

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

September 13, 2015

Baptism

Selected scriptures

Prayer: *Father, I do thank you for how great you are, I thank you for the gift of who you are, and Lord today we are focused in on baptism, this is baptism Sunday and again Lord, I pray for your Holy Spirit's presence, I want to pray that you would help us with an understanding of just what baptism is, that we would go under the hood as it were and get a better, deeper understanding of it, that we may grow in our appreciation of what it is you've done for us. I pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would be glorified in all we do, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as I just alluded to, today is our baptism picnic and each year we get together for fellowship and for food and for an opportunity actually for folks to get baptized. We meet at Spears pavilion which is a great place to have a picnic and again this year because the pond is so low and weed choked, we're going to be having our baptism in a pool. But if you've never been baptized, there are some questions that I would assume you need to have answered before you consider taking this step. Number one, just

what is baptism; number two, what is the point of baptism; and number three, the most important one, why should I get baptized?

I want to reprise my baptism message of last year to answer those questions. And the first one, first one obviously is: What is baptism. Well, the word "baptize" is a transliteration of the Greek word "baptizo" which simply means "to immerse in liquid." You know, if the Greeks wanted to dye a piece of cloth, they would just take it and baptize it by immersing it into a vat filled with dye. So the word "baptize" means simply to immerse in liquid. What is the point of immersing someone in liquid, water to be exact? Well, the actual ritual of baptism consists of being plunged beneath the surface of the water and then immediately being brought back out of the water. It is a powerful symbolic act that demonstrates three different aspects of a believer's new life in Christ. In baptism there is death, there is burial, and there is resurrection, and it's all summed up in that one single act.

First there's death. You know, God says in *Romans 6: The wages of sin is death*. He says in *Ezekiel 18: The soul that sins, it shall die*. This is a spiritual pronouncement of fact and it's more certain, more set and more determined than any physical pronouncement you would ever see. What God is saying is very simply, he says when you sin, you die. Now that may be a hard

thing to convince people of and it's hard because, see, the judgment of sin isn't immediate and because it's not immediate, folks tend to think that it's nonexistent. God told Adam in the Garden of Eden in *Genesis 2:16*, he said: *"You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* God says eat the fruit and you're going to die. Well, Adam and Eve both ate the fruit and guess what? They didn't immediately drop dead. And so we ask, well, is God making an empty threat here? Well, here's what actually happened. They may not have died but they did instantly change from being flawless creatures who had shared perfection itself with their creator to now becoming flawed, fallen creatures no longer perfect and no longer suited for fellowship with their creator. Point is, they didn't realize what had happened. I mean, they were certainly immediate but non lethal effects, I mean they instantly realized that they were naked, they were now filled with fear, they were filled with guilt, but there seemed to be no immediate physical effect. Well they didn't realize it but from the moment that that fruit touched their lips, they began the process of dying, and for them it took hundreds of years to complete, for us it takes considerably less time. But all of us know we are all in the process of dying. And it's the separation of cause and effect that allows people the fantasy of thinking that somehow or other our sin

is not going to find us out. See, if the moment you sinned you died, there would be no sin because there would be no people, and because God withholds his judgment and gives us time and opportunity to repent, we frequently blur the connection from sin to death. Well, that was not the case for Jesus. I mean, he came literally into a world of the walking dead and he came offering life itself knowing that the price of this new life would be his own death. In fact he even announced it ahead of time. In *Matthew 20:18* he says: "*Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.*" Now Jesus knew precisely that the wages of sin was death because it was our sin that led to his death. *John 3:16* says: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not*" -- what? "*should not perish, but have eternal life.*" Make no mistake about it, every one of us was and is on our way to perishing because we've all inherited Adam's rebellion. Sinner is who we are by nature, sin is what we do by practice. It is the direction that our fallen nature bends toward, 'cause all of us have inherited Adam and Eve's predilection for law breaking. Folks think about the ten commandments or the law, they think this is some kind of set of rules that God has given us to try to make ourselves better to come out, make

