



The Meaning and Importance of Baptism

February 1, 2026

Matthew 3:1-17

(Video 41:37)

You want to mark in your Bibles, what we already read, Matthew 3, gonna go there a couple of times. You're also gonna wanna mark Matthew 28, Acts 8, and John 1, and we'll see how I do in getting there. I've shared with you, I know at least once, maybe twice in the past, on my own account, I've actually been baptized three times. Born into a family that was Roman Catholic, and as an infant, immediately upon birth, I wasn't supposed to live, they thought I was gonna die in hours, couldn't get me to breathe, and they baptized me and gave me what they called the sacrament of baptism at that time. Then later on, as an infant, about a year later, went through the formal Catholic sacrament of baptism as an infant, and I use the word baptism now that I understand the scriptures, and I know Christ is my Lord and Savior, in a very loose term, those were not biblical baptisms, they were not scriptural baptisms, and therefore they're not really baptisms at all, but I use it loosely. And then I got baptized a third time, actually in a swimming pool at the landings at Dobson Ranch in 1981, where Teri and I were living at the time my late father-in-law baptized me as a believer in Christ in a scriptural manner by immersion. I use the term sacrament, it's referred to as a sacrament of baptism, it's also referred to as an ordinance. A lot of Protestants don't like to use the term sacrament because it implies something that baptism really is not. If you look up the word sacrament in a dictionary, there'll be two definitions you're given. The first definition will be a rite, a ritual, a symbolic religious act that symbolizes a spiritual reality, a spiritual happening, something spiritual that has taken place in the participant. The second definition will be a rite, a ritual, an act, a religious function or performance that mediates grace to an individual. That is the definition of sacrament that is erroneous. There is no magic in the water. There is no special



supernatural magic or grace that takes place just because these individuals are going to be immersed in water in and of the act itself. Now, it is a means of grace in the sense that they're being obedient to the commands of scripture. And whenever you're obedient to the commands of scripture, there is an enabling grace. God enables what He commands. And there's other grace that flows from publicly being baptized, which we will talk about in a little bit.

We have an amazing paradox. I'm always astounded by this. We have millions upon millions of people around the world who were baptized, are baptized because they were baptized as infants. And they're not Christians. Then we have all these people who are truly genuine, born-again Christians, know Christ as their Lord and Savior, and they've never been scripturally baptized. And it's crazy. It's a paradox. How did all of this baptizing of infants start?

Well, actually, it started in the Middle Ages. And Emperor Constantine didn't do anybody any favors, the Emperor of Rome, in about 310 AD. Constantine declares Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Big mistake, because what happens? You will recall in your history of Rome, the emperors before Constantine were looked upon as gods, and they were worshiped and so forth. And worship was intertwined with civil government and being obedient to the government and so forth. And so government and religion were all meshed together. He declares Christianity to be the official religion of the empire. All of a sudden, wow, it becomes fashionable to become a Christian. It becomes politically expedient to be a Christian. As a matter of fact, it becomes financially profitable to be a Christian. So all of a sudden in Rome, the capital city of the empire with millions of people, it becomes fashionable to become a Christian. Everybody goes, wow, if the emperor's in, we're in, we better do this. So now you got all these people wanting to "join the church" who don't know Jesus Christ as



their personal Lord and Savior. They're just joining the church and becoming a "Christian". Well, how do you do that? How do you identify? They use the ritual of baptism. And so you have all these tares, if you will, coming in and controlling the wheat. And of course, Rome being the capital city, the biggest church and so forth, it takes over, it takes control, it proliferates. And now you go through the centuries of all these non-believers who are doing all of these non-biblical things because they're not even believers in Christ for the most part. And all the errors and heresies all creep in. Well, one of the errors and heresies that crept in was the baptizing of infants. That is nowhere commanded or even demonstrated in scripture. Why baptize infants? Well, they thought, again, totally non-biblical musing of fallen man, the stain of original sin, baptism would be a way to get rid of, so we'll dunk these babies in water if you want. And by the way, even in the Middle Ages, when they baptized infants, they completely immersed them in the water. They didn't sprinkle them, they completely immersed them in the water. But they thought that was a way of getting rid of the stain of original sin. It was basically humanistic, non-biblical, sinful, erroneous theology, error, and it was nothing but ritualism and mysticism. But in any event, you've got the church that is really a political entity as much as it is a religious entity, and they're baptizing these infants. Well, then you get along to Martin Luther and Calvin and all those folks who, the Protestant Reformation, they're reading the scriptures, they break away, and the "Protestants" break away from the "Catholics", and so you've got these Catholic states and Protestant states, different places. But in both of them, the government, the civil government, the authority, whether it's the church at Rome and the Roman Catholic tradition or whether it's a Protestant tradition, the church and the civil governing ruling authorities are one and the same, and they're running the society that way. But when the Protestants broke away from the Catholics, Luther and Calvin, they got their soteriology right. We're saved by faith through



