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[0 : 00] A study on the gospel of Mark. However, I want to jump ahead a little bit and take advantage of an opportunity that we have today as we celebrate baptism.

! In other words, it's the right thing to do.

Mark tells the story. His way of communication, which you'll learn about more in the coming days. Mark said it the short way, quickly.

Mark chapter 1, beginning in verse 9, it says, In those days Jesus came from Nazareth, Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

And a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son, with you I am. Well, please. I want to answer three questions this morning about baptism.

[1 : 25] One is, what is baptism? Two is, why was Jesus baptized? And three, what does it mean to us?

First, what's baptism? Well, the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, Article Chapter 7, describes it as the following. A Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus.

It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

So what is baptism? Baptism is a symbol. It was introduced in the world, not through Christianity. Water was often used as a symbol for some type of spiritual cleansing.

[2 : 41] Ritual baths sprinkle the archaeological sites in Israel, both pagan and Christian. But when Christ was baptized, something changed.

He aligned that with Christianity, and quite honestly, that step trumped up all other religious ritual baths. Baptism now is thought of as a Christian concept.

There are various ways that people are spiritually rinsed with water, and it means different things. Some sprinkle. We don't sprinkle because the word means to dip or to immerse.

It was the same word they used for dyeing clothes. You don't dye clothes by sprinkling. It may be more convenient to do it other ways, but Baptists don't believe it's as biblical to do it other ways.

We also do not believe that it is necessary for salvation. The thief on the cross was not taken off the cross, baptized, and put back up there, yet Christ said that he would spend eternity with him, even beginning that day.

[3 : 49] The reality is, it is an initial step of obedience. But I told our candidates this morning, I said, if something happens and all the water drains out of the pool, before we get up there, and the Lord comes back tomorrow, if you've given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus, you're saved.

The baptism did not save you. It's the public proclamation of what happened to you spiritually. It's the initial step of obedience, and it's not an option for obedience.

It needs to be done, but your salvation is not based on anything that you do. The other thing I told them was this, and I always tell them this. When somebody asks you when you got saved, don't tell them when you got baptized.

Tell them how the Lord saved you. Tell them your story. Tell them how God met you where you were, and how God used other people to influence your lives, and how he saved you.

And then after you tell them your salvation testimony, then tell them how you got baptized. The reality is, it's a symbol. It's an initial step to follow the Lord after salvation.

[4 : 56] Romans chapter 6 verse 4 says this, We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

So literally, the baptism that you just witnessed symbolizes three steps. One is, the old is buried. The old life without Christ is buried in a watery grave, and new life after being cleansed by Christ emerges, and you walk out in the Lord.

That's what baptism is. Second thing is, why was Jesus baptized? Now, if you're puzzled by that, you're not the first to be puzzled by that.

John was as well. Matthew chapter 3 verse 14. John the Baptist looked at him and said, I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? Jesus was baptized for several reasons, and I want to share four of them with you.

One of them is, it signaled a beginning to his ministry. Just like it signals a beginning to the Christian life. It ought to be the first thing you do after coming to Christ. And it was after his baptism that he went into the desert, what I call his seminary experience.

[6 : 17] He went into the desert to be tempted by the evil one that prepared him for the ministry that he would do for the next three and a half years. It was a signal to a beginning of his ministry. It was also a sign of divine approval.

Verse 10 and 11 of what we read says, And when he came out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved son.

With you I am well pleased. How about that for a baptism? My soul, what an experience that must have been to be witnessing that. Quite honestly, the impact of such a sight is probably why it is recorded in the Gospels, at least from the perspective of the Gospel writers.

It made a huge impact to get that divine approval. The third thing is it's an example for us. As Christ was baptized, so we follow what Christ does, including being baptized.

If Christ had not been baptized, some quack would say, Well, Christ wasn't baptized. Why should I? Well, he fixed that in saying he was baptized. And he did it as an example for us.