ourselves worthy for heaven. Well, that's not what the law's about. The law is a set of non-negotiable demands that the King has placed upon his subjects. You see, God is the King and we are his subjects. And violating any one of his commands in any way is a capital offense for which all of us have earned the death penalty. And God says so. He says as much in *Romans 3:19*, he says this: *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.* You say accountable to God? Most folks don't even think they're remotely accountable to God and certainly most folks don't think of themselves as guilty of a capital offense because all of us see all of the death that is around us not as our just due but as just a natural process. I mean after all, Disney told us there's this great big circle of life and we're all just a part of it, but it was never supposed to be that way. I mean, it was Adam's rebellion that introduced us to sin itself. It was Adam's rebellion that brought sin into our world when it wasn't there before. *Romans 5:12* says this, it says: *Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.* Death may seem natural to us because all of us, we have no choice, we all accept it as such but it's not natural. We were intended to live in a world where there was no death. But because of Adam, we are all born under a death sentence that literally takes a lifetime to

execute. I mean it's the distractions of living that make us forget that we are all, every one of us right now, in the process of dying. Growing old just removes the distractions.

I used to visit a friend in a nursing home, and if any of you have done that, you know these are incredibly depressing places. You go into these, there's usually a great room of sort, and they bring all the folks out and they bring them out and they're usually -- these folks are well advanced in years and they're in their wheelchairs and they're either just sitting and staring or they're playing bingo or they're playing cards and they're just kind of passing the time, and it certainly seems to me and I think it's pretty clear to many of them that they're just waiting their turn to die. I mean it was their turn today, it's going to be your turn tomorrow. And eventually every one of us is going to come face to face with the fact that every single one of us is facing a death penalty, and it's a death penalty that we're facing for our sins. And the fact that we're able to put such a distance between the sin in our lives and the death penalty that sin demands only serves to hide the obvious, and that is we are born and we live under a sentence of death. Well, God hates that. God sent his Son into the world to rescue us from the curse of that death, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Jesus came to perfectly fulfill what the ten commandments demanded,

and having done that, he stood in our place, bearing the guilt of our sin. He did the dying, we did the sinning.

Well, death is the first thing that baptism is all about. See, baptism first symbolically represents death. Secondly, going under the water represents burial. But here's the good news about death and burial when it pertains to baptism. The good news is that this is a death that you choose to die. I mean that's unique. Not only is it a choice that you make but it is a door to life. Jesus said in *Matthew 10:39*: *"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* Baptism represents your willingness to lose your old life for Christ's sake and Christ's partnering with you in a new life. You see, when you go under the water you are representing not just one burial but two. You see, in baptism you don't go under that water alone. You are symbolically participating in the death of Jesus Christ as well. And when you go under that water you are symbolically saying when Jesus died, I died with him as well. *Romans 6:3* says this: *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.* So we're dead and we're buried with Christ as we go under the water. So first we have death to our old life;

secondly we have burial, we are buried with Christ in our sins; and thirdly, as you're coming back out of the water, there's a resurrection. *"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."* See, as you come out of that water you are symbolically showing that you are raised and released in Christ. You are now dead to sin. That's what we demonstrate as we come out of the water.

Now again just what does that mean practically speaking, I mean, I lust, I envy, I lie, I cheat, I gossip, I get baptized and suddenly it all disappears? Well, the answer to that question put that way is no. Baptism doesn't do that at all. See, baptism cannot confer new life. God can do that alone. Baptism simply demonstrates that new life has already taken place. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 that we are all by nature dead in our trespasses and sins. And no matter how hard we try, we still lusted and envied and lied and did all the other things that God's law had forbidden. We all had hearts that were dead set against the will of God. And baptism is a symbolic way of demonstrating that that person, that person with a heart that was once dead set against the will of God, that person has died, and he or she is the one being buried with Christ under the waters of baptism. Some folks mistakenly think that the waters of baptism are what are designed to cleanse us from sin. I have to

