

Jesus, Baptism, and You

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Our text for today and for a few more weeks is in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 28:18-20, what's known as the Great Commission, rightly so. If it's great, it probably needs some attention. We probably need to spend some time on it. Matthew 28:18,

18 ... Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

There's that kingship again, right? Absolute sovereignty. And what did he say after having asserted his authority? This is Jesus after his resurrection, before his ascension giving the marching orders to his disciples and in a representative sense to the church that would follow after them. Here is what we are to do. Here is what we are to understand. Here is the message that we take out to the world. Verse 19,

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The church exists to make disciples. The primary goal of the church is not to feed the poor, certainly not to entertain the masses, we are to go and to make disciples of the nations. We are to go, we're under command to go and to proclaim to everyone everywhere that King Jesus calls them into his kingdom, he calls them to repent and believe in him and that is what we are to do. The primary command in this text is make disciples, you see it there in verse 19, "Go therefore and make disciples." Grammatically speaking, that is the central command, going, baptizing, teaching, just shows us how disciples are to be made.

So Jesus tells us to go out and to tell others about him, to go out and to tell others about his salvation, to call them into his kingdom. To make disciples, to just generally make a comment or two about that, to make disciples means to bring men so that they are learners under the authority of Christ; to bring men into submission to Christ; to assert his authority which he had just asserted in verse 18, to assert it, to proclaim it as we've done the past three weeks, God's promised King, God's rejected King, God's resurrected King, we assert his authority in this way and then we call men to submit themselves to that

authority, to believe in Christ, to turn. As Jesus said, we read it just in the Scripture reading, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Well, the kingdom is at hand when the King is present. Well, the King is here. He's in our midst. He's with us always. And so he's asserting his authority as his word is proclaimed.

So we call men and we tell them that you must receive Christ by faith. We tell them that you must bow to him as Lord and King. We tell them that you must accept his authority as your infallible teacher because all authority belongs to him. He is the way, the truth, and the life. We're not at liberty to disagree with what he says in his word and what his word says about him. We don't have that liberty. We're not lord. It's not like we study Jesus' teaching and then we decide what's acceptable to us, or what conforms with the spirit of the age, and we'll take that and reject the rest of it. Jesus isn't Lord when you teach that way; he's not Lord when you proclaim that way. And so we proclaim everything that Jesus said. We proclaim his difficult sayings. We proclaim his Lordship. We proclaim everything about what the word of God says knowing that this book bears the imprimatur of the King of the Universe. The Old Testament pointed to Christ, Christ pre-authenticated and sent out the apostles who would be the ones who wrote the New Testament. This word is about him.

So that's what we proclaim, you are to receive Christ by faith, bow to him as Lord, become his disciple, believe him as your infallible teacher. The question is for young and old alike here today: have you responded to him like that? Is your life in submission to the Lord Jesus Christ? I'm not asking whether you're living a life of perfection, but who is on the throne of your being? Who is King in your life? It's either Christ or it's you and there is no in-between. It's not a co-royalty. Jesus isn't your co-pilot, as the bumper stickers used to say. Christ is Lord or you are lost. It's that simple. He's Lord or you're lost and that's bound up in this command to make disciples.

Look at verse 19 with me and notice the sequence in which Christ explains these things and what he makes the focus of what we are to do because we're only going to focus on one particular aspect of it, just following the text as it unfolds here in Matthew 28:19. He says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations," and he immediately says, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." In the name of the Triune God, men are to be baptized as they become disciples of Christ. This is the plan of Christ. Baptism is an ongoing part of making disciples and that's what we want to consider today is this whole matter of Jesus' baptism and you.

We want to answer four critical questions about baptism here this morning. We have a baptistery off to my left. We often baptize people on Sunday morning as we have opportunity to do so. We've taught on baptism in the past. We have a standing folder out there, blue folder for people to learn about baptism. Well, I want to come back and emphasize it again for a couple of reasons. One is that new people are coming into our church all of the time and if you're new within, say within the past several weeks, several months, you're kind of new and getting acquainted with our church, I just want you to know how welcome you are, how glad we are that you're with us, and that we would love it if you found that Truth Community Church was where you wanted to make your

permanent home. It's important for you to know where we stand on the issues of baptism and the centrality that it holds in our philosophy of ministry. Beyond that, in addition to that, is that we have a number of families as your kids are growing up, you know, they're entering into their teenage years, they're sorting out where they stand with Christ and all of that, they need to hear these things also. We can't just assume the fact that we taught something 4, 5, 6 years ago, that there's an ongoing recognition of the centrality and the importance of it now. One of the ways that you lose a generation is that you don't emphasize and repeat fundamental truths as another generation is coming up. I have a responsibility as a pastor to emphasize the centrality and importance of these things.

