

Introduction

We are interrupting our series on Matthew and the beatitudes in order to focus on the subject of Christian baptism. And that is because we have the opportunity to share in the baptism of 7 followers of Christ today. Our scripture text is Acts 16:16-34.

[Read Text and Pray]

Why do we baptize? Well, we baptize because Jesus commanded it. This is the great commission from Matthew 28:19-20. Having risen from the dead, he gathered his disciples in Galilee to a mountain. Big things happen on mountains. Abraham offered Isaac on a mountain. Moses received the law on a mountain. Elijah called on God and He sent fire down to consume the sacrifice on a mountain. Jerusalem is Mt Zion. And when Jesus was about to depart from his disciples, he brought them to a mountain.

His language reflects the significance of the place. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have taught you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age." Make disciples. Baptize them. Teach them.

This is the charge to the church. It is a charge that was carried out in obedience to the command of Jesus. A survey of the book of Acts reveals how the disciples carried out Jesus' commission. On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit clothed the disciples in power, they emerged onto the streets of Jerusalem preaching the gospel. In response to Peter's sermon, the multitudes cried out, "What must we do?" He replied that they should repent and be baptized. About 3,000 were baptized and added that day. And what did they do? They taught the Lord's commands. The text says that the disciples devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. In Acts chapter 8, under the preaching of Philip, many more believed. Acts 8:12 says, "when

they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Saul was converted on the road to Damascus in his blinding encounter with the Lord. He neither ate nor drank for three days. When the Lord sent Ananias to him, he laid his hands on Paul and he regained his sight. And immediately he rose and was baptized, even before taking food.

The next major event in the book of Acts is the conversion of Gentiles. After seeing a vision in which the Lord declared all peoples clean, Peter went to the home of a Gentile centurion named Cornelius and preached the gospel to all assembled there. As he was preaching Christ, the Gentiles received the word of God and the Spirit fell upon them in power. And here is what Peter said: "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. Make disciples. Baptize them. Teach them. But the striking aspect of this event is what it clarifies about baptism. God worked savingly and powerfully in the hearts of these Gentiles as the word was being preached. And they believed and received the Spirit in power. Baptism was applied after that fact as a recognition of the work God had already done in their hearts. Baptism is for believers. Baptism does not save. But baptism is commanded. And in this case it was applied in obedience but also in recognition that these were added to the church. So it is an outward, visible, identifying act which formally acknowledges God's saving work in the lives of those who are baptized. And it is a kind of formal welcome into the family of God by identifying with Christ, his saving work, and his people.

After some years the Jerusalem council of apostles fully endorsed the taking of the gospel aggressively to the Gentiles. Paul went with Silas by the leading of the Lord into the region of Macedonia. Arriving in the city of Philippi, they looked for and found a place of prayer where they spoke the gospel. One there was Lydia. The Lord opened her heart to believe. She was baptized along with her household. There was a turning of the entire household to faith in Christ.

In that same city on that self-same visit, Paul and Silas were thrown into jail because their preaching and signs caused such a disturbance. This is our text for this morning. The Philippian jailer had to be a rough and rugged sort of man to have that particular occupation. There is no reason to think that he was seeking God. Where that is the case, the writer of the book of Acts, Luke, was meticulous to tell us so. The jailer's task was to make certain these two men were kept secure. He put them in the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. He could lock them up, but he could not shut them up. They sang and prayed in the middle of the night. God brought an earthquake which opened the doors and broke the bonds of all the prisoners. Realizing this was the case, the jailer, who had been asleep, was on the verge of taking his life. In his mind this was perhaps better than the fate he would have known if he had to answer to his Roman superiors. Paul kept him from eternal disaster when he called out not to harm himself because none of the prisoners had left.

The jailer, on the verge of an eternity in hell, now humbled himself before Paul and Silas. He was evidently aware of their message. In the earthquake, he saw the hand of God. The Lord was confirming them as his servants and their message as his. He knew he needed salvation from this mighty God. But how to be saved? With fear the jailer fell down before Silas and Paul. Then he brought them out and he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He was ready. He was convicted of his sin. All he needs at this time is a clear answer to his question, "What must I do?"