grace and so forth in Christ, not by works, et cetera. They got their soteriology right, but the vestiges of some of those old traditions, baptizing infants, they didn't get those old grave clothes off, so to speak. They brought those right in with them. So now you've got Catholic states and you've got Protestant states, and they're all running the civil government, and they're all baptizing infants by tradition erroneously, for the most part. And they came up with, some of the Protestants came up with some excuses for it. Okay, so now you're getting all these people baptizing. Well, what happens? Some people are reading the scriptures. Some people go, "Oy vey, this is not right. Nowhere in the word of God does it say we should be baptizing infants." And so they start realizing, hey, I'm now an adult. I'm a believer in Jesus Christ. I need to be obedient to the word of God and do what the word of God says. I've never been scripturally baptized by immersion as an external sign of an inward spiritual reality that's already taken place in my heart. Well, not only the Catholics, but even the Protestant leaders go, "Whoa, you're gonna start baptizing adults? You're violating the civil law. That's insurrection against the civil government." And they start persecuting these people. As a matter of fact, they gave them a name. You may have heard of the name Anabaptist. *Ana*, it means renew or to do again. *Baptists*, the word baptize, they were renewed baptizers. They were *re-baptizers*. They were those who came to faith in Christ really and realized we need to be baptized the right way. And so they called them *re-baptizers*. They gave them other nicknames as the centuries went on, *dunkards* and so forth.

The persecution was intense. I mean, they martyred, killed these people because they saw them as insurrectionists against God and the civil government to rebaptize, to baptize an adult. There were the Waldensians and other groups, you don't need to worry about. So what happened, so when the Puritans ultimately came, you realize what a great experiment America really is in so many ways. When the Puritans come here, they've seen a heartbreak



and a disaster of a civil government wedded to the religious establishment as well. And so they built into our framework as a country, what, the separation of church and state. And by the way, all that was ever designed to mean was that the government couldn't enforce a government religion, a mandated religion on anybody. That's all it meant. All this other aberrations that have developed over the last 250 years of getting God out of government and all that other stuff and no 10 commandments in the school and all that foolishness is all satanic and has got absolutely nothing to do with what the founding fathers intended. But that's how, by the way, one of our late elders, Wedge Lutz, and there's a whole group of people with the Lutz, L-U-T-Z, we said Lutz, but it's Lutz, last name. They are all descendants of Anabaptists who were persecuted in Europe and fled and located in Eastern Pennsylvania and some rural areas in Eastern Pennsylvania and some other places as well. And so many of the movements that exist today as a result of the Anabaptists, you might say some Brethren movements and the Mennonites, the Hutterites, and some other groups like that are all related to Anabaptists. But that's how we got into this situation of having so many people still baptized as infants and not baptized in a scriptural manner.

Why go into this? Why talk about this? Well, a little bit of history helps you know how we got here, but why do that before we're going to baptize these individuals? It underscores the significance of what we're doing and why we're doing it. One commentator said this: *The failure to take baptism* (and when he's talking about scriptural baptism publicly by immersion). *The failure to take baptism by bodily immersion seriously, get this, may well be at the root of the immense problems that exist in the church because without making an issue out of baptism, a church can accumulate people who want to make no public profession of faith in Christ at all.* Another commentator said this: *There's a great effort being made today to make those kinds of people* (meaning people in the church who don't want to make a public



profession of Christ) *very comfortable. Whereas in biblical terms and in the early church, in the obedient church, the demand is laid on people that if you have put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, you must make that public confession openly in baptism.* So what he's saying is we got a lot of people who are professors but are not genuine possessors of Christ because they never make a public profession of their faith, and you get a bunch of tares in the church with the wheat. It's not the litmus test, but it's one good test of trying to make sure that people genuinely know Christ.

Why would there be people in the church today who have not been scripturally baptized? One of the big ones, and in a group this large, is always one or two. And we've had a changeover and new people come in the last couple of years since we talked about this. One is **ignorance**. People don't understand and have never been taught not only the significance of baptism, but the fact that baptism is something that occurs after you have come to a genuine faith in Christ, which is why doing it for an infant is meaningless, okay? And so they've never been emphasized. They think it's no big deal. I was baptized as an infant, now I'm a believer in Jesus Christ. Well, no big deal. Now, interestingly enough, I was talking to, I can't remember now, Phil, if you were the one saying, it might have been Phil, he came to faith in Christ years ago, but he's never been in a church that emphasized baptism. Never explained the significance of it, never really gave an opportunity for individuals to do that. Second reason why people don't get baptized is that they were (scripturally baptized), they were baptized by immersion, but they **weren't a believer at the time**. They maybe got baptized by immersion in a church as a teenager, and then a few years later, the light clicks on and they really come to know Christ. That happened right in this very church, the man who made this pulpit, sitting right over there, and we did a baptismal service eight or nine years ago. His daughter was being baptized, and it dawned on him, you know what, I got baptized when I was 17, I wasn't a



believer then. I came to know Christ a few years later. I've never been scripturally baptized. He got up at that point in time, got in, we baptized him the very day. So some people just don't understand the significance of it. Jimmy Foster, are you here at all? Jimmy Foster's been feeling, hey, there you are, Jimmy. I'm so happy you're here. I'll never do a baptism the rest of my life when I don't think of that woman sitting right back there. I know you've been sick recently, and it's so good to see you. November the 13th, 2011, you oughta remember that day, we're in the gym at Scottsdale Bible Church, thought we were gonna baptize 15 people. We threw it open afterwards and baptized another 16 more. We were there till 3.30 in the afternoon. One of them was scheduled to be baptized that day was Jimmy Foster. She comes to know Christ in a little church in Ohio when she's 11 years old, but one thing led to another, and she never got baptized. Regretted it all her life. And that day, we baptized her at, and she was mm-hmm, years old, and we also baptized a seven-year-old boy, and we had both ends of the spectrum that day, and I'll never forget what you said, because you'd gone decades and had never gotten scripturally baptized and wanted to do it that day, and you'd been sick that week, as a matter of fact. And I said, I'm so happy to see you here, Jimmy. And she said, I remember what you said. You said, "I would've crawled on broken glass to get here today, John." And that's how significant this is and how some people just fall into habits. And by the way, that was a very humbling thing. That's another reason, and the main reason, I think, why people don't get scripturally baptized even though they know they're not and they should. It's **pride**, pride. Years go by, and you didn't do it. Now all of a sudden, good grief, I don't want people to know that I've been this negligent and this recalcitrant and I've gone all this period of time and not done this. And so it becomes a prideful thing. There's other aspects to that as well. It could be that in addition to pride, well, this is a prideful thing, **it's humbling**. I was just talking to Phil again. I was talking to Josh who's gonna get baptized. You know what? You



gotta come into a building, you're dressed different. And you're gonna get in water and Niza's gonna have, Niza or Niza? Niza's gonna have her makeup ruined and her hairdo destroyed. We're all gonna be wet and people will be looking. And you know what? It's uncomfortable. It's supposed to be uncomfortable. It's humbling. It's supposed to be humbling. He gives a greater grace to the humble. He honors that humility. And look at the spiritual impact it has on the life of a church. We were talking, Bob Winkler led us in a group prayer here before just a little while ago. And before he's prayed, I remember making the comment. He says, you know what? They'll forget, they've already forgotten all my sermons. People are still talking about the baptism services. Because to hear that testimony of how almighty God has worked in the heart and life of an individual, it does something just enriching to your faith and it encourages your soul.