Now in those blue folders out back, you'll find a document that has our philosophy of baptism. I'm not going to go through everything that's in there. One of the things that's unique about us is that we don't make a practice of baptizing really young children. We don't baptize infants and we don't baptize really young children and that paper in that folder will explain why. There are important biblical reasons why we do things the way that we do and that's just for follow-up. If you have questions, you can pick up one of those folders on your way out this morning. That's just by way of preview of some other things that won't be covered here today.

What four questions will we cover here today? Well, first of all, we want to answer the question: why do we practice baptism? Why do we practice baptism? When we remodeled this beautiful worship center in which we meet, why did we go to such trouble to make a prominent place for the baptistery? Why would we do that? Why is baptism important? Well, beloved, we practice baptism because Jesus Christ is the Lord of the church, he's the head of the church, and he says as we make disciples we are to baptize them. Well, as a local church, we need to have a way to do that, then, and so this baptistery to my left becomes an expression of our obedience to Christ. We want to make room for that and have occasion for that in the life of our church. It's important enough to spend money on it and so we practice baptism because Christ is the Lord of the church, the church belongs to him, and he says this is what you are to do.

Look at it there in verse 19 with me. He says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Now look, any church that's making a claim to following Christ has to deal with this command. Now baptism does not make you a Christian. You can't go into external water and guarantee that an inner change is going to take place. For those of you inclined toward theological language, we utterly reject the concept of baptismal regeneration, the idea that baptism can give you new life. That's not true. That's not biblical no matter what Anglicans may say about it, and the Catholic Church and others, for that matter, Church of Christ and things of that nature. Baptism does not make you a Christian but Jesus Christ commands it for every true believer as a public testimony to the reality of his salvation. Christ command this as a means of making a public identification with him that is consistent with the inner change that the Spirit of God has worked in your heart.

And let me just say this, I say this gently but I want to say it clearly, that if you're in your more mature years, by mature I mean from your mid-teen years on into adulthood here,

I'm gonna make a statement that may rattle your ears a little bit but we need to see this and understand it. If you have not been baptized, something is wrong. Something's wrong if you have not been baptized as a believer in Christ, because Christ says that his disciples will be baptized and it's not just in a predictive sense but he's saying that, "This is My command. This is what I want My disciples to do. I want My church to make disciples and I want those disciples to be baptized in the name of the Triune God." And so it's not that a person has to be baptized to be saved, that's not the point, but the point is that baptism is a natural first expression of obedience to Christ if you truly know him, and so if you truly know him and you've not been baptized, something's wrong and your conscience should be striking you now saying, "Oh man, what's going on here?" Or if you just have no interest in baptism, "Why would I do that and I'm not interested in that," then it's an indication that you're not a Christian and if you're not a Christian, you're on the path to hell. That's a problem. You see, if you've never been baptized, something's wrong and I can't tell you exactly what it is as I speak to you as a large group like this, but you should have it in your mind if you've not been baptized, something is wrong because Christ commands it and you are in disobedience to the command of Christ in that condition.

So why do we practice baptism? We practice it because Christ commands it. Now most of you know that I spent many years in the state of California before we moved to Cincinnati and we started Truth Community. I remember an older woman who was, she was probably in her 70s or 80s and she was one of these ladies that her hair was always perfect, you know, and she refused to be baptized. She professed Christ but she refused to be baptized and someone asked her, said, "Why are you being so stubborn on this? I know you believe in the Lord." And she said, "Look, I get my hair done. I don't want this messing up my hair." That's not a very good reason. People have all kinds of odd reasons for rejecting baptism. You know, the command of the Lord, here's my point, that's kind of a fun little illustration of a much more serious point, the command of the Lord triumphs over, it stands over any earthly objection that you might make to it. You say, "But I'm afraid to speak in public." Well, I think you should fear Christ more than you fear men, don't you? You say, "But, you know, I don't know what to say." Well, we have things in place to help you know what to say, to help you express that faith in Christ. "Well, maybe my family will reject me." Do you know what? Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." Every objection that you would raise up to being baptized as a believer in Christ is demolished by the authority of Christ. There is no excuse for it.

