

Romans 3:19-31
The Salvation Symbolized in Baptism
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Beloved, this Lord's Day we have had the privilege of witnessing a baptism. That is always a joyful occasion for two reasons. First, when a person submits to baptism with water, he is at that time publicly identifying with Christ, and Christ's church is at that time officially receiving him into its number. A person's baptism with water is a public statement that he now identifies not with the world but with God's people.

If we can compare the visible church to an army, baptism with water is when a person first dons the uniform that officially and publicly identifies him with God's army on earth. As it says in Galatians 3:27:

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

At baptism, a person puts on Christ like a uniform and identifies with Christ's church. Just wearing a uniform doesn't in and of itself make a person a good soldier or even a real soldier, but donning that uniform is still very important. After all, we would have little respect for a person who claimed to be in the army but then refused to wear its uniform because he didn't want to be publicly identified with the army. We should have a similar lack

of respect for a person who claims to be a Christian and yet refuses to submit to baptism with water because doing so would publicly and officially identify Him with Christ and Christ's church.

A time of baptism is joyous because it is when a person is officially numbered with God's people and officially identified with God's people. There is a second reason why a baptism is a joyous occasion, a reason that has to do not merely with outward identification but with inward spiritual realities. Baptism with water is joyous because it visually portrays the salvation that is ours through a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. This second point is what I want to examine this morning. I want to look at salvation as it is symbolized by baptism with water. I want to do this under three headings, the **picture**, the **process** and the **product**.

Let's begin by looking at the picture, or the symbolism of baptism. What is being symbolized when we pour out some water from above on a person in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit? The answer to that question is really rather simple. Most basically, baptism with water symbolizes baptism with the Holy Spirit. We see this most clearly in Acts chapter 11 where Peter explained to some skeptical Jewish Christians why he had baptized the Roman centurion Cornelius. Peter explained that he baptized Cornelius with water because God had already baptized Cornelius with the Holy Spirit. How could Peter deny Cornelius the symbol when God had already given Cornelius the symbolized spiritual

reality? Here are Peter's own words:

Acts 11:15-17

- 15 "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.
- 16 "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'
- 17 "If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"

Well, if baptism with water symbolizes baptism with the Holy Spirit, what does the Bible tell us about baptism with the Holy Spirit? The Bible consistently describes baptism with the Holy Spirit as a pouring out from above. Through the prophecy of the prophet Joel, God said, "I will **pour out** of My Spirit on all flesh." Peter on the day of Pentecost proclaimed that Joel's prophesy had been fulfilled and then said this about Jesus:

"Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He **poured out** this which you now see and hear."

Titus 3:5-6 says,

"... not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to [God's] mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

whom He **poured out** on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior ..."

In these verses, the Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit as being poured out from above like water. The Bible uses water as a symbol for the Holy Spirit. Water cleanses our bodies, and the Holy Spirit cleanses our souls. Water gives life to our bodies, and the Holy Spirit gives life to our souls. Thus we read in Isaiah 44:3

"For I will **pour water** on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will **pour My Spirit** on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring."

Thus we read in John 7:37-39:

"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; ..."

Baptism with water is symbolic of baptism with the Holy Spirit. And when the water of baptism comes down upon a person from above, that is symbolic of God's pouring out His Holy Spirit upon His people as a cleansing and life-giving flow.

We have looked at the picture in the sense of the symbolism of

baptism with water. Our next point is the **process**. By the process, I am referring not to baptism with water itself, but to the spiritual baptism which is symbolized by baptism with water. In other words, how does the Holy Spirit cleanse us and quicken us spiritually? What is His process for accomplishing that? He does so by putting us into covenant union with Jesus. God through the work of the Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ or immerses us into Christ. In ancient secular Greek literature, the most common uses of the Greek word we translate as "baptize" are references to shipwrecks and drownings. The Greek word most commonly referred to permanent immersions. There are a few times where the word was used to refer to the soul as immersed in the body. This is the sense in which Jesus pours out His Holy Spirit upon us from above to baptize us into Himself and into His saving work. It is a permanent immersion. We are put into Christ, and we stay in union with Christ. We experience this union with Christ as a faith relationship. God pours out His Holy Spirit upon us to enable us to believe in Christ as our experience of this permanent covenant union.

We have some passages which talk about this permanent immersion. Let's begin with Galatians 3:27, which says,

27 "For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ."

When God saves us from our sin, He pours out His Holy Spirit upon us, and the Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ, immerses us into Christ, puts us into covenant union with Christ.

Let's also look at Romans 6:3:

3 "Or do you not know that as many of us as were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were **baptized into His death**?"

God pours out the Holy Spirit from above who immerses us into a permanent covenant union with Jesus, and to be in covenant union with Jesus is to be in covenant union with His saving work, including His atoning death upon the cross.

Our last point is the **product** or the result. Now I am not here talking about the product of water baptism. I am talking about the product of that baptism with the Spirit which water baptism symbolizes. And the product of baptism with the Spirit is salvation based upon that union with Christ which we experience as a faith relationship with Jesus.

Our Scripture reading for today talks about the salvation which we have in Christ. In Romans 3, verses 24 and 25, Paul uses three major words to describe how Jesus saves us:

"being **justified** freely by His grace through the **redemption** that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a **propitiation** by His blood ..."

Let's close by looking quickly at each of these words as an explanation of the salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus.

The first word used in this passage to describe our salvation in Christ is **justification**, a word from the legal context of the courthouse. When an accused person goes before a judge, the judge is going to do one of two things. He is either going to justify the man or condemn him. To condemn means to declare guilty and thus liable to punishment. To justify means to declare righteous and thus not subject to punishment.

