

## BACK TO THE BASICS: Why Baptism?

Matthew 3:13-17<sup>i</sup>

### INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is good to see you this morning. For those of you that are guests with us today, whether you are in the room or joining us online, we say a very special welcome to you. My name is Chris Wigley, I have the privilege of serving as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. And on behalf of our church family, and our staff team, we welcome you.

We would love the opportunity to be able to connect with you. You can let us know you are here in a couple ways. You can text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you do that, a reply text will be sent with a link you can click on. That will direct you to a form that will then provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you.

Or you can stop by the information center in the lobby area. We have a gift we'd like to give you there. Again, we look forward to connecting with you.

### SERIES OVERVIEW:

We are working our way, this summer, through a teaching series we have called, "Back to the Basics." We are taking a biblical look at foundational observances and practices given to The Church. Today we turn our attention to Baptism. I want to invite you to take your bible and turn with me to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 3. We are going to look at several verses today, but our main passage of focus will be Matthew 3:13-17.

### ILLUSTRATION: Symbols in Our Culture

You know, there are certain symbols, or signs, even jingles in our culture that cause us to immediately recognize where they belong. These things have been so engrained in our brains and we can readily recognize them. Let's see if we can have a little fun this morning and play a game that I think will prove my point. I will give you a description and you blurt out what comes to your mind. Ready?

Golden arches... What's in your wallet... We are Farmers... (Nationwide is...)

Great job! Now, there is a symbol that stands above them all. A symbol of tested greatness. A symbol of nation-wide designation. A symbol of excellence. (Pull out a Dallas Cowboys jersey). The blue star! Man, I get excited when I see this symbol. Sure, it's shined brighter in decades past, but I'm still a fan!

Symbols surround our lives. They are everywhere we look, and we recognize them. This is even true of the church and there are symbols all throughout scripture.

### ILLUSTRATION: Biblical Examples

- **Rainbow** – God's covenant to never flood the earth again (which is comforting to know... last week I was getting a little concerned)
- **Ark of the Covenant** – when seen it was recognized as the presence of the Lord.
- In the New Testament there are several as well... Like the **Lord's supper, what we looked at last week, and baptism**

Today we are going to talk about baptism. One thing that I have come to realize in my 23 years of ministry is that there are a lot of questions surrounding the topic of baptism. That's because we are, in many ways, a melting pot of people coming from different backgrounds and church experiences. And our views on this subject are often tied to those backgrounds and experiences.

So, today, I want us to take off our denominational hats, and lay them aside. I want to remove the lens of our backgrounds and just examine The Bible and see if we can determine clarity of Scripture on this subject. Because here's the deal, we should not be tied to a background, or a person, an experience, or even a denomination more than being tied to The Bible. When we get to glory, God is not going to take into consideration our adherence to a denomination. He will take into account, our dependence on Jesus and His Holy Word. So, can we do that today? Let's come to the Scriptures with the desire to not read background and experiences into it but allow the Scriptures to read into us and inform us. It is my heart to be biblical before I am anything else. Amen?

So, I want us to search the Bible and answer a few questions. Questions like, "What's the big deal about baptism?" "Does baptism get us into Heaven?" "Why should someone be baptized?" "When should someone be baptized?" "How should baptism be done?" I believe the Bible answers those questions.

With that said, let's read our text for this morning. Matthew 3:13-17. *13Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

### **MESSAGE:**

Let's begin our discussion this morning with our first question. **Question #1: What is the big deal about baptism?** There are a few things that I would say:

#### **1. Jesus PRONOUNCES it as a big deal.**

In our passage we read, Jesus pointed out that His baptism was a big deal. He sought to be baptized, and John The Baptist tried to resist, yet Jesus demanded that He be baptized. Why would Jesus do such a thing? I believe He was modeling for His believers an example of obedience.

In addition to that, Jesus also commanded baptism. After His resurrection, He gathered His disciples and gave them their mission. A mission that is to continue until He comes again. Matthew 28:19-20. *"19Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

The modeling of Jesus in being baptized, and the command of Jesus to baptize, points to the fact that baptism is a big deal. It is an act that is important enough to be observed and commanded by The Lord Himself. So, in that way, baptism is a big deal. Second reason it is a big deal is that...