Now sometimes people aren't physically able to be baptized. Sometimes, and there are ways that we can work around that. But 98% of us have no physical reason that it keeps us from stepping into the baptistery and giving testimony to Christ. And so we just need to stop with the excuses, stop with the ignoring of it, and come to grips with the fact that Christ commands this, and as a church we obey that command and we take it seriously and we treat it earnestly, and there's a reason why we don't make a joke out of baptism. We think baptism is a serious matter. Someone was telling me that they heard recently of a baptism where somebody ran into the baptistery and did a cannonball jumping into the water, you know, supposedly as an expression of some kind of, I don't know what,

eagerness or whatever. We don't do stuff like that here. That just turns it into a travesty, a freak show. No, we treat it joyfully but we treat it earnestly because baptism is commanded by the Lord of the universe and we think that matters. We think that matters.

So why do we practice baptism? We do it because Jesus commanded us. Let's ask a second question: who should be baptized? Who should be baptized? And the answer to that question is that everyone who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ should be baptized and there's a really wonderful way in the unfolding of revelation, the progress of revelation that helps us see this very plainly from God's word.

So stay with me here. In Matthew 28, Jesus commands his disciples and says, "Go out. Make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Okay, good. Now how did the disciples who heard that command understand it? What did they do with it when they went out and began in ministry? You see, we're not left simply to what Jesus said in these words and then we have to fill in the gaps ourselves, we have the testimony of the early church recorded for us in the book of Acts which shows us exactly the way that this should be done and we're going to look at a number of passages in Acts rather quickly, maybe seven or eight, I don't know, I didn't choose to count them before I stepped in, but just as a summary statement before we look at them, here's what I want you to see, beloved, is that people were baptized in the New Testament upon confessing faith in Jesus Christ as they heard the word of God. People were baptized upon confessing faith in Jesus Christ as they heard the word of God. Every aspect of that is important. People heard the word of God, they believed in Christ, and they were baptized as a consequence of their faith.

Scripture shows us people being baptized who have done this, what I'm about to say, they have made an intelligent volitional response to Christ. They have intelligently understood the message that was preached to them, they have exercised faith in Christ, and then they are baptized. There is a mental, intelligent understanding of the Gospel and a response of faith and repentance in Christ that comes in the context of baptism, and we're going to see this as we go through several passages.

Turn to Acts 2 with me, please, and we're just going to bounce on the top of the waves of these passages. Acts 2:38. Peter in Acts 2 had preached a lengthy sermon. The word of God had been preached to his audience and he said in verse 36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified." And so notice he's preaching just to the Jews at this point, but he says, "Let all of you in Israel know." There is this universal appeal, this universal aspect that goes out from his preaching saying, "I want you all to know that this Christ that you crucified is Lord." And in verse 37, "when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" There's this volitional aspect. "We have to do something in response to what we've heard. Tell us what it is that we are to do. We just crucified the Messiah, we're in big trouble here! How can we find mercy from the hands of God for what we've done?"

Now look, beloved, those of you here, you didn't literally crucify the Messiah like they had but your hands are dripping with the blood of guilt of your violations of the law of God, of your lying, of your adultery, of your thieving ways, of your refusal to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind. It's the same question, the same question they asked is the same question that you must ask. "I'm guilty before God. I can't change my spots. I'm a leopard and I can't change my spots. I have no power to remove my own guilt. What shall I do?"

Well, look at verse 38, "Peter said to them, 'Repent,'" turn from your sin, in other words, "and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.' And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'" You see, the word of God was preached to them and they're pricked in their conscience, "What do we do?" And he goes on and he continues to instruct them in the word of God in verse 40, "many other words he solemnly testified. 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'" So then, verse 41, "those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls."

The preaching of the word of God brought a spirit of conviction upon them. They realized their helplessness, and into that helplessness Peter spoke the command and promise of Christ. The command: repent. Repent and as part of your repentance, as a manifestation of the trueness of your repentance, be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins." But it wasn't just command, it was promise as well. It was promise. He says, verse 39, "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off." See again the universal nature of it, for everyone who would fall under these words. You know, this is for you.

