

INTRODUCTION

We're studying the Parables and Miracles of Jesus recorded by Matthew, and today we're going to talk about the miracle of Jesus' baptism. When we last saw Jesus he was a toddler returning from Egypt. For the next three decades we know very little about his life. Luke records an event when Jesus was 12 years old and visiting Jerusalem, but other than that, the Bible is silent about his childhood and adolescence. Jesus remained in the carpenter's shop doing His stepfather's work, until He was prompted by the Spirit to begin His Heavenly Father's work. I can't help but wonder if there was a bit of reluctance on Jesus' part as He left the familiar sights and smells of the quiet carpenter's shop to step out and face the opposition He knew would come. I wonder if Jesus worked with two large beams and thought about the cross. I wonder if He ever handled a hammer and large nails and thought about how one day they would be driven into His hands and feet.

But in the fullness of time, Jesus came on the scene to begin His 42-month ministry of redeeming the world. The Bible says in Galatians 4:4 "When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, to redeem those under the Law." The miracle of His baptism was the event that launched His ministry.

Matthew 3:11-17. John the Baptist said, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan 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.'"

John the Baptizer was an interesting character. He didn't invent baptism. For many years the Jews had baptized Gentile converts. At the ruins of Qumran where the Dead Sea scrolls were found, there is evidence the Essenes regularly immersed themselves in a ritual bath called a *mikvah*. But John called upon everyone to repent and be baptized. John 3:23 tells us John was baptizing in a place called Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. He wasn't pouring water or sprinkling people, he would have only needed a trickle of water for that. John's baptism was a full immersion. After Jesus was baptized, a miracle took place. The Holy Spirit visibly came upon Jesus and God spoke these amazing words, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." What a miracle! I want us examine Jesus' baptism and learn four important messages that God has for us.

(1) GOD'S MESSAGE TO EVERYONE: Turn from your sins and follow Jesus' example in baptism

Jesus had no need to turn from sins, but He was baptized for "righteousness sake." That just

meant it was the right thing for Him to do to set an example for us. On the Day of Pentecost, Simon Peter preached a powerful message about Jesus being the only way to heaven. At the end of the message, people asked him, "What shall we do?" Peter's reply is found in Acts 2:38 and his words still apply to each of us today. He said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) And the Bible says on that day more than 3,000 people turned from their sins and were baptized.

To understand what water baptism is, let's talk about both the sequence of baptism and the meaning of baptism. First, the timing of baptism is important. The correct sequence is to first repent and place your faith in Jesus and THEN be baptized.

It's not my desire to criticize any other Christian denomination or group, but if you were baptized as an infant, your baptism is out of sequence. It wasn't your fault, because you didn't have a choice in the matter. But the Bible teaches baptism is only for those who are old enough to understand that they are sinners and need a Savior. Writing about this, Ray Stedman observed: "I will barely touch on the problem of infant baptism because I do not think you can find a single verse in the New Testament which even suggests that it is proper. Baptism is an expression of faith by the individual. It cannot, therefore, be practiced by an infant who is incapable of expressing any faith of his own. Only the baptism of believers is authorized in the Bible."

In the New Testament and in the first 300 years of church history, the only people who were baptized were believers. The reason some churches still baptize infants by sprinkling them is because in the fourth century, the Catholic Church made baptism a sacrament, meaning it was an act through which salvation was bestowed. After Constantine, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, it simply became a matter of efficiency for a priest to take water that had been sanctified (holy water) and sprinkle people, including babies. Now I understand why some churches still sprinkle or christen babies; they are using it as a time of dedication of that child to God. We do that at Green Acres, we just don't use water, and we call it a family dedication or parent commitment.

The second important element of baptism is the meaning. Baptism doesn't save you. Instead, we believe it is a powerful symbol of death, burial and resurrection. Because of this, we believe the only proper baptism is by immersion—not by sprinkling or pouring.

The word *baptizo* appears more than 80 times in the New Testament. In the beginning it wasn't even a religious word. It was a word that simply meant "to dip, soak, or immerse." One of the first uses of the word *baptizo* outside the Bible is found in the writings of Nicanor who was writing in 200 B.C. Nicanor was providing a recipe for making pickles. In his recipe he writes that the vegetable should first be "baptized" in boiling water, and then the vegetable should be "baptized" in vinegar. So the word "baptizo" always meant "to dip."

In 1611, when King James enlisted Greek and Hebrew scholars to translate the Bible into the King James Version English, the translators stumbled when they came upon the word "baptize." They knew it meant to immerse, but they also knew their boss, King James, had been sprinkled, so they were between a rock and a hard place. If they translated the word "baptize" as "sprinkle"

or “pour” they would have been ridiculed by the academic community because there are other Greek words that mean “sprinkle” or “pour.” But if they translated “baptize” as “immerse” they would have been inferring that the King was not properly baptized. So rather than translating the word “baptize,” they just transliterated it, and for the first time, “baptize” became an English word. It’s funny that they translated “baptize” as “dip” when it spoke of Jesus taking a piece of bread and dipping it in the sauce before handing it to Judas—that was the same word—*baptizo*. Or in Luke 16 when the rich man asked Lazarus to “dip” his finger in water and touch his tongue, guess what word for “dip” is? *Baptizo*.

