion. Some people say he Christianized paganism. He didn't do us a favor. He paganized Christianity. He turned Christianity into an institution and God never wanted it to be an institution. He always intended it to be a family.

With an institution comes officials, rules and regulations—you've got to do it exactly this way. So, the church in Rome became the most important church and the pastor of the church at Rome became the most important pastor. It came to the point where he became infallible. He was called the Pope. That's how it got started. There was a break off to the Greek Orthodox Church several years later.

The first churches to come out of that system built buildings and baptisteries where believers were immersed. Biblical architects have discovered baptisteries in the shape of the cross where the believer would go down into the baptistery and be baptized by immersion.

As the church grew, the doctrine developed that said, "Salvation is only through the church and the only way you get into the church is by being baptized." They had to make this more efficient if they were going to evangelize the world. To them, baptism was sacramental, a sacrament.

How are you going to baptize a still-born baby? A man gets run over by a wagon. How are you going to baptize him? He's dying. So they developed a system where a priest could take some sanctified holy water could go out and sprinkle the water on a still-born baby. He would sprinkle the water on that person who was dying. There are incidences of a priest standing before a group of soldiers and baptizing all of them with a few drops of water. You are now a part of the church and salvation is through the church.

Several hundred years later, they entered the Dark Ages. It was called the Dark Ages, because there was no light of the scriptures. Only the educated priesthood knew what the Bible said. Common man didn't know what the Bible said, so many strange beliefs developed—weird, preposterous beliefs. Then, in the 1500s, (the 16th century) a group of educated Christians in Germany suddenly began to read the Bible. A fellow named Johannes Gutenberg developed the printing press, so books no longer had to be transcribed by hand.

I like the story of the old German guy who moved to America and said to a president of a theological seminary, "You know I opened a trunk from my great, great granddaddy and I found an old Bible. It was a Gutenberg or Gutenstein or something." The eyes of that seminary president got big. He said, "What did you do with it? What did you do with it?" The guy said, "Well, it wasn't worth anything. Some old guy by the name of Luther had written all over it, so I just threw it away."

Once they started reading the Bible, men like Martin Luther, John Calvin and John Knox, said, "Hey! Something is wrong. Something is rotten in Rome, because what they are saying is not what the Bible says." So a movement called the Reformation to reform the Church began. This Reformation was based on three great principles: (1) *Solo scripturo*. Only scripture, not tradition, the Word of God only. (2) *Solo Gratia*. Only grace. Salvation is by grace, not by works. It's not by buying indulgences, it is by grace. (3) *Solo Fide*. Only faith. The Word of God, grace and faith.

These men began to change the church. Of course, the Catholic Church excommunicated them—kicked them out. They began their own churches. Luther started what is now the Lutheran Church. Calvin and John Knox started what is now the Presbyterian Church. The only problem

with these reformists is they didn't take it far enough when it came to baptism. The Lutheran Church—God bless their hearts, they love Jesus and I love them—but they still sprinkle their babies. The Presbyterian Church, many of them do it that way.

About one hundred years later, a group of Christians read the Bible and said, “Something is still wrong. When it comes to baptism, we believe baptism ought to be by immersion, for believers.” So these people started baptizing adults who were believers, dunking them. They experienced such great persecution from Protestants who called them “Ante-Baptists”—baptizers again. They said, “Those people were already baptized. They were sprinkled when they were babies. You are rebaptizing.” The Ante-Baptists said, “No, we aren't *rebaptizing* them, we're baptizing them *scripturally*.”

In 1609, King James, son of Mary Queen of Scots, said, “I want everybody to be able to read the Bible.” So he commissioned 54 Greek and Hebrew scholars to translate the Hebrew in the Old Testament and Greek in the New Testament into the Bible. When these men came to the word *baptize* they were in a pickle. As Greek scholars, they knew the word *baptize* meant “dip” or “plunge.” What if they had put the word “immerse” there? What would they have been saying? They would have been saying, “Wait a minute, King James, you've not been immersed and dipped.” They couldn't translate it “sprinkle,” because there's another Greek word for sprinkle—*rhantizo*. They couldn't translate it “pour,” because there's another word for “pour” – *luo*. So they copped out. They didn't translate it; they transliterated it: Baptize. There was not an English word “baptize” until the 1611 edition of the King James Bible.

Elsewhere in the Bible, the word, *bapto*, they correctly translated. When they said, “Jesus took the piece of bread and dipped it in the sauce and gave it to Judas,” he baptized it. King James says, “He dipped it.”

Revelation 19 says Jesus comes with a robe dipped in blood, baptized in blood. In the Septuagint, it says old Naaman back in II Kings dipped himself seven times in the Jordan River—baptized. Sometimes they translated it correctly, but as a cop out, they transliterated it “baptize.” Without a doubt, the word “baptize” means “to dip, to plunge.” That's why we are called Baptists.

I guess they did us a favor in a way, because how would it sound for us to call ourselves “Dippers?” I go to Green Acres Dipper Church. I guess it would be worse to say Green Acres Plunger Church. We've got our big dippers and our little dippers. That's how the tradition and the practice of sprinkling babies began. If anyone can find anywhere in the Bible where an infant was ever sprinkled for baptism, I'll gladly apologize for what I've just said. That is true to the scriptures and church history I've studied for many years.

Those are the two misconceptions. Here's the truth: Scriptural baptism is for believers by immersion. Have you been scripturally baptized? Sometimes when we tell people they must be baptized they say, “Oh, I was sprinkled as a baby.” That's not scriptural baptism as we understand it. Or someone says, “When I was a child I made some decision and I was dunked and later I was saved.” You haven't been scripturally baptized. The sequence is out of order. It is always salvation, being born again—and we believe in instantaneous conversion. You may grow

up to it and you may grow from it, but there is a point in time and space when you pass from death unto life, when you are born again. The Bible teaches you are to be baptized after salvation. To be baptized before salvation is like burying someone before they die because baptism is a picture of burial.

III. MOTIVES FOR BAPTISM

1. Obedience

Why would someone want to be baptized? For the same reason Jesus wanted to be baptized: Obedience. Jesus said to John, "I'm going to be baptized for righteousness." It is the right thing to do. What if the Bible had said, instead of repent and be baptized, what if it had said, "Repent and as a sign you're a Christian, run around your church seven times singing Hallelujah?" Do you know what I would have done? As soon as I understood that's what the Bible said, I'd have been running around the church seven times singing Hallelujah, simply for the fact that the Bible told me to do it. I'd be doing it out of obedience. I wouldn't have to understand it—I'd just do it. The Bible doesn't tell us once we are a Christian to run around the church seven times. It says once you are a Christian, be baptized. It is an act of obedience. Jesus said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord and you don't do the things I tell you to do?"

Sometimes people say they don't understand the Bible. Have you ever thought that God is not going to reveal any more light on his Word until you start obeying the things that you have light about? Simple things, so just obey.

2. Identification

Another motive for baptism is identification, because when you are baptized you are identifying with Jesus Christ. He was baptized. We identify with Him by our baptism. Our baptism identifies us with the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's why immersion completes the picture. If you don't have the right picture, you don't have the right meaning. Some people say, "It doesn't matter what the picture is as long as it's a picture." That's kind of like you asking to see a picture of my wife and I pull out a picture of a dog and I say, "Well, any picture will do." No. Some people say it doesn't matter how you picture it as long as there's water involved. No. The picture is burial, being buried with Christ, raised to walk in a brand new life.

Every time someone is baptized, the gospel is preached. What is the gospel? Christ died for our sins, was buried and was resurrected on the third day. I look forward to the day when at least 365 times a year the gospel is preached through baptism. I long for the day our church is the kind of church where the Lord is adding daily to the church such as should be saved, that we baptize at least 365 people in a year, one per day. Every time we baptize, the gospel is preached.

3. Testimony

When a person is baptized, it allows them to testify to everybody who watches the baptism, "I am a follower of Jesus Christ." Have you ever heard the phrase, "Profession of faith?" When

does a profession of faith actually happen? It can happen many times but I want to tell you, it's not necessarily walking down an aisle. It's not necessarily filling out a card. I believe a profession of faith occurs in the life of a Christian when they stand in the baptismal waters and they say, "Jesus is my Lord." When they say, "I take God as my Father...Jesus is my Savior...The Holy Spirit is my Guide." That is their confession of faith; it's a testimony. Jesus said, "If you confess me before men, I will confess you before my Father."

Let me tell you what I believe happens every time a believer is baptized. He says, "Jesus is my Lord" and up in heaven, Jesus, seated at the right hand of God the Father turns to his Father and says, "Father, did you hear that? This one just confessed me and now I gladly claim him, I gladly claim her, I confess that person to you."

Did you notice what happened when Jesus was baptized? God said, "You are my son whom I dearly love and I am pleased with you." Do you know what our greatest needs are? We have a need to be accepted. We have a need to be loved and we have a need to be approved. We find all three of those in what God the Father said. I believe when you obey the Lord in baptism, God the Father looks at you and says the same thing to you that he said about Jesus, "This is my child. I accept you. I dearly love you, because you have been obedient to me. I'm proud and pleased with what you've done."