[7 : 28] The fourth reason is it's an identification with us. By being baptized, he identified with where we are without him. He identified with our weakened, sinful human nature.

2 Corinthians 5 verse 21 puts it this way. For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The beginning step of that was his baptism. Now, what does all that mean to us? It means it's a big deal to us.

It's a big deal to Jesus. It was a big deal to his followers. It ought to be a big deal to us. Let me show you how it influenced his followers. In Acts, Christ ascends in chapter 2, and the Holy Spirit comes, and many are saved.

After Peter preaches, the crowd is, quote, cut to the heart under conviction, and they ask the apostles, what are we to do? And Peter says in Acts 2 verse 38, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[8 : 46] In verse 41 of that chapter, it says they were baptized. Everyone who received the message was baptized. And that became the pattern throughout the book of Acts.

In Acts chapter 8, the Samaritans are saved. And after they're saved, they're baptized. Their immediate response was, why not? Why shouldn't I be baptized? And what about Saul?

That's exactly what Saul thought when he was on the road to Damascus, and he met the Lord. The Bible tells us that as soon as he got to the city, he was baptized. Then, on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, there was Cornelius.

Cornelius got his whole home together, his whole household together, along with his friends, and Peter led them all to Christ. And do you know what followed that? Baptism. In Acts chapter 16, the gospel spreads to Europe.

Paul and Silas are looking for a place to pray down by the river. And Lydia and some of the others are there, and they share the gospel with them. They're all saved, and they're baptized right there in the river, on the spot.

[9 : 52] That led to a great revival. While they're worshiping and singing and praising, word spread, and the authorities wanted to hush Paul and Silas, so they threw them in prison.

And just like the passage that I read from the pool a little while ago, while they worshiped, singing and praising God in the jail, God shook the doors open. Paul and Silas took advantage of it, not by escaping, but by sharing the gospel with the jailer.

And that jailer and his whole household was saved and baptized. Acts chapter 17 speaks of the revival in Corinth, and that many men and women believed and were baptized.

Acts chapter 18, more men and women are saved and are baptized. In Acts chapter 9, John's disciples, those who followed John the Baptist, and looked for a coming Messiah.

When they found out that the coming Messiah had come, Christ had come, they got saved and were baptized. You see it again and again and again. In the life of John the Baptist, in the life of the Lord Jesus, in the life of the early church, two things are consistent.

[11:01] And I want you to get this. Jesus Christ is the only way that people will find peace with God. He's the only hope that people have. And everyone who accepts Christ as Savior and Lord were baptized as a symbolic statement of faith in him.

So what does that mean for us? So out of that, we get three truths. One is baptism is sacred. It's sacred for the Christian.

As I told you, it's a term that the Fuller used. That's the old age dry cleaner. And when he took a white garment and dipped it into a scarlet dye, he baptized it.

The garment's identity was changed from white to scarlet. And in that way, baptism, when people began to be baptized, it symbolized a change of identity.

The visual picture of the change of our identity is something that is set apart for the Christian.

Baptism is not something to be taken lightly.

[12:10] We don't get baptized when we feel guilty and want to get things right. We don't get baptized when we need to rededicate our lives. We don't get baptized when we feel like doing it, feel like we need something new to happen in our life.

Baptism is something that we do one time in our life as a believer. Once you give your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, you follow him with baptism. And then if you walk in error ways after that, get right.

There's no need to be baptized again. You've been baptized as a believer. If at some point in your life, you realize that your baptism came before your salvation, as one of our candidates this morning did.

And God convicted him about that. He rode that for a little bit. And God continued to lay that upon his heart. Then he did what I call getting your baptism in order. He wanted to be baptized again, but it's the first time he was baptized as a believer.

We get baptized at the change in our identity and when we realize that we've never done it as a Christian. And it is a sacred time of worship.

