

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*When Should Children Be Baptized? – Part I.*"

As you probably heard during the announcements we are having baptisms in a few weeks on Easter Sunday.

With my children getting older we have been having many conversations about baptism, and when and if they should be baptized.

I thought it would be good to help some of you think through your children being baptized too.

So over the next couple weeks leading up to the baptisms I'm going to talk about when children should be baptized.

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Once I finish these sermons I am going to preach on the vision of our church. I try to do this every few years to help establish:

- Where we are
- Where we want to go
- How we do things

The last time I preached on this was over seven years ago, January 2014, so I am probably overdue.

The reason I mention this is I'd like to share something about our view of fathers in the church, that doesn't just relate to our vision, but also baptism.

This brings us to lesson 1...

Lesson one: at WCC fathers play a large part in shepherding their families.

In some churches the elders carry much of the responsibility for families. At WCC we try to put some of that responsibility back on the fathers' shoulders, because that's where we think it belongs.

Here's an example...

At some churches:

- Only elders pray, read Scripture, or preach in the service
- Only elders administer the communion elements
- Only elders baptize people

As you know if you have attended WCC for very long, or I could even say one Sunday, you can see that we try to involve men, including young men, frequently. We have men and young men:

- Pray, read Scripture, and preach in the service
- Provide the communion devotion, as well as distribute the elements
- Lead the music
- Share some of the teaching load
- Lead home fellowships
- And baptize their children

We do this for two reasons:

1. Most obviously, we don't think it's biblical that only the elders serve and/or use their gifts in the church
 2. Second, we believe God has called men to lead in the home and the church, so we want to provide opportunities, and even training, for them to do so
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So because of this view, we generally lean on husbands to lead their homes, versus taking that leadership from them. You could even say we look to husbands to help us in the shepherding of the church by asking them to shepherd their families.

One such example took place last year when everything happened with COVID. You might remember when the four of us sat up front behind the table, and Andrew Criss said...

“Husbands, as elders we need you – and your families need you – to lead them during this time. Your wives have questions. Please guide them. Shepherd your wives and children. Wives, please look to your husbands for leadership. We want to be completely available to your husbands, so that if they need help, we can help them, and then they can get back to you.”

So I wouldn't say that we don't want to hear from wives. I would just say that we want to hear from wives through their husbands. We want wives to receive all the shepherding they need, but we hope most of it comes from their husbands.

I mention this, because we take a similar approach with the children in the church. We look to fathers to deal with their children. This is one reason why when our church grew we didn't entertain hiring a youth pastor. We think we already have many youth pastors and they are the fathers of the families.

Along these lines we expect fathers to determine when their children:

- Should be baptized
- And should partake in communion

The reason I wanted to lead with this lesson is regardless of what I share in these sermons it is still up to the fathers to decide when their children should be baptized. While we are happy to help in different ways, such as answering your questions, meeting with you, helping you think through things, it is still something the fathers must decide.

Speaking of when children should be baptized, let's move in to lesson 2...

Lesson two: salvation is the requirement for baptism.

Let me introduce two terms that are crucially important in this discussion.

There are basically two views of baptism...

One view is paedobaptism, or more commonly known as infant baptism. The word paedo means child. Think of a pediatrician, or doctor for babies, and you'll be able to remember that paedobaptism is baby baptism.

This is the view held by Catholics and those Protestant denominations that have the most similarities with Catholicism, such as Presbyterians and Lutherans...or those denominations that we would say didn't break away from Catholicism far enough after the Reformation.

We reject this view. We don't believe it originated in the early church. Instead, we believe it originated with the Catholic Church, and is largely a holdover from Catholicism.

The view we hold is credobaptism, or more commonly known as believers' baptism. Think of the word creed, or confession, and you'll be able to remember that credobaptism is believers' baptism, because the idea is those people who have confessed Jesus as Lord, or who have a creed they believe in, can be baptized.

As you might guess, creating sermons involves many choices, because it's possible to go in so many different directions. In this sermon I had to decide how much attention to give to credobaptism versus paedobaptism. Because I believe this is such a settled issue in our church, I didn't want to spend much time on it.

But I do want you to be able to respond to paedobaptists, so I'll draw your attention to some of their most common arguments when we reach them in the verses we look at.

Also, I will add that if you have any questions about these two positions, please reach out to me so I can try to answer them.

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For now, just consider this one verse from Acts 2. Peter is preaching the gospel on the Day of Pentecost before the first Christian baptisms...

Acts 2:41 So those WHO RECEIVED HIS WORD WERE BAPTIZED, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

The important thing to notice is it was only those **who received his word**, which is to say those who believed, who were baptized.

Those who didn't receive his word, or didn't believe, such as babies, weren't baptized. To think otherwise would be to speak into silence.

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Now because we believe our children must be saved before being baptized I would like to give you some evidences of salvation to look for in your children's lives. While no parent can know for sure that their child is saved, I do believe this should be helpful in making that determination.

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Also, two other points before we jump into this lesson...