I'm gonna talk about this more in coming weeks but the reason that we come to Christ and what we proclaim to men and the basis upon which men come to Christ is twofold and it is nothing in you that is the basis upon which you know you can come to Christ. You can come to Christ because Christ commands you to come. You are to respond to that and his command, you say, "Lord, I come in response to Your command. I know I'm unworthy. I know I'm guilty but You command me to come, therefore Lamb of God, I come." Because he promises. He says in John 6:37, "The one who comes to Me I'll never cast out." There's a command in one hand, a promise on the other. "You must come. I will receive you if you come." And there is this gracious manifestation of the glory and grace and love of God in the midst of our recognition of our guilt where he says, "I will receive you. Now come to Me." And that is the basis upon which men respond to Christ and the outward manifestation of that inward change is the act of baptism. They received the word, they repented, they were baptized. So that, to answer the question who should be baptized, it's those who have repented and believed in Christ.

Now you go on in Acts, look at Acts 8, and one of the things that I think is really helpful, there's a desire among some and there's a practice of some to reduce salvation to just a

formula. You pray this prayer and it's just like there's magical words of incantation that they have to use or they think the Gospel hasn't been preached or people haven't really responded if they don't fit into that. Scripture doesn't present it that way. Scripture uses a lot of different terminology to express the same reality, and if you look at Acts 8:12, you'll see that the word "repentance" isn't used but "believed" is, and they believed the good news.

Look at Acts 8:12, "when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike." What was the intelligent response? They heard the word of God, they believed the good news and therefore they were baptized. They believed in response to the word, having believed they were baptized. That's the biblical pattern.

You can look at Acts 16:14, "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening," she was listening as Paul spoke to her, the word of God was being spoken to her, "and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us." Paul came preaching the word. The Lord as he must do, opened her heart and she believed the things that she had heard. The Lord opened her mind, gave her understanding, opened her heart, gave her a new heart as Ezekiel says, and in response she believed, and as a result of believing she was baptized. Her heart had been opened to respond.

So we've seen this described as repentance and being baptized, receiving the word and being baptized, believing the good news and being baptized, their hearts were opened and they were baptized. Do you see the pattern? The word of God is giving them a foundation. Now that tells us something really important, is that before people are baptized we need to be careful about what we're doing. We need to somehow, we need to do what we can to make sure that they've truly understood the word, that they've been under, somehow they've been under a ministry of the word and that they are responding to truth, not simply an emotional appeal like is given at an altar call, or not simply because they want to go along with what the family expectations might be, or not simply because they're wanting to make a public display of themselves. Somewhere in the person's life and in their testimony, there needs to be a recognition, an explanation, "I heard the word of God. These Scriptures have impacted my mind and I have turned from sin and believed in Christ as a result of it." Somewhere there needs to be something like that.

Now it's not that a person needs to be a systematic theologian before they can be baptized. It's not that they have to understand the ins and outs of every book of the Bible. But that somehow there is a fundamental understanding, a basic understanding maybe is a better way to put it, a basic understanding of the reality that God sent his Son into the world on a saving mission to save sinners; that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, he lived a perfect life, and he offered that life on the cross as a ransom to pay for the sins of everyone who would ever believe in him; that he was buried, that he was raised on the

third day and that everyone who comes to him in repentant saving faith is delivered and forgiven of all of their sins. I just said that in 60 seconds. Somehow, somewhere before a person enters into the waters of baptism they need to be able to somehow articulate that for themselves. "I understand this message. I believe it. I've repented and turned to Christ. I realize I have no other hope for my salvation." That's the idea.

You can go on in the book of Acts, Acts 16:31. They believed in the Lord Jesus. We looked at this passage a few months ago as we were introducing the book of Philippians. There had been a great earthquake. Paul and Silas were in prison, verse 26. The doors flew open. The jailer was about to commit suicide because he was responsible for those prisoners and he thought they had escaped. "Paul cried out," verse 28, "with a loud voice, saying, 'Don't harm yourself, we're all here!' And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear [this jailer] fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'" I doubt he spoke it as softly as I just did. "They said [to him], 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household." They spoke the word. He believed. He was baptized. Do you see the pattern? It's consistent. It is consistent through the book of Acts.

Chapter 18, verse 5, "Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." See, the word of God is being proclaimed. "But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.' Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized." They believed in the Lord Jesus. The word was preached to them. They were baptized.