#### **2. Baptism PREDATES the New Testament.**

Before the New Testament, God had His people, the Jews, and they were the people who received the Law and established covenants with God. However, there were other nations around them called Gentile nations, and there were often people from those nations that desired to convert to Judaism. So, a system was in place to induct what were called "proselytes." Three parts to the induction. Circumcision, sacrifice, and immersion of oneself into water. This

immersion was to illustrate that one was "dying" to the Gentile world, the old way is gone, my old identity is gone, and they then become a new person with a new life and relationship with the one true God.<sup>ii</sup>

Fast forward to just prior to Jesus' earthly ministry, John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of Christ. John urged repentance and he used baptism as a symbol of that repentance. So, everyone that submitted themselves to the baptism by John the Baptist was confessing their sinfulness and that in order to establish a new relationship with God. A death, burial and resurrection was required. This was ultimately fulfilled by Jesus at the cross.

Baptism is a big deal because Jesus pronounces it, baptism predates the New Testament, and thirdly, ...

#### **3. Baptism was PRIORITIZED by the church.**

The book of Acts is an incredible book chronicling the birth and work of the early church. In Acts, we see The Church prioritize baptism.

#### **ILLUSTRATION: Verses in Acts**

Acts 2:41 - *"So those who received His word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls."*

Acts 8 - When Philip preached in Samaria and a bunch of Samaritans believed and were baptized. Also in Acts 8, Philip baptizes an Ethiopian after he responds to the gospel.

Acts 9 - Saul, who became Paul, had a come to Jesus moment. He surrendered to Jesus and was baptized as soon as possible.

Acts 10:47 - Cornelius and his soldiers were baptized after hearing the Gospel.

Acts 16:15 - Lydia was baptized on the same day she trusted Jesus.

Acts 16:34 - The Philippian jailor believed at midnight and he and his family were baptized before dawn.

Acts 18:8 - Paul preached in Corinth, people got saved and those people were then immediately baptized.

You get the point, right? In The New Testament church made baptism a priority. Baptism is a big deal because Jesus pronounces it so, it predates the New Testament but also, the church prioritized it.

But I want to be sure to make something very clear. The early church maintained a priority of baptism, but while there was not a separation of time

between baptism and salvation, the bible certainly does teach a distinction between the two. Which brings us to our second question this morning.

## Question #2: Does Baptism get us into Heaven?

Acts 2:41 again. *“So those who **received** His word were baptized...”* Notice “received” is in the past tense, meaning that they had already received the word of the Lord. I believe this to be salvation. Salvation is what restores our relationship with God and thereby granting us eternal life. So, baptism, even though it is a priority, and it is not separated from salvation in the Scriptures, it is just a symbol.

### ILLUSTRATION: Wedding Ring

Take for example my wedding ring. When you see the ring on my finger it tells you that I am married. But what if I take the wedding ring off, am I still married? Yes! What makes me married? My commitment to Cathy under God. What if a single person were to put on my wedding ring? Does that make them married? No! But, when I wear this ring, it tells everyone about a real, love relationship that exists in my life between me and my beautiful bride.<sup>iii</sup> But the ring is just a symbol of that, it is not the commitment in and of itself. The same is true with baptism.

If baptism is merely a symbol, and not required for salvation, then it brings up our third question which is... **Question #3: Why should someone be baptized?** A few things I would say to answer this question:

#### 1. Obedience.

Baptism is the first step of obedience when you surrender your life to Jesus. Because we are responding to Jesus’ command in the Great Commission. Matthew 28:19-20 that we read earlier. Look at the passage again.

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

The directive here is to make disciples. That’s the command. Everything else is either modifying or describing “making disciples.” Follow me, here.

The first thing listed that as we are going, as we are making disciples, is to baptize them. Then, we teach them everything that Jesus has commanded. In other words, the first step of obedience in following Jesus is to be baptized. It’s

not to know all the commandments or to attend a certain class or to pray about it. We don’t first become a mature Christian and then get baptized but rather Jesus is saying as soon as you believe, be baptized! After you are baptized, we teach, we walk, we grow disciples of Jesus.

This is important to realize because I often hear people say that they are not ready yet for baptism. That is often rooted in the idea that they need to obtain some level of understanding before they get baptized.

Listen, the only thing you need to know in order to be baptized is Jesus and the symbolism behind baptism. That was certainly the case for the early believers! They didn’t know ecclesiology, missiology, eschatology, or any other -ology before they were baptized. They simply surrendered to Jesus and began doing what He did and then they grew in their knowledge of those things.

Why should someone be baptized even though it doesn’t secure your salvation? Number 1, obedience. Secondly, ...