How Paul and Silas responded is incredibly important. So they responded, "Keep the Ten Commandments and you will be saved." No! "Be baptized and you will be saved." No! "Start going to church and you will be saved." No! "Believe in the lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." So they spoke the word of the Lord to the jailer and his family.

We know they all believed. How do we know? Because they all were baptized. In that very hour, the jailer took Paul and Silas and washed their wounds, and they baptized him and all his house. No waiting til morning or til the next day. Who knew what the next say would bring forth? Would Paul and Silas be executed? That did not matter to the jailer. What mattered to him was digging in his heels to live for Jesus. Then he fed

them and rejoiced that he had believed in God. On the verge of hell, the jailer was now bound for heaven.

It was not because of something he did but what God did for him. He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Why do we baptize? We baptize for the same reason Paul and Silas baptized the jailer. He had believed in Christ and was welcomed into the family of God. Jesus commanded that his followers make disciples, baptize them and teach them. They were obeying Christ.

And there are other reasons we baptize. These are matters that pertain to why it is Jesus commands us to baptize.

1. We baptize because baptism is all about identification. When a person is baptized he or she is identifying with another. When Jesus was baptized, he was identifying himself with sinners. He never sinned, but he came to John for a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sin. Whose sin? Not his, but the sins of his people. He was expressing a oneness with those who come to God for forgiveness of sins, who come believing and trusting.

We baptize because in baptism the one who is being baptized is identifying with Christ. The world behind me Jesus Christ before me! That's the message being proclaimed by those who are baptized. I am denying myself and taking up my cross to follow Christ. I follow Jesus and I am one of his disciples. It comes across in the close connection between making disciples and baptizing them as Jesus connects them in his great commission.

We further baptize because baptism identifies believers not only with him as the one we follow but also we identify with him in terms of the work he has done to save us. Just as the Lord's Supper reflects the death of Jesus which brings about our justification so does the emblem of baptism. Paul uses the imagery of baptism in Romans 6 to declare our identification with Christ's death and resurrection.

In Romans 6:3-4, Paul says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. 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.

We further baptize because baptism depicts washing. Washing is cleansing. Because we are united with Christ, our sins are washed away. We have a new heart through Christ, a clean one, a pure one. Reflecting this reality, Ananias spoke to Paul when the scales fell from his eyes and he could see. And he said to him, "rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." Baptism is seen like a Psalm 51 appeal to God to "blot out my transgressions, to wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and [to] cleanse me from my sin." Peter also draws on this connection saying it is an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That is why we baptize.

It should also be clear who we baptize. From time to time we receive calls from individuals wondering if we will baptize their infant children. The answer is no. And why would that be? It is because the only candidate for baptism is a person who believes. Why was the Philippian jailer baptized and his family? Because they believed. Who was baptized on the day of Pentecost? Believers, those who repented of their sin. Who was baptized when Peter preached to Cornelius' family? Those who received the word of God; they believed. In the end it is not a matter of age but of belief and understanding.

Baptism does not bring people into salvation. Baptism does not bring people into the church. Baptism does not cause the new birth. But baptism is an outward recognition that God has already worked savingly, that God in Christ has brought people into his church, that God has already raised to life a sinner who was dead. As Peter said, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these who received the Spirit just as we have?"

Conclusion

Lastly, how do we baptize? We immerse. It is actually a redundancy to say we baptize by immersion because technically the word immerse and the

word baptize are the same. The Greek word baptizo means to dip. It was commonly used of dipping a cloth into dye in order to change its color.

When you look at the gospels you see that Jesus was baptized in water. He had gone down in the water for when he emerged, he went up from the water. When you look at the history of baptism, you find that sprinkling is a fairly recent. But then you have the reality which baptism depicts. Immersion alone depicts burial and resurrection.

So that is why we baptize, who we baptize, and how we baptize. With that said, we have the privilege of baptizing seven disciples today.