One more, Acts 22:16. Paul is describing his testimony and in verse 12, "A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him." And Paul had seen Christ for himself. "And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'" They called on the name, Paul called on the name of the Lord. He was baptized in response to that.

So beloved, all of that brief survey from the book of Acts to show you multiple multiple multiple times the course of things in the nature of baptism. The word is preached, people hear it, they understand, they respond in repentance and faith, and baptism is to follow as a nature consequence of that. So baptism is for those who receive Christ after hearing the

Gospel and men and women, we saw that in one of the passages, right, men and women. Geography, all men everywhere. Gender, men and women hearing the message and they come in repentant volitional faith in Christ and they are baptized in response to that.

Now let me emphasize something very clearly here that I've already said but I'll say it again: baptism does not have the power to save anyone. If you do not have faith in Christ, baptism does one thing for you, one thing and one thing only, it gets you wet. It does nothing for your soul whatsoever. The totality of Scriptures teach us this. We understand the passages on baptism in light of Scripture's broader teaching about the nature of salvation, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works lest any man should boast." But the fact that conversion, that salvation comes to us, that we receive Christ through faith alone does not mean that baptism therefore becomes irrelevant or unimportant. How could it be unimportant, I ask you? If Christ has commanded it to his people, how could it be unimportant? On what basis do people say, "No, baptism doesn't matter"? Yeah, go into the throne room of heaven where Christ is exalted in glory and say, "You know what? What You said about this isn't really important. I'll do it my way." Please. Of course it's important. Anything that Christ says is important and here in Matthew 28, he made it the central, one of the central aspects of making disciples in the Great Commission. Of course it's important.

The fact that it doesn't add to salvation or contribute to the rebirth of a soul doesn't mean that it's to be ignored and so you can think about it this way: you must be saved in order to be baptized, you do not get baptized in order to be saved. I can't state it anymore clearly than that, can I? However that does not mean that baptism is optional anymore than any command of Christ to the church today is optional. We don't pick and choose, beloved. You don't treat the word of God that way. You don't treat Christ this way. You say, "This satisfies me. I like that. That appeals to my flesh, but this part is awkward for me. I don't want to be public and all that, and so I don't think I'll pay attention to that." On what authority does any man or woman look at the word of God and say no? In what sense is that the mark of a truly regenerate heart? You see, it's not about baptism, it's about your fundamental disposition to the authority of King Jesus.

Conversely, stating this in a positive way, having dealt with it in that negative way, a true Christian will desire to obey Christ in baptism. He will. She will. When it's explained to them, they'll say, "Yeah, that's what I want." And it's not from a sense of, "Oh, I've got to do that so now I can be saved." That's not it. You see, there's a new heart that God gives in conversion that is tender toward the things that he says, that is receptive to the authority of Christ, that says, "Well, Jesus, if this is what You command, of course I'll do it. What is there to discuss? How soon can I get to the water?" You know, there's an eagerness that is somewhere in the heart of the one, there's a desire that says, "You mean I have an opportunity to testify before the world, to testify before the people of God what Christ has done to save me? I get to say things to glorify the One who said and I get to obey Him and I get to do that? Wow. Yeah." And you start to see this is a privilege. This is an opportunity to be able to do something like that, but it's out of this heart that is tender toward Christ, that loves him and willingly, gladly, lovingly submits to him. You

see, properly understood for the true convert of Christ, baptism isn't something that grates against his will, he just needs to understand and respond and he wants to do that.

Now Catholics baptize infants and say it imparts some kind of conditional salvation. We don't believe that. Scripture doesn't teach that. We rejected that in our series on Catholicism two or three years ago. Some Protestants, maybe even some of you, come from this tradition, some certain Reformed traditions. Some Protestants will baptize infants of believing parents and they say that it signifies the child is part of God's covenant family. They're not teaching that it saves them but they view baptism as a token of God's covenant to believers, you could say it that way. Well, we don't practice that. I'm not drawing swords against that but we are not an infant baptizing church even in that sense. That view of the covenant rests on theological assumptions and there is no clear biblical pattern to baptize infants. That's why we don't do it, but I just mention that to give you a brief sense of perspective on what other Christian traditions try to do. I'm saying Christian to the Reformed tradition, I don't call Catholics Christians because they're not Christians. So but that's another point for another day.