[13:19] Not only is it sacred, but it's also symbolic. And what a beautiful symbol it is, but it is a symbol all the same. Don't misunderstand what Jesus said in John chapter three, verse five. Jesus answered, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

What's he saying? He's saying that unless something happens to you spiritually, you're not saved. And once that does happen, there ought to be the evidence that something happened to you spiritually in your life.

And that evidence should come through your obedience to follow the Lord. And that obedience first step is by baptism, by his example, as well as by his commission.

You follow him up physically. The physical process is evidence of the spiritual process. Baptism is by no means a means of salvation.

I want you to be clear today. We are saved by grace and not by works. There's nothing we can do to earn our salvation. There's nothing we can do to maintain our salvation. It's maintained in the cross of Christ.

[14:21] It's brought to us by the cross of Christ. We live in response to what Christ has done for us. And we live in the strength of the Holy Spirit of God dwelling within us to help us to rise above the traps that we could so easily beset us in the past.

It need not be that way for the Christian. We ought to get it right before the Lord. And when we lean upon the Lord and trust in the Lord to take care of that, he'll give us the strength to do that.

We fall in our own ways. We'll fall wayward. We'll walk away from the Lord. We won't be as faithful. Now, thank God. He's like one of my, like I was with one of my children in a parking lot. When my children were small in the parking lot, I had a hold of their hand. Now, maybe they wanted to get away from me. Maybe they didn't want to hold my hand. But you know what? They didn't get away from me. You know why? Because they wasn't in control. I had their hand. I'll rip the little arm off, but they're not going anywhere. I'm thankful that the hand of God has us and no one can snatch us out of the hand of the Father.

[15 : 26] We can rest in that. So folks, if our lives are not right, we go back to the Father. Quit straining and tensing the hold that he has on us.

Come back to him voluntarily and get right with God. It is a symbol.

It is sacred. It is a powerful symbol, but it is a symbol. Not only that, but it's standard. It's standard. The Great Commission, Matthew 28, 18 through 20, tells us Jesus says to make disciples baptizing them.

Part of his last words are to baptize. Why does he not speak of salvation? Because baptism is the symbol of salvation. He has told us not to save, because we can't save anybody, but to share and to trust him in that.

And what we share, the Holy Spirit will use. And when they come to Christ, they need to be baptized as believers. We see it again and again in the Bible, the importance of baptism.

[16 : 37] Jesus himself was baptized. The church has always been identified by baptism. It's the introduction to the church. It's the identification to the church.

It is the initiation and the induction into the church. As the church is the place for a Christian's identity, so baptism is the procedure of that identification.

Therefore, it's the standard for Christians. To not do it is disobedient. To do it is to be obedient and follow the Lord's example. And the only other ordinance we celebrate as Baptists are the Lord's Supper.

However, the bread symbolizes the body of Christ, the Lord Jesus. And the drink symbolizes the shed blood of Christ. We do it because he told us to do it.

Paul summarizes it this way. In 1 Corinthians 11, verse 23 through 26, it says, For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread.

[17 : 43] And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. But he follows that up with a serious warning.

And I want you to hear this. In verse 27, he says this, Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

Let a person examine himself then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

In other words, we need to come to the table prepared. How do you prepare to come to the table? First, you give your life to Christ.

[18 : 48] If there's never been a time in your life today when you've given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus, when you said, Lord, I know I'm a sinner, and I know I'm separated from you because of my sin, and I need you to save me, I need you to cleanse me, I need you to change me from this day forward.

If that's never happened to you, I want you to know today's the day of salvation. You can come and he'll meet you where you are. Don't wait until you clean up your life. You're not going to clean it up. He'll clean it up. He'll work with you through the Holy Spirit of God to make you everything that he would have you to be. The first step is to give your life to Christ. The second is to publicly acknowledge him through baptism.

Baptism is the initiation into the church, and if you're a born-again believer, you need to be a part of a church that preaches the word of God and stands upon the gospel.

And if you've never acknowledged Christ through baptism, I encourage you to come this morning and say, I need to tell others what Christ has already done in my life.