Actually, I’m okay that the translators of the KJV didn’t translate baptize as “dip.” I like the word baptize or baptist. Just think, if they had correctly translated the word, we might be called Green Acres Dipper Church and we’d be the big dipper and there would be some little dippers around town! But from the beginning, Christian baptism was always by immersion and for people old enough to repent and place their faith in Jesus. When you go under the water, it’s a picture of a burial—the old you before you trusted Christ is dead and buried. And when you come up out of the water, it’s a picture of your resurrection to a new life!

Baptism is like taking a wedding vow. You are identifying yourself with Jesus and pledging your love and loyalty to Him. You only need repeat your wedding vows once to be married, but through the years I’ve had the joy of leading couples in reconfirming their wedding vows. When I am in Israel I always have the joy of baptizing some people for the very first time in the Jordan River. For others, I have the joy of reconfirming their love and loyalty to Jesus by re-baptizing them in the same water where Jesus was baptized.

Have you been baptized by immersion after you put your faith in Jesus Christ? If not, why not? We usually baptize on Sunday mornings, but for some people who prefer, we baptize during the week at a time convenient for you and your family. If you are interested in taking this important first step of obedience to Jesus, come forward at the end of this message or stop by the Bethany Suite after we dismiss.

(2) GOD’S MESSAGE TO THE BELIEVER: Crown Jesus as your Lord, so He can baptize (immerse) you in the Holy Spirit

When Jesus was baptized, the Bible says the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove. Although the dove has come to symbolize the Holy Spirit, the text doesn’t say the Holy Spirit looked like a dove, but that the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus in much the same way in which a dove lands with a fluttering of wings that slows it down. There are several different kinds of baptisms in the New Testament and water baptism is only one. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is so important that it is mentioned six times in scripture. These words appear in all four gospel accounts, and just before Jesus ascended back to heaven He said, “John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:5) Jesus was referring to what was going to take place on the day of Pentecost when the disciples would be filled with the Holy Spirit. The sixth time this statement appears is in Acts 10 when Peter mentions it in conjunction with Cornelius, a Gentile, being filled with the Holy Spirit.

There are some well-meaning Christians who describe the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" as some kind of second-blessing experience in which you do strange things like faint or speak in tongues. You may be asked by them if you've been baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoken in tongues. If you haven't, they may try to make you feel inferior and tell you there is "something more" for you. Because many Christians sincerely want to experience everything God has for them, some have been deceived into seeking some kind of freaky experience instead of seeking the Lord.

I strongly believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit. I believe it is the same as being filled with the Holy Spirit, but the Bible makes it clear that all believers will not speak in tongues. The initial filling of the Holy Spirit may be called the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but we are commanded to continually be filled with the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Holy Spirit is not for our enjoyment it's for God's employment!

To be filled or baptized in the Holy Spirit means you are totally immersed in the life of God. There are many Christians who are still living according to the desires of their flesh—the Bible calls them carnal Christians. A carnal Christian is saved, but they aren't experiencing the joy and victory of the Christian life. It's like a carnal Christian has taken a glass of the Living Water and splashed it on them—they have just enough of Jesus to save them, but not to really bless them. But a Christian who is baptized in the Holy Spirit has jumped head-first into a swimming pool filled with the Living Water, and their entire being is surrounded, covered, and supported in the life of Jesus.

To be baptized in the Holy Spirit is the same thing as being baptized into Christ, because Jesus and the Holy Spirit are completely identical. Look at these three verses that speak of being baptized into Christ. "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ... For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body ... for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27)

Crowning Jesus as your Lord and being baptized in the Holy Spirit are two sides of the same coin. Now Christians quibble about whether the baptism in the Holy Spirit happens simultaneously when you are saved, or if it is a subsequent experience. I don't think we can put God in a box and say it has to happen in any particular sequence. In Acts 8, 9, and 10 there are three separate conversion stories and in each one, the sequence is different. So, forget the argument over WHEN it happens. A much more important issue than WHEN it happens is HAS it happened?

Most of us have heard of Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist of the 19th century. Moody was an uneducated shoe salesman who never was ordained nor attended a seminary, but he shook two continents for Christ. Today, the Moody Bible Institute and Moody College still carry on his legacy. What was the secret of Moody's power? He had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. At his funeral, Moody's assistant, R.A. Torrey, spoke of how early on in his ministry Moody's attempt to be an evangelist were futile and failures. But there were two ladies who often said, "Mr. Moody, we're praying for you." Moody was a little upset with them and asked, "Why don't you pray for the unsaved?" They would sweetly reply, "We are praying that you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit." After several encounters with these two women, Moody asked them

what they meant, and they explained that he needed the baptism in the Holy Spirit to be effective. That's when Moody asked the women to pray with him.