#### 2. Identity.

Baptism is proclaiming a new identity. We saw that was the case in Gentiles desiring to convert to Judaism. That significance has not changed.

Romans 6:3. *<sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into his death?* Baptism is an identity thing.

### ILLUSTRATION: Jersey

Take this jersey for example, I didn’t bring this jersey out in hopes of becoming a fan. I brought the jersey out because I am already a fan. I’ve even got my Dallas Cowboys socks on! I just want everyone else to know that I am a fan. The same is true of baptism. You don’t get baptized in hopes of **becoming** a follower of Jesus. You get baptized because you **are** a follower of Jesus, you have been given that identity.

Baptism is a public declaration of yielding to Christ. It is the recognition that you have surrendered to team Jesus. Paul said it this way in Galatians 2:20, *“<sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.**”* When we are baptized, we proclaim to the world that we have aligned our lives to Jesus as Lord. We have followed His example. We have surrendered to Him.

Why should someone be baptized? Obedience and identity. Thirdly, ...

### 3. Marker.

Baptism is a kind of marker in our lives that helps us understand what a relationship with Jesus means. When we come to Jesus, we die to sin, and we become a new creation. Paul used the picture of baptism to illustrate this truth.

Romans 6:3-8. *<sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup>We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup>For one who has died has been set free from sin. <sup>8</sup>Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*

#### ILLUSTRATION: Souvenirs

Let me illustrate it this way. When we go on vacations, we purchase souvenirs. Something that will serve as a reminder of the trip. I have made it a habit recently to purchase ornaments on trips that we take. I want to, at Christmas time, remember the trip. It serves as a marker for an experience that we had.

Baptism can be that kind of marker. It is a reminder, an event to look back on, that you surrendered your life to Jesus, that you died to your old sinful self, and you have been saved to walk in a new way. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit empowers that new life. Is baptism necessary to know that? No, but it does, according to Paul, serve as a powerful reminder of that profound truth.

Just like the ornament is not the trip, it is a reminder of that trip. Baptism, therefore, is a marker, a reminder, that tells us that we have died to sin, and we are also to continually die to sin.

So, we've answered the questions of why Baptism is a big deal, and that it is just symbolism, and why someone should be baptized. In the time we have left this morning, let's answer the final question...

#### Question #4: How should we be baptized?

I want to answer this question by simply looking at the examples given to us in Scripture. Two things I want to examine. When should we be baptized? And what mode of baptism does Scripture set?

### 1. Baptism, in the Scripture, comes AFTER salvation.

There are two main approaches regarding the timing of baptism. Pedobaptism, a word referring to infants. The other called credobaptism, or creed. Credobaptists baptize someone following a statement of faith, belief.

In the New Testament, there is not an indication that infants were ever baptized.<sup>iv</sup> The examples we get are only those that are baptized following a profession of faith in Jesus as Lord. Credobaptism. The closest we get to infant baptism in the New Testament is the case of the Philippian jailer. Remember the story? Paul and Silas are in prison, singing hymns, the earth shook, and their chains fell, and jail cells opened. The jailer was going to take his own life because he failed to keep proper watch. Paul stopped him, shared the gospel with him. Then the jailer took them home and Scripture says the jailer and his entire family were baptized.

Who all is in his family? We are not given the ages of his children. However, there is a major clue in the text that leads us to the conclusion that they were not infants. Acts 16:32 says, *<sup>32</sup>And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.* Speaking the word of the Lord to everyone in the house communicates that everyone in the house was of age to hear the gospel and respond to it for themselves. Thus, having expressed belief in Jesus as Lord, they were then baptized.

Perhaps one of the clearest indications that credobaptism is the practice of the Scriptures is in Acts 2:41. *<sup>41</sup>So those who received his word were baptized...* The prerequisite for baptism is to receive the gospel. It is for this reason that we practice baptism after salvation, following a profession of faith.

The second aspect to how to be baptized deals with the mode of baptism.

### 2. Baptism, in the Scripture, is by IMMERSION.

Some churches pour or sprinkle while others immerse. What does the bible say? Well, there is no passage in the New Testament by which any other form of baptism was utilized other than immersion. John 3:23 highlights this. *<sup>23</sup>John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there,*

*and people were coming and being baptized.* The indication of water being plentiful means that there was enough water to immerse. If sprinkling or pouring were in view, then John's baptisms could have been done anywhere.<sup>v</sup>

Even in the case of Jesus' baptism, which we read as our main text, verse 16 of Matthew 3, "*16And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water...*" To come up from the water is to say that he was down in the water. Every example we have in the New Testament uses the same language.

Also, it is important to take notices of the word translated "baptized." It is a word that means to completely submerge. That is the original intent of the word. So, every time we read the word "baptize" in the New Testament, we need to think immerse.

Now, I want you to hear me clearly. Because the evidence of the Scripture points to baptism by immersion, following a profession of faith, I do not want to take away from the significance of infant baptism. Churches that practice that do so as a way of following the Old Testament practice of circumcision. So, it is a ceremony for parents to express a desire to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of The Lord. We have something similar. We do Family Dedication. We don't want to confuse the two, dedication and baptism.

If you were baptized as an infant, and you have come to a belief in Jesus as Lord, I would encourage you to also follow through with believer's baptism. And likewise, if you were baptized by a mode other than immersion, I would encourage you to consider two things: 1) the example set for us in the New Testament, and 2) join in on the display that baptism by immersion paints. To buried with Christ in baptism and raised to be a new creation.

**CONCLUSION:** I want to ask the band to come back and lead us in a time of response.

Really and truly, there are 2 groups of people here today that ***do not*** need to be baptized. Only 2 groups of people that ***DO NOT*** need to be baptized. If you're not in one of these 2 groups, you need to get baptized.

**Group number 1** – people who do not have a relationship with Jesus. If you do not have a relationship with Jesus then hear me clearly, you do not need a baptism ceremony, you need a Savior. Baptism is reserved for those that have

trusted Jesus as the Lord of their lives. Now, I beg you to come to Christ this morning and then follow through in believer's baptism. That's group number 1.

**Group number 2** – people who have been baptized by immersion following a profession of faith do not need to be baptized. Everyone else needs to be baptized.

You know, I am convinced that baptism can be a pride issue. We either don't want to be embarrassed or we think it's not necessary or maybe we are tied to a certain tradition. We all understand pride. Can I just challenge us a little right here? Think about what we are saying when we let pride get in the way of following through in believer's baptism as taught by the bible.

Think about those first Christians. The persecution they were signing up for by being baptized publicly. Listen, the early believers were not persecuted because they said a prayer. They were persecuted because of what they did; being baptized. Baptism was a denouncing of the old way and the acknowledgment of following a new authority. In Rome, it was high treason to acknowledge any authority other than Caesar. By being baptized, the early believers were committing to a life of persecution.

And here's the deal... at our church, when we are baptized, we don't come up out of the water to persecution, we arise out of the water to applause. What kind of a statement is it when we are too prideful to be baptized? Let's just agree to throw pride out the window and instead choose obedience over pride.

I'm going to pray and then I want us to respond. [PRAY]

## ENDNOTES:

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<sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation of this message: John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1985; John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, TradLife Press: New York, 2019; GotQuestions.org, “*What Does The Bible Say About How to Get Baptized?*” published at: <https://www.gotquestions.org/how-to-get-baptized.html>; David Mathis, “*What Does The Bible Say About Baptism?*” published by Desiring God, accessed: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-does-the-bible-say-about-baptism>; Dr. Ray Pritchard, “*What is Baptism? Its Meaning & Importance in Christianity*,” article published by Christianity.com, accessed: <https://www.christianity.com/jesus/following-jesus/baptism/what-does-baptism-mean.html>; Stephen Wellum, “*Water Baptism*,” essay published by The Gospel Coalition, accessed: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/water-baptism/>; Dr. Jack Graham, “*A Testimony in Baptism*,” article published by PowerPoint Ministries, accessed: <https://jackgraham.org/resource/a-testimony-in-baptism/>; Vance Pitman, “*What is Baptism?*” sermon preached at Hope Church in Las Vegas, NV, Sunday, April 8, 2018; Pastor Skip Heitzig, “*Wanted: Dead or Alive*,” sermon preached at Calvary Church in Albuquerque, NM, Sunday, November 17, 1991.

<sup>ii</sup> Taken from John MacArthur’s Sermon, “*Understanding Baptism*,” preached on January 29, 1989, accessed: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-57/understanding-baptism>.

<sup>iii</sup> Adapted from an illustration by Vance Pitman in his sermon mentioned above.

<sup>iv</sup> GotQuestions.org, “*What Does The Bible Say About How to Get Baptized?*” published at: <https://www.gotquestions.org/how-to-get-baptized.html>.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.