Now we have all broken the law of God. We are all guilty. And the book of Proverbs says that a good judge does not justify the guilty (Proverbs 17:15). A good judge does not declare the guilty to be righteous. If that is the case, then how is God going to justify the ungodly, which is what we are, and still be a good judge? To use the wording of Romans 3:26, how is God going to be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus? The answer is our covenant union with Jesus together with the principle of "double jeopardy." A judge cannot justly punish the same crime twice. And our crimes have already been punished. Jesus paid for our sins by His suffering in our place. The reason God can justify the ungodly (Romans 4:5) is because Jesus died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6). To use the language of Romans 6, as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. His death is now our death and the payment for our sins.

Jesus also lived a perfect life and has a record of perfect obedience. Jesus has imputed this perfect record to those who believe in Him. We are not only washed with Jesus' blood but also clothed in Jesus' righteousness. If we are in covenant union

with Christ, God will not condemn us. Christ has already suffered for our sins, and justice will not allow those sins to be punished twice. God will instead pronounce us fully righteous in His sight. Christ has given us a legal standing of absolute righteousness based on our covenant union with Him and His death and His righteousness. That is what is meant by justification.

The next word in this passage used to describe salvation in Christ is **redemption**. Redemption is the buying and freeing of a slave, or the freeing of a kidnap victim through the paying of a ransom.

The devil has taken all sinners captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26). Satan argues that all sinners belong to him because sinners are law breakers and thus outlaws. As such, they are citizens of the kingdom of darkness under Satan's rule. They are his hostages, his captives, his slaves. The only remedy to this plight is redemption, the payment of a ransom to purchase freedom. We have no means to pay this price, but Jesus came to make this payment for us:

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Mark 10:45

Jesus paid the ransom price by His suffering upon the cross. His suffering in our place satisfied the demands of God's law against us and thus freed us from the claims of Satan.

But how is this possible? Jesus is only one Person. He suffered on the cross for only a few hours. How could that suffering by One for a limited period of time redeem a multitude without number from an eternity of punishment? Jesus may be but one Person, but one gold coin is worth more than a barrel of pennies. In Jesus Christ, the image of humanity was stamped upon the gold of divinity. Through His humanity, Jesus was able to experience human suffering and thus experience a human punishment in our place. Through His divinity, His suffering had an infinite worth. His atoning sacrifice is a sufficient ransom to redeem all of God's people, even though they are a multitude beyond numbering (Revelation 7:9). His suffering is a sufficient ransom to redeem God's people from all their punishment, even though they could suffer for an eternity in a lake of fire and not complete the payment. Through His saving work, Jesus earned the riches of saving merit which He freely gives to His people. The riches of His grace are exceeding riches, immeasurable riches, incomparable riches (Ephesians 2:8). Indeed, the riches of Christ are unsearchable (Ephesians 3:8). They are an unfathomable ocean of merit whose depths cannot be plumbed and whose shores cannot be seen. The gold coin of Jesus' Person and work is of more than sufficient value to redeem all of God's people from their spiritual captivity and to satisfy all of the devil's legal claims against them. These riches of redemption are ours if we are in covenant union with Jesus.

The last word is this passage used to describe salvation in Christ

is **propitiation**. This is a word taken from the worship in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple. Propitiation is the satisfaction of God's righteous wrath against our sins. This concept is rooted in the imagery of the yearly Day of Atonement in the liturgy of the old covenant.

In the Holy of Holies of the Old Testament temple, the Shekinah glory of God sat enthroned on the ark of the covenant, seated between the two cherubim. Inside the ark were the two stone tablets of the law, the written record of our covenant obligation to our Sovereign Lord. The Holy of Holies was isolated from the rest of the temple by a veil "woven with an artistic design of cherubim" (Exodus 36:35). This was the imagery of Adam's expulsion from the presence of God in the garden of Eden. When Adam had sinned, God drove him out and placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). The cherubim are the guardians of God's holiness. Their embroidered presence on the veil represented our isolation from God due to our sin. The law of God on the stone tablets in the ark testified to our sinful transgression of the covenant.

Under the old covenant, no one could enter the Holy of Holies at any time, except for one man on one day of the year. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest of Israel entered the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed animal on the mercy seat atop the ark of the covenant. This sprinkled blood, the symbol of the violent death of an innocent victim, came between God and the stone tablets of the law which testified to

His people's sins. Because of this bloody covering, God saw their sins no longer. The death of a substitute victim satisfied God's righteous anger. His just wrath was appeased.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the old covenant Day of Atonement. If we are in covenant union with Jesus, He is both our Sacrifice and our Priest . The blood of bulls and goats never truly took away sin, but the sacrifice of Jesus was effectual. It did indeed appease God's wrath against the sins of God's people. After Jesus cried out upon the cross, "It is finished!" and after He yielded up His spirit in death, the separating veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Jesus opened the way for His people to come near to holy God. Therefore, as the writer of Hebrews says, we have boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19). Because of the priestly work of Jesus, we who believe in Him are now at peace with holy God.

Beloved, baptism is a beautiful picture of God's salvation. Jesus pours out His Holy Spirit upon you. The Holy Spirit immerses you into covenant union with Jesus. In covenant union with Jesus, Jesus becomes your justification, your redemption, your propitiation, your salvation. The waters of baptism symbolize all of this, but the waters of baptism will not in and of themselves save you. They instead point you to the One who can.

You need to recognize your own need of the spiritual cleansing and spiritual life which only Jesus can give. You need to receive Christ and rest upon Him alone for salvation. Pray that God will use the gospel message that is visually portrayed in baptism

with water as a means of grace in your life. Pray that God will by His grace enable you to look to Jesus alone for salvation. Do so, and all that baptism pictures will be realized in your life.