Nothing happened that day, but several days later as he was preparing to make his first trip to preach in London, Moody described what happened. "I was walking up Wall Street in New York and in the midst of the bustle and hurry of the city, their prayer was answered. The power of God fell on me and I had to hurry off to a friend and ask for a room by myself. In that room I stayed alone for hours and the Holy Ghost came upon me filling my soul with such joy that I had to ask God to withhold His hand, lest I die on the spot from the very joy." Moody left that place with God's power on Him and when he got to London, hundreds were added to the churches and that campaign resulted in him being invited over for larger campaigns. R.A. Torrey claimed the reason God used D.L. Moody was because he knew what it was to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus told the disciples in Acts 1:8, "You shall receive power (*dunamis*) when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses." Can you honestly say the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit is upon your life? That only happens when you allow the Holy Spirit to fill you and empower you.

(3) GOD'S MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH: Introduce people to Jesus, baptize them, and teach them to be disciples

So there is a message to everyone: Repent and follow Jesus' example of water baptism. There is a message to individual believers to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. But there is also a message to the church. The last words Jesus spoke to His disciples are called the Great Commission. Jesus said, "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 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Jesus considered baptism such an important act of faith and obedience that He made it a part of His command to the church. There are many things that a church can do, but nothing is more important than seeing people come to know Jesus and following Him in baptism. Jesus said there is joy in the presence of angels over one person who repents. That's why baptism is a celebration at our church. Whenever someone is baptized, we applaud and praise God because we are obeying our Lord's command.

Jesus commanded us to baptize all nations. The word for nations is a word that means "people-groups." We practice and support Global Missions because we believe God wants every person to be saved. How are we doing as a church and as a denomination of baptizing new converts? You may be surprised to learn some baptism statistics. In 2007, our Southern Baptist Missionaries were responsible for 609,968 baptisms—that factors out to 120 baptisms for every full-time missionary! We baptized many more people overseas than in the U.S., because the total baptisms in SBC churches in 2007 was 345,941. (That factors out to 7.7 baptisms per church). In the same year, GABC baptized 226 people. That means for the people who attend our church, it took about 20 of us working 12 months to win one person to Jesus. I rejoice over every person who is baptized, but I believe we really should be baptizing about 500 people each year.

We have all kinds of wonderful ministries and activities, but we must never forget the main call of Christ is for us to introduce people to Jesus and to baptize them. As you've heard before, the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. And the MAIN THING for us is reaching, baptizing, and teaching new converts.

(4) GOD'S MESSAGE TO PARENTS: Express your love and admiration to your children

There's one more message I believe God has for us from this miracle. When Jesus was baptized, God the Father spoke these words: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17) This wasn't the only time God spoke audibly to praise His Son. At the Transfiguration of Jesus the Bible says, At the Transfiguration: "A bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'" (Matthew 17:5) And then again, just a few hours before the cross we read: Jesus said, 'Father, glorify your name!' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, 'This voice was for your benefit, not mine.'" (John 12:28-30)

Parents, let's take a clue from the most perfect parent in the universe, the Heavenly Father. He felt it was important to brag on His Son, so He did it not once, or twice, but three times. Moms and dads, it's important for you to brag on your kids—personally and publicly. Here's how you do it: Tell them you love them, and then tell them they are doing a good job at something. That's what God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased. Listen to Him." Parents, the worst thing you can do to your kids is criticize and belittle them in front of their peers. But the BEST thing you can do for them is to tell them how much you love them and how proud you are of them. Find something your kid does well and brag about them.

Some of you are thinking, "Well, my kids are all grown now, so I've missed my chance." How old was Jesus when the Father said these things? He was in His thirties, so it's *never* too late to express your love and admiration for your children. Do it today, and do it often!

CONCLUSION

Before we leave the topic of baptism, notice John the Baptist said he baptized in water, but that the One come after Him would baptize in the Holy Spirit and with fire. You may scratch your head and wonder what a baptism in fire is all about. Immediately after that, John spoke of the Messiah having a winnowing fork in his hand. In Bible times, a threshing floor was an elevated platform located where there was always a constant wind. The wheat that had been harvested would be piled on the threshing floor and a worker would take a big wooden pitchfork and toss the wheat up into the air. The wind would catch the lighter husks, or chaff, and they would blow to one side, and the heavier grain would fall down on the floor. John said the Messiah would gather the grain into the barn, but the chaff would be burned in an unquenchable fire. So, in one respect, there are only two kinds of people in this world—the lost and the saved represented by the wheat and the chaff. Everyone will be baptized—either in the Holy Spirit or in the fire. The choice is yours.

What is God saying to you today? Do you need to experience water baptism as an act of

identifying with Jesus? Do you need to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus in your life, so He will fill you with His supernatural power? Do you need to be more active in sharing your faith with your loved ones and friends who don't know Christ so they can be baptized? Or are you a parent who just needs to do a better job of saying, "I love you and I'm proud of you to your kids?" Just listen and you'll hear God speaking to you today.

OUTLINE

(1) GOD'S MESSAGE TO EVERYONE: Turn from your sins and follow Jesus' example in baptism

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." *Acts 2:38*

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Jesus said, "John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." *Acts 1:5*

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At the Transfiguration:

"A bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'" *Matthew 17:5*

Hours before the cross:

Jesus said, 'Father, glorify your name!' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, 'This voice was for your benefit, not mine.'" *John 12:28-30*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes