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What's the Big Deal About Baptism
August 24th, 2014, Jeff Germs

Today we are going to have a few people getting baptized at McIvor Lake. We had several people baptized there a couple months ago and others wanted to get baptized and asked if we could do it again so we have joy and privilege of baptizing a few more people today. Last time we had eight planned baptisms and gave a call for more to come forward if the Lord so led and four more stepped up and proclaimed that they too would like to make a public profession of their faith in the work of Jesus in their lives. And then the following Sunday we had two more who were baptized in the river. God has been doing something at CRBC. It is so phenomenal to be a part of it.

Now, I would imagine that there are a whole bunch more of you who are considering baptism but there is some reason that you are holding back. And I have heard many reasons in my time as a pastor why some people choose to wait to get baptized, or not do it at all, but there is really no good reason to wait if you have truly trusted Christ. There are many New Testament examples we could look at this morning but I want to mainly look at one in Acts 8. This is the story of Philip, one of the disciples of Jesus who had a divine appointment with an Ethiopian official who was spiritually hungry.

Now, just to set the scene here, Jesus had already been crucified. He rose from the dead and had appeared to many people over a period of about forty days before he finally ascended to heaven. After this, the Holy Spirit visited this first small church. Peter then, by the power of the Holy Spirit, preached a very powerful and courageous sermon to a very large crowd of mostly Jewish onlookers. After his sermon some of his listeners asked Peter how they should respond.

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Acts 2:38–41 (NLT)

38 Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God." 40 Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" 41 Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

Wow! Can you imagine a baptismal service with three thousand new believers? That must have been an exciting day to say the least. I wonder how long it took. And it happened after Peter preached a very long sermon. Were they looking at their watches and saying, "Hey Peter, it's getting close to 12:00. You better wrap this up." I don't think so. Peter preached his sermon and after that, just like we are going to do today, they baptized everyone who believed - all three thousand of them. If they had 12 apostles doing the baptizing it would have taken over four hours if they took one minute per person. I don't ever want to hear anyone complain about a long service again when we have gone ten minutes over.

Notice that they didn't have their theology or doctrine classes first. They didn't straighten out their lives first. They believed in Jesus and were baptized, based on their profession of faith.

Well, after this mass baptism there are many accounts of individuals and whole families believing in Jesus and getting immediately baptized. It was a regular occurrence. In Acts 8 is one such event.

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Acts 8:26–40 (NLT)

26 As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, "Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, [about 2600km] 28 and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

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29 The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage." 30 Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 The man replied, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.

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32 The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. 33 He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." 34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?"

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35 So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus. 36 As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?" 38 He ordered the

carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing.

There are several things that stand out in this passage for me. The first thing we already alluded to and that is that in this situation, as is usual in the New Testament, there wasn't a long time lapse between when a person believed in Jesus and when they were baptized.

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There was true belief and immediately following was a baptism to symbolize the inward reality of Christ.

A very common thing today is that people will sometimes wait for months or years before getting baptized. There are several reasons people might do this. I have talked with many people who have had the understanding that if they get baptized they have to be perfect and they know they can't live up to that expectation so they choose to wait until they get their act together. Let me tell you, if you are waiting until you get your act together before you get baptized it will never happen.

We are all a work in progress. None of us, including me, has arrived, nor will we until Jesus takes us home. On this earth we are under construction and we have the joy of walking with a whole bunch of other broken people who are train wrecks just like us.

I've talked to others who didn't want to get baptized until they intellectually understood more theology or doctrine. They had a lot of questions left unanswered. Again, if you are waiting until you have everything figured out intellectually, you will never take that step of obedience. We will never have God totally figured out. He is infinite. We are finite. It stands to reason then, that there will be more mystery about God than we can ever know. He has revealed to us what he wants to know about him through his written word and through his living Word, Jesus. That means that we get to know God more intimately by walking with Jesus and spending time in his Word. But, there will always be unanswered questions. Don't hold back on getting baptized because you don't have everything figured out yet.

Another reason some people choose to not get baptized is because they feel they were already baptized as infants. I can relate to that. My parents had me baptized in the Lutheran church when I was an infant. I have no recollection of it happening, but they tell me it did. And then when I was a teenager I came to a realization that I was a sinner and completely unable to save myself and I asked Jesus to do what I couldn't do. And based on my faith in Christ's finished work on the cross I was baptized.

In the Bible, belief always comes before baptism. Baptism does not save anyone. There is no magic in baptism. Nobody is saved because they are baptized, not a baby, not an adult, nobody.

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Ephesians 2:8–9 (NLT)

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

Salvation is completely a work of God, and baptism does not save.

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It is a rich symbolism of an inside work that has already been done. **It's an outward expression of an inward reality.** And I know that this is a touchy subject for some of you if you were baptized as infants like I was. I understand that. But what helped me was the realization that there is no biblical example of an infant being baptized because infants cannot believe and baptism always follows belief.

Another thing I want you to notice is the mode of baptism.

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Acts 8 (NLT)

³⁶ As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?" ³⁸ He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing.

It seems very clear to me that the Ethiopian was immersed. He went down into the water and came up out of the water.

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As a matter of fact the word 'baptize' [**baptizo**] literally means to plunge under water. In the Greek language it was used for a soup ladle that was dipped, or a ship that was sunk. It literally means to submerge totally.

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Add to that the fact that baptism by immersion was very common to the Jews. They would ceremonially wash themselves in mikvehs. When we go to Israel next year, Lord willing, we will see many many examples of ancient mikvehs. Jews would have to totally immerse themselves and do a ritual cleansing on various occasions. They could not go to the Temple without being ceremonially clean. Also, if someone converted to Judaism they would be ceremonially cleansed by baptism in a mikveh.

So, baptism by immersion wasn't weird at all to the Jews. It was a continuation of what God was doing. So, it was obvious to this Ethiopian that if he was to convert to Christ he would need to be baptized. **"Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?"** And down into the water they went.

So, what does baptism symbolize?

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Romans 6:3-4 (NLT)

³ Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? ⁴ For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

There is a rich symbolism in baptism. When you get baptized you are not saying that you will from day forward be perfect. What you are saying is that Christ was perfect for you and that his death paid the penalty for your sins and you are walking in the newness of the life he has given you. When you go down into the water it symbolizes your death to sin and self and when you come up out of the water it symbolizes your new life in Christ. There is no magic in baptism. But it is a very powerful act when you step out in obedience and submit to Jesus' lordship in your life by being baptized.

Here is the last thing Jesus said before ascending to heaven.

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Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT)

¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

I was told a story this week about someone who was baptized against their will. It was a kind of sadly funny story. It was the first time, and I think, likely the last time, he had ever been to church and one of his relatives who brought him, informed him that he was getting baptized. I don't know if they felt like they needed to fill their baptism quota, or what, but he had no idea what was happening. It was totally meaningless and actually reminiscent of many of the abuses that the church has perpetrated throughout the years.

For many years, the church became more powerful than the government and was actually in cahoots with them and they would use baptism as a means of census taking. If you lived in a certain area, you would take your baby to the church to get baptized and the church would record it so the government would know how much to tax you. That is an abuse of power.

Baptism is something that is very personal. It cannot be forced on anyone. Nobody should be guilted into getting baptized against their will because baptism holds no power. But, neither should you wait to get baptized. If you believe in Jesus, that he died to pay the penalty for your sin,s and was raised again so you could have life then you should get baptized. It is a command of Christ. The apostles commanded it many times. So, if you have not yet been baptized by immersion as a believer in Jesus Christ you can do that today. Take a step of faith and obedience and follow him into the waters.

The last time we had a baptism service we had eight people signed up and then gave a call on the Sunday for people to get baptized. A few came forward after the service and talked to various staff about it. I was quickly getting ready to go to the lake after the service and went into the kitchen and there were a couple ladies in there. I asked them if they were going to the lake for the baptism. One of them was Linda Quintrell. She lowered and shook her head and said, "No." I kind of sensed that there was something going on there, but didn't know her story, and didn't feel a peace about asking her.

I went to the lake and after we baptized about eleven people I gave another call for people to come forward and out of the crown walked Linda. I was so surprised. It was a great moment. If Jesus has saved you and you have not been baptized why not take that step of obedience today. Run home and grab a change of clothes and a towel and we will see you at Lion's Beach at McIvor Lake.