First, these are the exact evidences that Katie and I consider when discussing whether we think our children are saved. I feel like we don't have much alone time during the day, so once our children go to bed, if Katie isn't too exhausted and doesn't want to immediately follow them to bed herself, we stay up and talk, and often the topic of conversation is our children and how we feel things are going with them.

We talk about whether we see these evidences in their lives. We share the things that encourage us, and also the things that discourage or concern us.

All that to say I am sharing with you the same approach we take.

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Second, these are pretty good evidences to look for in anyone's life – child or adult alike – when trying to determine whether conversion has taken place. I have looked for these evidences in my life.

So these evidences can serve two purposes:

- Serve as evidence we're not saved
- Serve as evidence we are saved...give us confidence in our salvation

Jesus said many will come to him and say, "Lord, Lord..." and be deceived about their salvation. We don't want to be one of those people.

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Let's consider the first evidence...

Lesson three: evidence of salvation to look for in your children (part one) godly sorrow.

Repentance is required for salvation, and it comes from godly sorrow over sin...

2 Corinthians 7:10 Godly sorrow produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly sorrow produces death. (NKJV)

Worldly sorrow is the sorrow in:

- Courtrooms when the verdict is read
- Children when they find out they're going to be punished
- Adults when they find out they're going to suffer because of something they've done

Basically, worldly sorrow is regret, not over the sin itself, but over the consequences. It has no redemptive value.

Godly sorrow, on the other hand, is the sorrow over sin, because there's understanding the sin was committed against a holy, loving God.

Godly sorrow doesn't simply desire to avoid the consequences, but desires to have victory over the sin itself. As a result it produces repentance, or a turning from the sin to Christ, which is why Paul says it leads to salvation.

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Now regarding our children, here's what to look for...

When they sin, do they ever confess it of their own volition because they're filled with godly sorrow, thus demonstrating a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit who is at work in them...or do we always have to catch them?

If we do catch them, do they seem genuinely sorry about what they did, or do they just seem sorry that they got caught and are about to be punished?

This is obviously a very difficult thing to determine, because every child looks sorry when they get caught, and it's hard to tell if they're sorry about what they did or sorry they're about to be punished.

This is why it's so wonderful when children confess, and seem sorrowful, without being caught, because it's a more likely demonstration of godly sorrow.

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The next part of lesson three...

Lesson three: evidences of salvation to look for in your children (part two) spiritual fruit.

This flows from the previous evidence, because if children, or anyone for that matter, are genuinely repentant, fruit will be produced.

If there's one man most associated with preaching repentance, it's probably John the Baptist, because he was performing baptisms of repentance. He said...

Matthew 3:8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Paul communicated this as well...

Acts 26:20 "Gentiles...should REPENT AND TURN TO GOD, PERFORMING DEEDS IN KEEPING WITH THEIR REPENTANCE.

When we put off something, we must put on something else. The vacuum that's created will be filled with fruit or good works if the repentance is genuine.

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Jesus communicated something similar...

Matthew 7:19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

This is a pretty clear way of saying if people don't produce fruit they are going to hell. It's not that people are saved by producing fruit, but spiritual fruit is the evidence of saving, or living, faith.

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When Jesus preached the parable of the soils he made the point that when the seed, which represents the word of God, takes root in someone's heart, fruit is produced...

Matthew 13:23 As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

If we have believed the Word and are saved, we will produce fruit. People produce different amounts, but everyone produces some.

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James 2 is probably the clearest place in Scripture making this point. Three times he says that faith without works is dead or non-saving:

- **James 2:17 Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**
- **James 2:20 Faith apart from works is useless?**
- **James 2:26 Faith apart from works is dead.**

I'm amazed by the number of people confident in the salvation of a child, parent, friend, or sibling when there is no spiritual fruit.

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Let me be clear about what I am convinced is a bad evidence of salvation and a good evidence...

First, praise God if your child prays for Christ to be his or her Savior. That's wonderful. But by itself I don't think it's a strong evidence of salvation.

You probably know from some of my sermons in the past that we are not a big "Sinner's Prayer" family. I am very concerned about the damage that can be done when children are told, "You said this prayer so you are saved."

This has led to many children becoming teenagers, young adults, and even adults who don't live for the Lord, but they are convinced they are Christians because they said a prayer when they were a child and there was an adult who told them that they were saved.

I think it is very important to include the word, "If." So a better thing to say is...

"IF you prayed this prayer, and have repented of your sins, and put your faith in Christ, then you are saved."

Then your child will remember that IF they repented of their sins, put their faith in Christ, then they are saved.

If they get older and find themselves living in the world, getting drunk, looking at things they shouldn't, the list goes on, then they will have that nagging suspicion that...

"Maybe I am not a Christian, because it does not seem like I have repented of my sins. Instead it seems like I'm throwing myself into them."

If we include the word "if" they'll recognize there must be some substance behind the words.

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To tie all this together...

After our children make a confession of faith, we must look for fruit or works. While works don't save, they are one of the strongest evidences of salvation.

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The next part of lesson three...

Lesson three: evidences of salvation to look for in your children (part three) spiritual hunger and thirst.

While I wish I would've gotten saved earlier in life, one of the advantages of getting saved later is being able to see a dramatic change.

If I go back twenty years ago when I became a Christian there was a spiritual hunger and thirst after conversion that was not present before:

- Before conversion I never read the Bible, after conversion I loved reading and studying the Bible.
- Before conversion I didn't want to pray or go to church. I did pray—if you could call it that; it was more reciting prayers mindlessly, which Jesus condemned in the Sermon on the Mount—and I did go to church, but that's because I thought I had to if I wanted to go to heaven.
- After conversion when I knew I didn't have to go to church to be saved, I wanted to go to church because I was saved.

I mention this because children don't have the luxury of seeing a dramatic change. When children are raised in the church they pretty much do these things as a part of their lives.

You can't really look and say...

“When he was four, before he became a Christian, he never wanted to read the Bible. But when he was five, after he became a Christian he loved reading the Bible and praying.”

So it's not the easiest thing to see, but we should still look for spiritual hunger and thirst. Let me show you where this is made clear in Scripture.

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Go ahead and turn to **John 4**.

This is the account when Jesus spoke to the woman at the well. She was drawing physical water, but Jesus drew her attention to spiritual water. Look at **verse 13**...

John 4:13 Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

The words **in him a spring of water welling up** reveal why people thirst and have it satisfied: they have a fountain in them, referring to the Holy Spirit, providing an endless supply of water.

John 4:15 The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

Jesus was speaking spiritually, but she thought He was speaking physically. She would have loved to not have to return to the well every day and draw this water.

Notice the clear contrast between the water in the well and the water Jesus offers:

- **Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again**

- **Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst.**

Jesus is contrasting the temporary physical satisfaction that would come from the water in the well with the eternal spiritual satisfaction that He provides that lasts forever.

Turn to the right to **John 6**.

Jesus fed the 5000. They told their friends, a large group came to follow Him. He wanted to take their minds from the physical to the spiritual so look at verse 35...

John 6:35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

This is similar to what Jesus said to the woman at the well: He will prevent people from hungering and thirsting again.

You could look at this and say, “Well, this says they won’t have a spiritual hunger and thirst.”

Right. They don’t, because Jesus satisfied it...but they did spiritually hunger and thirst, or He wouldn’t have satisfied it.

You see a good example of people without a spiritual hunger and thirst when they could tell Jesus wouldn’t help them physically. Look at verse 66...

John 6:66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

This is what it looks like to have no spiritual hunger or thirst.

We’re probably most familiar with the Beatitudes or blessings, that are in Matthew’s gospel. But Luke also contains a version of the Sermon on the Mount that only has four of the Beatitudes, versus the eight Matthew has, but it also has the four woes which are not in Matthew’s account.

Listen to one of the Beatitudes and one of the woes...

Luke 6:21a “Blessed are you who are hungry now (spiritually hungry), for you shall be satisfied.

The Beatitudes are not commands. In other words, they’re not imperatives. Instead, they are indicatives. Jesus isn’t telling believers to do something. He’s telling believers we are something.

In this beatitude he says that believers are hungry, not physically, but spiritually.

In the woes, Jesus describes unbelievers. Listen to the corresponding one...

Luke 6:25 “Woe to you who are full now (or not spiritually hungry now), for you shall be hungry.

So he says unbelievers do not have a spiritual hunger.

Here’s another verse making the same point...

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

John says if we have a love – or hunger – for the things of the world, then the love of God is not in us, which is to say we’re not Christians.

Listen to how Jesus describes unbelievers...

John 3:19 Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

So Jesus says unbelievers love – or hunger – for the world – versus for Christ – and if they do it is evidence that they are not Christians.

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So here's another way to look at this evidence...

It's not just what our children DO hunger for, it's also what they DO NOT hunger for. They're going to hunger for something:

- Believers hunger for the things of the Lord.
- Unbelievers hunger for the things of the world.

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None of us, child or adult alike, always want to pray, read the Bible, fellowship, or go to church...this is even the case for the most mature Christians.

But every Christian who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit must have some spiritual hunger or thirst, which is to say some interest in spiritual matters.

There's something wrong if people say they are Christians, but they never want to pray, read the Bible, listen to sermons, go to church, or talk about spiritual things.

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Now again, to make this personal to our children...

Do we see an interest in spiritual matters? Do they pray and read their Bibles on their own sometimes, or do we always have to force them to do so?

If children never want to pray or read the Bible, I don't think they should be baptized. It's not a legalistic issue as though those things would save them. It's more an issue that if they are saved they would desire to do these things at least sometimes.

Children who have put their faith in Christ, want to worship the Christ who has saved them.

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Let me close by reminding you of our Lord's words. He said...

“You MUST be born again.”

Not, “You might want to think about being born again,” or “It's probably a good idea to be born again.”

He said, “You MUST be born again to be a Christian.”

Our children MUST be born again. They must be new creations. If they are there will be evidence, and the next step is for them to be baptized.

If you have any questions about anything I've shared this morning I'd consider it a privilege to speak with you. Let's pray.