We believe that the best biblical warrant is for only baptizing true disciples who have had opportunity to with understanding hear the word of God and respond in true repentant faith. That is the biblical pattern upon which baptism was administered, and that requires, that assumes, that necessitates a certain level of maturity in the candidate, in the baptism candidate, so that you know that there is an intelligent aspect, there is an understanding of the mind to this that is the basis upon it.

So we asked the question: why do we baptize? We baptize because Christ commanded it. Who should be baptized? True believers who have heard the word of God with understanding, and that immediately excludes infants. Third question: how do we baptize? How do we baptize? What is the mode of baptism? What is the manner of baptism? Well, we baptize here at Truth Community Church we believe the biblical pattern is that we baptize by water immersion for the following reasons. Immersion meaning we put people completely under the water and bring them out. The whole body is placed underwater and we bring them out.

Why do we believe that? Well, the word for "baptize" is a transliteration of the Greek word "baptizo." That's as technical as I'm going to get. The standard dictionaries in the Greek language give this meaning to that word, one says it means to dip or to immerse. Another one says it means to immerse. Another dictionary says to put or go underwater. Another one says it is an immersion in water. And so there's multiple authorities pointing to that meaning of the word but we don't have to simply go on what those authorities say, we can see the pattern in Scripture itself. Immersion is the picture that is given to us by the description of biblical baptisms.

Look at Mark 1. Mark 1 in verse 5, "John the Baptist," in verse 4, "appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Mark 1:4. Verse 5, "And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River," not beside it, in it,

"confessing their sins." Then you go down to verse 9 and you see the baptism of Jesus described, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." Verse 10, "Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: 'You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.'" And so you get this picture of people going into the water, down into it. You have to go down into it in order to come out of it, right? This isn't complicated.

You also see this when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Look at Acts 8 with me, if you will. I'll give you a moment to find it. Acts 8. And just to reinforce what we were saying earlier in the message, this Ethiopian eunuch had been reading Isaiah the prophet. Philip ran up and said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" "How could I unless someone guides me," verse 31. "The eunuch answered Philip and said, 'Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him." You see the word of God in it. Baptism is taking place in the context of a ministry of the word of God, in the context of teaching and explanation about who Christ is. In verse 36, "they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?'" Down in verse 38, "he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing." Into the water, under the water, come out of the water. That's how we baptize.

So having treated this very briefly admittedly, when you combine that meaning of the word "baptism" with the idea of being in a river and coming out of water, you're left with the picture of immersion and that's why we practice baptism by immersion for membership in our church. It is our policy. It's the elder's policy that a man must be baptized by immersion before he can become a member of Truth Community Church. We won't accept as a basis of membership an infant baptism because we think this is that important. The same thing for women. I said man, I tend to speak that way but men, women, same principle.

Okay, so fourthly and finally: what does baptism represent? What's going on in baptism? What is it doing? What's the purpose of it? If you just want somebody to get wet, well, you know, just put their head under a faucet and turn it on, you know? There's obviously something more than just getting wet that's going on here. There's a lot of ways to get people wet but what is it about baptism that is significant and why does the Lord command it? Well, baptism is an outward symbol that testifies to a prior inward reality. It's a symbol. It's a picture in the same that communion, which we practice regularly here, is a picture of the body and blood of Christ. It symbolizes a spiritual reality. It pictures something else and baptism is testifying to a prior inward reality.

Look at Romans 6 with me. Romans 6. Paul here is talking about in Romans 6, he's been explaining the reality of true salvation, of justification in the early chapters of Romans, and he uses baptism to explain the spiritual reality of coming to faith in Christ, of being

born again. In verse 3, "do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus," see, he's talking about baptism into Christ, not baptism into water, "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection." In the book of Colossians, you don't need to turn there but in Colossians 2:12 it says this, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."

So what's the point of baptism? What is it picturing? It pictures this: it's as though a man walked into the baptistry as the old man, the dead man, his prior man in Christ, what happened when Christ saved him was that he was immersed into Christ. Christ brought him to himself and he's now united with Christ in his death and burial. And so you bury the person, as it were, into water symbolizing the death of his old man in Christ, and then you bring him up out of the water showing the spiritual resurrection, symbolizing that, and in that death and resurrection you have a picture of what's happened inside that man. My old man is gone. He is dead. He's been buried and now I have been raised by the Spirit into newness of life. Baptism is a picture of that reality in a way that even a child could understand, a picture that's going on.