tell you that those waters don't have the power to do that. Only the blood of Jesus Christ has the power to do that. So baptism doesn't cleanse us from sin, it is instead a sign that that cleansing has already taken place. Baptism is actually a celebration and a demonstration of a successful heart transplant undertaken by God himself. And that event God makes perfectly clear in Ezekiel 36, and you've heard me quote this scripture countless times. What you might not get is its connection to baptism. This is *Ezekiel 36:25*. God says: *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* You see, when God speaks about burying the old life in baptism, coming out of the water celebrating the newness of life in Christ, he's talking about something far more profound than simply getting our act together, cleaning our act up. I mean, he's literally speaking about dying to an old way of living and being re-created in a new one, of having this ice cold heart of stone surgically removed and have a brand new living heart of flesh surgically implanted. God says in verse 27: *I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* Now for all of us,

that is a brand new way of thinking. I mean God's law said you must do this, you cannot do that. We felt bound, we felt imprisoned by that law, I mean, not only could we not do it, we had no desire to do it or not do it in the first place. We were what you call prisoners of the law. You see, fallen mankind's default drive of rebellion is actually a unique form of slavery. It's unique in that it's a slavery that deeply resents liberation. It's a slavery that deeply -- that fights tooth and nail to remain in that same case of being enslaved. It's a slavery that completely blinds those who are enslaved to what their status really is. But they think they're free as a bird, and they are not.

Now the best illustration I can give for this occurred over 39 years ago, I've mentioned this before. I was living in San Francisco, I mentioned this before but I think it bears repetition. I was working with a group of non-Christian carpenters -- really non-Christian -- and we used to have frequent discussions about my faith 'cause I shared my faith with them almost every day. And a lot of those discussions centered about how they viewed my faith, and they said -- they thought that me being a Christian meant I had no freedom whatsoever. I mean if you're a Christian, that's it, there's no sex, there's no drugs, there's no partying, there's nothing. I mean, who in the world would want that? So I was working with this one fellow Tom and we went to his apartment for

lunch and we sat down at his kitchen table and as we sat down at his kitchen table for lunch -- I've mentioned this before -- there was a huge stack of *Penthouse* magazines over on the side there, and Tom pointed at the magazine, said, "See, you Christians can't even look at a girly magazine." And interestingly enough there was a brand new copy of that magazine right on the table that comes thankfully with a brown paper wrapper on it, and so I was just sitting at the table, I said, "Well it's interesting," I said, you know, I pointed at the magazine and I said, "You don't have the freedom to not look at that magazine." And as he said -- as I said that, I said, "I can look at the cover on that magazine and I can walk away from it but you can't." And he got this silly little grin on his face. And he got that grin because he knew that what I said was true. I mean, he knew he did not have the wherewithal to not look at that magazine. I mean, he hadn't realized it before but he realized it at that moment and just for a moment that he was enslaved to that and at least he had the honesty to admit it sort of with that grin. I mean, he was admitting that what he was touting as freedom was really a form of slavery. And whether it's lust or envy or bitterness or jealousy or gossip or any of the other sins that plague us without Christ, every one of us is helplessly enslaved to sin.

Listen to how Martin Luther put this. He said: "Scripture

represents man as one who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick, and dead, but in addition to his other miseries is afflicted, through the agency of Satan his prince, with this misery of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, unfettered, able, well, and alive." See my friend Tom never realized that he was in fact a prisoner. And here's where the prisoner part becomes self-evident. You see, Tom knew that where he was was not the right place to be. He maybe have even hated where he was or not, I don't really know, but he knew that he lacked the willpower to change where he was. I mean, he knew what the right thing to do was and he knew you're supposed to do the right thing, he just knew that he didn't have the ability to want to do the right thing enough to do it. That's what we mean when we say he was a prisoner of the law. Paul says in *Romans 7:14*: *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate.* You see, as long as we live, the law has this power over us and it has this power to demand what we cannot supply. And so in baptism, the plunging under the water is this living picture of what it means to die to the power of that law. I mean, we're talking about dying to one way of living and being recreated to living in a new way. And when we say we are dead to sin, we mean that the power that sin used to have over us, it has been ended and it's been ended by a

death. Once a person has died, he's free from any power that the law has over him.

You know we've seen that example, I mentioned a couple years ago with one of the horrors of the collapse of Libya was seeing people were parading around that city, the main city and they were parading the dead body of Muammar Gaddafi, the bloody corpse, and they were expressing their hatred of Gaddafi by displaying it in a terrible way and by mocking it and doing all kinds of things to it, but displaying it was all they could do. I mean, you can beat a corpse, I mean, you can desecrate it, you can threaten it, you can torture it but we all know that it's only symbolic because for all practical purposes nothing can touch a dead man. I mean, in one sense he's absolutely free and the only problem is he's dead. But what if you had the same freedom, I mean, that the law could no longer touch you because it saw you as a dead man but you're still very much alive? That's what baptism represents. Again, *Romans 7:4: Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.* You see, in baptism you symbolize that the day you placed your faith in Christ is the day you died. It's the day that you died to the law and its demands of perfection. And you died to the law because Jesus Christ stood in your place to receive your

punishment. So now you're dead to its demands. You've been buried with Christ under the water. You're resurrected with him as well. Again *Romans 6:4*: *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.*

All of this talk of death and burial and resurrection might sound too spiritual to some, I mean, they might say okay, practically what does this mean to me? Let me make this as practical as I can. I raised the issue before about dying to sin. And I said, you know, I lust, I lie, I gossip, I steal, I get baptized with Christ and it all goes away? Let me just kind of break it down for you as to actually what really takes place, what really happens. You see, I become born again first. That's the first thing that happens. And when I become born again, that means that God's Holy Spirit comes to live within me. You know, *Romans 8:9*: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* So here's the bottom line, here's where it starts. When I am born again, I literally become a temple where the Holy Spirit of God now lives. And while he's living inside me, he now begins to change my sinful desires. They literally begin to transform. Well, baptism represents the dying of the old man with those old sinful desires. It means that not only can the law no

longer legally touch you because you've died with Christ, but also now that you now find that your very desires are brand new. These are not the desires that you had all along. These are desires that are now beginning to line up with God's desires. And so you start to do what the law used to require but now you're doing it for the sheer pleasure of doing it. Worship and giving and singing and praying, these are all things that I could have done quite nicely without, thank you, before Christ came into my life, but now that is literally unthinkable. I mean, I now do those things not because I have to but because now I want to. The difference now is that my heart of stone has been replaced with a heart of flesh and we freely now do what the law requires.

Jonathan Leeman sums up nicely the freedom a heart transplant provides. He says this: "Biblical freedom is this remarkable state in which we want what God wants. How does this happen? How are we set free to want what God wants? At one time God's righteous law imprisoned us, but now, we are free to be 'slaves of righteousness' and Jesus and Paul want to call that 'freedom.' How is that possible? It is possible because of the new covenant. The spirit gives us new hearts. He creates new desires in us so that we desire to love God and love our neighbor which is to fulfill the law."

Now, I'm 66 years old. I mean, for 42 years of those 66 years I've been a new creature in Christ. But I still remember my first 24 years when I was a prisoner of the law. I remember, you know, in many ways I hated my life, but I hated the thought of God even more. If someone could have ever stopped me back then and described for me what my future life would have been like including what my likes and dislikes would be, I wouldn't believe them. I mean if somebody were to tell me at age 24 that in the second half of my life I would be going to church, studying scripture, and praying for the pleasure of it, for the pleasure of worshiping God, I would have burst out laughing. I am certain I would have laughed right in their face. I mean the newness of life in Christ means there's a brand new set of appetites that God has placed inside me.

But let me make a distinction here as well. You know, if someone said to me as I grow older you're going to feel the need for God, you're going to feel the need for religion, you're going to feel the need for church and perhaps as a forty or fifty-year-old man with a family, I might have paid attention, paid attention to something like that, I might have seen some positive benefit for my kids, maybe for my family in doing the God thing. And so perhaps I would have been willing to hear that. I mean, I might have even done the religion thing for its obvious benefits. And make no mistake about it, religion, any religion has benefits. I mean,

Romans 3:10 tells us no one seeks for God, yet on any given Sunday morning there are literally hundreds of thousands of churches and synagogues and temples and mosques that are filled with people who are apparently seeking God, but they're not. In reality what they are seeking is the benefits of seeking God rather than seeking God himself, because God says no one seeks him on their own. And every religion offers a sense of security, a sense of belonging, a social structure, an identity structure that can make them seem very attractive. Those are benefits that have nothing to do with seeking God himself. And lots of contemporary westerners now choose a religion like you would make any other life-style choice, on the basis of a perceived benefit. You know, I was thinking about trying Buddhism because I really want to learn how to meditate, or I was thinking about Wicca or the Kabbalah, that was a little too mystical, so I decided to try Kundalini yoga so I could lose some weight. That's how many of us now choose our religion, and I'm not saying that to mock that or to point that out. I'm simply saying that this is a present reality. God has nothing to do with it. But had God not intervened in my life, had he not done this spiritual heart transplant, I too might have made a similar life-style choice. What I never would have believed is someone telling me that I would be worshiping God not for its benefits but for its pleasure. If someone had told me even later in life that the joy and the deep satisfaction of a relationship with Jesus

Christ would far surpass anything I had ever imagined, I would have dismissed it as the rantings of a madman. But that's what newness of life in Christ is all about. We start loving what Christ loved, we start hating what he hated, we start valuing what he values because the Spirit of Christ is now inside us, he's taken up residence within us, and he tells us: *I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* All of this is symbolically captured by the act of baptism. We are dead in our sins, buried with Christ under the water then raised with Christ as we come back out of the water.

And so to review, first, what is baptism? Well, baptism is simply plunging under the water. What is the point of baptism? It's a symbolic picture of our death, our burial, and our resurrection in Christ. It is not a cleansing from sin but rather a picture of the cleansing that's already taken place through the blood of Christ. And finally question number three: Why should I get baptized? Well, the simplest and most direct answer is because God said so. God told us to. If you go back to the book of Acts and you see Peter's first sermon, Peter made it crystal clear, this was the very first day of Pentecost, the gift of tongues had descended on the assembled believers, and everyone spoke in their native tongue but was understood in their native language, and Peter spoke and his words were very powerful as this is what he said. This is Acts

2:22, he said: *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know -- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it."* Now apparently Peter never got the memo that you're not supposed to be that blunt. You're not supposed to make people feel guilty by telling them exactly where they stand. You're not supposed to accuse people directly of murder. We look at this, and we see Peter just opened up and he opens up and he lets the people have it. And he goes on to say in Acts 2:36, he says: *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."* Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, *"Brothers, what shall we do?"* Well it's important here to note also what Peter did not say in response to their question. He didn't say, *"Smile, God loves you."* And he didn't say, *"Hey, guess what? God loves you and has a perfect plan for your life."* Listen to what he did say: *And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Why did Peter say that? Well, Peter

said that because shortly before Jesus ascended into heaven, Jesus himself gave a final message to the disciples and to Peter as one of those disciples, and Jesus said this in *Matthew 28*, he said: *"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 commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* So Peter in his first sermon is doing exactly what Jesus had commanded him to do, and God was clearly pleased with Peter's approach. I mean after all, *Acts 2:41* says: *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.* You see, baptism marked the birth of the local church. And two thousand years later we are still doing the very same thing.

And that leads to my question this morning. It has to do with this whole appetite that God has placed within us, and I would first ask: Why are you here this morning? I mean, have you ever asked yourself that question? I mean, if you're a member of the kingdom of God and God the Holy Spirit is living inside you, he is uniquely conforming you into the image of Jesus Christ, he is shaping and molding the very appetites that are inside you. And that includes an appetite that causes you to want to be here in the first place. Now I've said many, many, many times there's a thousand other places you could be this morning, so why are you here? Well, is it

not because God has placed within you a desire to meet with other believers, I mean, to share worship, a desire to share the word of God, become part of a chosen, called out group of fallen sinners that God has elected to pour his blood, his grace, and his mercy into in order to display his glory? That's what the living body of Christ is. That's what the church is. And that's all part of the newness of life that is represented when we come up out of the water in baptism.

You see, the ceremony of baptism affirms the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ and my resurrection along with him.

Again *Romans 6:4: 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.*

And that newness of life is always displayed within the context of the local body of Christ, the church, by baptism. Baptism is often times our first opportunity to publicly affirm what God has done in our lives while at the same time affirming the church's role as an alternative reality to the world that all of us live in. See, baptism proves that you cannot just be a lone ranger Christian because nobody baptizes themselves. God designed it to be a physical declaration, to physically state that you are lining yourself up with God's people and his body. You know, he says we are to be in the world but not of the world, and baptism represents

our entry into the kingdom of God while we are here on earth. And as such, it is always a public declaration. It is never a private affair. I mean, even if it has to be done surreptitiously as it often has to be done in persecuted countries, it always takes place in front of witnesses and it still tells the world I am publicly declaring my allegiance to Jesus Christ and his church.

Jonathan Leeman sees baptism in athletic terms, and it really has to do with publicly acknowledging whose team you are on. And you know, lots of times as we look forward to baptism, it's mostly young men and women, boys and girls who may see it more plainly in terms of athletics, and the important point to realize is this, that is that conversion and baptism are two very separate and distinct things. At conversion, by God's grace, personally and privately, we switch teams. We leave the kingdom of darkness, we enter the kingdom of light, all things become new. *2 Corinthians 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* That's conversion, new team. Baptism takes place afterwards and sometimes it's a matter of hours. I mean, the Ethiopian eunuch was right then, the three thousand that Peter baptized, sometimes though it's a matter of years. But the act of getting baptized always takes place after we've switched teams.

Athletically speaking, baptism says now that I've switched teams, I'm going to publicly switch jerseys. You know, I mentioned the last time the story of LeBron James. I mean, the story centers around the best professional basketball player in the world. He decides after many, many years he's going to leave one team and he's going to join another. So you have this top athlete switching teams and he switched from Cleveland to Miami. And how did they display this change? He switched jerseys. They show LeBron, he's in Miami, he's parading around with his Miami Heat jersey, and meanwhile Cleveland, the team that he left shows everybody burning their old jerseys of LeBron in effigy because he had very publicly switched teams and traded jerseys. You well know probably, many of you that that story's changed again, I mean, he's left Miami and he's now back in Cleveland. So he's traded in his Miami Heat jersey for a Cleveland Cavalier jersey, and he's publicly declared his allegiance to this new team or this new old team by switching jerseys again. But he's doing it for money and he's doing it for fame, and it is only temporary because even the best athletes, like all of us, are still in the process of dying. Eventually he's going to be done. But baptism represents a new start with a new team that goes on forever and it's got a new king, King Jesus, who gives us life eternal. And it represents publicly putting on a new jersey, declaring my loyalty to this team for all time.

Mr. Leeman puts it this way when it comes to what baptism represents, he says this: "Whether people's decision to swap allegiances comes quickly -- comes gradually or quickly, a point comes when they must decide to change their team: You've been playing for the red team. You've been thinking about switching to the blue team. What's it going to be -- red or blue?" Conversion occurs at the moment the decision is made to switch teams. You leave the dark team to play for the light team. Leeman goes on to say: "Baptism, then is putting on a new jersey. It's when we publicly identify ourselves, by the church's representative authority, with his death and resurrection. All the thinking and journeying come to a head right there. Through the church, Jesus asks whether we will die to ourself and our own rule, be buried with him, and trust that he will raise us up with him according to a new power and rule."

Today some of our people are going to publicly enter the water, go under that water, then rise up out of it, having obeyed their Lord. By God's grace and through his mercy they have been lead from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. They've already switched teams. By God's grace through baptism we are going to have the pleasure this afternoon of watching them switch jerseys. Let's pray.

Father God, we do thank you for who you are. We thank you for the incredible gift that you are. And Lord, I just again, I want to pray for us and if there's anyone in this congregation that your Spirit is tugging on to undergo the waters of baptism in obedience to you, I pray that you would continue to move in their hearts, that they would be drawn, that they would be moving, that they would meet with me, we're going to have a time of just kind of sitting down and going over all of this when we get to the picnic, I pray that you would move those whom you would move to act in obedience to you, and that you would be honored and glorified by everything that takes place. And I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.