So dead, buried, raised to new life. That's what happens in Christ when somebody's saved, their heart is changed, the old man dies, he's buried, he's raised to new life in Christ. In baptism, the man comes in, he shows by the immersion into water that that old man has died, he's raised, he lives in new life. And so baptism is picturing our death, burial and resurrection in Christ, all testifying to the work of Christ in the candidate's life, and you do this publicly. You publicly identify with him. So that's the picture. This is what we believe that Scripture teaches about baptism.

Why do we do it? Christ commanded it. Who should be baptized? True believers. How do we baptize? We baptize by immersion. What does it represent? Death, burial and resurrection of Christ. You publicly identify with him. That leaves us one more question, doesn't it? I said four and I've given you four but there's one more question and I don't know the answer to this for many of you but I can simply ask the question: what about you? Have you followed Christ in baptism? If you have not been baptized, I have some things for you to think about. If you have been baptized and the Spirit affirms in your heart that you're a true Christian, boy, what a blessing, what a grace from God, right? It's not preeminently about baptism but it's what baptism represents, that God has genuinely truly saved us. We have been born again. We belong to Christ. We have new life. We are free from the condemnation and power of sin. Amen. Hallelujah. Praise God for that. And that's what we who have been baptized on true faith in Christ, that's our reality. It's a joyful thing.

But if you've not been baptized, let me just consider a couple of things with you, okay? And again I say these things to you in a pastoral spirit, I say these things to help you. Let

me ask you this: are you even a Christian? That question is on the table, are you even a Christian? If you are, why are you neglecting baptism? Are you aware of it and you're saying, "I don't want to do this"? Well, Jesus would ask you this, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" Luke 6:46. You see, baptism kind of smokes us out, doesn't it, in terms of it forces us to a decision of whether I've really believed in Christ enough to publicly identify with him before the people of God and before the world; to publicly testify to my faith in him perhaps before a hostile family who will reject me for it. I know a man who went into baptism and knowing that his father would be hostile to his baptism, but he did it anyway, testifying to the reality of Christ, testifying by the baptism against his father's wishes that Christ had a higher claim on him than even parental authority did. Baptism brings these things to light and so if you claim to be a Christian but you're refusing baptism, something is very seriously wrong and I can only ask the Lord to work in your heart to bring those things to light in your mind.

Now secondly, maybe it's not a matter of active hostile rebellion, maybe before today you just didn't realize that it was actually important and that's, you know, and that's why we teach on these things. You were unaware that baptism was important. You were unaware. Fine, that's not a problem before now, but now after today that excuse doesn't work anymore, does it? You can't say, "I didn't know," because you've been told that it's important and the question becomes, "What will you do with that?"

Let me just clarify one last time why we're saying these things: we want true disciples to walk in obedience to Christ and that's what we're commanded to do. That's why we're making an emphasis on this, is that there should not be anyone in the walls of this room claiming to be Christ's and comfortable with the fact that they've not been baptized. We want to eliminate that and encourage you toward obedience in that way, but ultimately, you know, we want you to know Christ. More than being baptized, we want you to know Christ and baptism will naturally follow there. But young people coming up in Christian homes, not knowing, "Where am I? I don't know where I'm at," people new to our church, "How did I fall into this place? I don't know where am I at." You see, we sigh before God, we pray before God that he would work in your heart and open up your heart and understanding to know Christ and these things are all bound up with the command that Christ has placed on us as believers to go and make disciples, and believer's baptism is that first step in obedience to Christ.

Now at the conclusion of our service, Andrew Snelling is going to come up and give some announcements. I just want to preempt one of them. He'll still make it but we're starting something new on January 26, two weeks from now, we're going to have a baptism class for those that have not been baptized who want to follow-up on today's message. You can look for emails to come out. You can plan to attend that January 26th right after the service. It's our privilege as our church, it's our desire as a church to give you every possible help that we can to help you walk in obedience to Christ. You do not have to do this alone. There's a whole church waiting to support you in this. There's really no excuse for refusing if you claim Christ and have not been baptized.

So we'll just end on this question: have you been baptized since coming to faith in Christ?

Let's pray.

Dear Lord, help each one here to truly love Your word. Help each one here to come to a true knowledge of faith in Jesus Christ. Help each true Christian to respond in obedience to Your word as it's been laid forth for them here today. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

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