Now I hope there's nobody here in this category. There's another category of individual who refuses to get spiritually, scripturally baptized. It's **outright defiance**. You're in sin. You know you're in sin. And you don't wanna heap a greater chastisement upon you by publicly getting baptized and saying you're all in for Jesus when you know you're going back to that same sinful pattern, lifestyle, pet sin, whatever it is, it's an outright defiance. I hope there's nobody here, but it could be. You need to repent of that sin immediately and be obedient to your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because chastisement, now that you know the truth, now that you know that you're violating the word of God as you'll see in a moment clearly by not being, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ and you've never been scripturally baptized, baptized by immersion post your salvation experience, you are in sin not to get baptized. You are directly violating the word of God. And God loves His children enough that He is not going to let you alone until you get back in line and get obedient to Him. There's a fifth reason as well and it could be just **total deception**. You think you're a believer and you're not or you know you're



not and you just been playing the game. You just been playing church and this is too big of a step for you. You'll be unmasked for what you really are.

Well, I don't know where you fall in in any of those categories if you do, but one thing is for sure, after today you cannot play the ignorance card anymore.

What is baptism? The verb *baptō* (G911) is used four times in the New Testament. The intensified form in the Greek *baptizō* (G907) is used numerous times. Always, always implying meaning or directly stating complete total submersion. If you were just gonna sprinkle water on somebody, you'd use the word *rhantizō* (G4472). That's not used for baptism in the Greek text. The other thing is this, the verb is never used in the passive tense. Meaning what? The action is never on the actor. It's always the actor doing something to the object. Meaning what? Nowhere does it say the water is placed on you. You are always going into the water. You, the baptism candidate if you will, the person who's baptized rhetorically or physically is actually doing the action and going into the water. It's never the water being placed on the subject, the actor. So all of those things to try to underscore that.

Let's go to Matthew 3 and get to these three or four passages of scripture. In Matthew 3, thank you Charles for reading it so excellently for us. In Matthew 3, John the Baptist of course has come baptizing there and in verse five of Matthew 3, what's it say? ***Then Jerusalem was going out to him.*** Do you think every human being in Jerusalem was going out to him? The scriptures are literature. They're intended to be read in the proper context. It's hyperbolic statement. He's saying, it's like I said, man everybody in Phoenix was at that ballgame. Well everybody in Phoenix wasn't at that ballgame but you get the understanding. What he's saying is massive crowds from Jerusalem are all going out there, okay? ***Jerusalem was going out to him and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan;*** This is the Bible's way of



saying a whole bunch of people, all right? Verse 6, ***and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.*** Now it's interesting, these are Jewish leaders that come to him to be baptized. Look at verse 7, ***But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees*** (those are the Jewish leaders, what were they coming for?) ***coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*** What's the point? No way, charlatans, frauds, you're not gonna participate in this. You're not gonna do another religious ritual. This is a matter of the heart. That's why he says bring forth fruit fit under repentance. In other words, this is a matter of the heart, not religiosity, not symbolism, not another ritual that you can get caught up in. By the way, isn't it interesting and we won't get there today, but in other passages of scripture, this chapter, Mark and some other passages, they don't say to John the Baptist, what's this crazy thing you're doing, dunking all these people in water? They don't say that. What they say is, by what authority do you baptize? They were coming out themselves to be baptized. They weren't put off by the ritual. And I started saying to myself, I wonder why. Why aren't they put off by the ritual? Well, before we get there, look at one more. Go over to Acts 8. Go over to Acts 8. This is a famous account, famous if you've been around Christianity very long, of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. He's sitting up in a chariot. He's reading the prophet Isaiah. Philip, of course, moved by the spirit of God, is led to go witness to this guy, but let's pick it up in Acts chapter 8:26. ***But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza (This is a desert road.) So he got up and went; and behold, there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot and was reading the prophet Isaiah.*** This is a Gentile who is a proselyte to Judaism, if you will. And he had come to



Jerusalem to worship. And he's traveling. He's ahead of her treasury. He's going across a desert area. He's got gear. He's got equipment. He's got an armed guard. He's got people, okay? If we were gonna sprinkle with water, he could take a cup of water from his canteen and sprinkle it on himself. But that isn't what happens. What's it say? Verse 29, ***Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." And when Philip had run up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "Well, how could I unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of scripture, the one he was reading was...*** and it goes on and sets forth the Isaiah passage, okay? And look at 34. ***The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?"*** Look at this. ***Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from the scripture he preached Jesus to him.*** Why is that significant? There's no New Testament at this time. There's a classic case of using the Old Testament to evangelize a soul and show them Jesus the Messiah right from the pages of the old covenant scriptures. ***As they went along the road,*** in this desert region with his chariot and his caravan and all these people, what happens here? ***They came to some water;*** Now they could have stopped and he could have said, you know what? What keeps me from being baptized, Philip? Now that I understand and believe in this Jesus Christ, here's my canteen, sprinkle some water on me. No, they have to wait till they come along and he sees some water. And he says, ***"Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"*** [***And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may"***] ***And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God."***] ***And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water,...*** There is no reason for Philip and this eunuch to go down in the water to take their clothes, hike up their robes and go down knee deep, waist deep, chest deep, neck deep unless he's going to submerge him in the water.



Otherwise he'd just pick up some water with a cup or whatever, sprinkle it on the guy and get on with it. And just making the case for immersion and making the case for the significance of it and making the case for the importance of it. And when they came up, verse 39, ***When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away;*** and so on and so forth. That's a powerful passage of scripture and a powerful passage to underscore that baptism is by immersion.

1 Corinthians 12:13 talks about baptism in a spiritual sense. You who are baptized into Christ Jesus. He's talking about when you were saved. It's a dry baptism. He's not talking about water baptism. When you accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, you were baptized into Christ Jesus. He talks about the children of Israel, they were all baptized into Moses, meaning they identified with Moses as their leader. When you were saved, was all of you saved or just part of you? All of you was saved. When you get baptized, all of you is supposed to be immersed. That's why it keeps the type. Jesus says, don't fear him who's able to destroy the body. Fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in the lake of fire. Later on in that passage in Matthew 3, if we had the time to go through it, what does John the Baptist say? Charles read it for us. I baptize you with water for repentance, but there's one coming after me who's gonna baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire, meaning the fire of judgment if you don't know him as Lord and Savior. He's talking about hell. If you go to hell, how much of you goes? All of you. When you come to Jesus, all of you has to come to Jesus. It's a total commitment. And baptism is that ritual, that rite, that tangible symbol of an inward spiritual act that you are all in for Jesus Christ. I want you to see one more scripture before Brian comes to lead us in song and we'll change and get ready for baptism. I want you to go to Matthew 28. Bob Winkler in his prayer was underscoring and praying for this congregation beforehand when we were



down here praying, asking that anybody who didn't understand, would understand that this is a command from scripture.

Where do you get that, that it's a command from scripture? Well, first of all, what did Jesus do? What did we see there in Matthew 3? And in John 3 as well. Jesus comes to be baptized, and what? John the Baptist says, whoa, you come to me for baptism? I'm the one that needs to be baptized by You. In other words, hey, I'm your cousin. I'm also God's spokesman, God's prophet. And I know who you are. I just told people the day before, behold, the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world. I know that you're virgin born. You don't have original sin. I know, as it says in Hebrews 4:15, you've lived a spotless, sinless, perfect life. You're the Messiah, you're God in human form. You don't need to repent. You got nothing to repent of. So, I don't need to be needing to be baptizing you. What did Jesus say? Suffice it or permit it for now, John. It is fitting for us, get this, to fulfill all righteousness. What did he say? The Son of Man came not to do away with the law, but to fulfill the law, every jot and tittle of the law. But wait a minute, he wasn't a sinner. He knew no sin. He didn't need to repent. Why was he being baptized? Because John the Baptist, a prophet of God, speaking forth the word of God, that's the word of God when God's prophet spoke, orally or written, it's the word of God. And what did he say? All men need to repent and be baptized. He's fully God, but He was also 100% man. And in His humanity, though not a sinner, He was still going to be obedient to the aspects of the word of God that He could, which was, be baptized. Let me tell you something. If your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, felt the obligation to be baptized, how dare you say, it's inconvenient. I can't get it on my day timer. It's a little bit embarrassing. I don't want to do that in front of all those people. It's outside of my comfort zone. Shame on us. Shame on you, shame on me, shame on all of us who ever had those thoughts.



Well, I got you to Matthew 28. Here's another reason why it's a command of scripture, not only to be conformed to the image and likeness of God, but the great commission. I call it the great privilege. Look at Matthew 28:19-20. ***Go therefore and make disciples.*** That is a command to every believer in Christ, then and through the ages. ***Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.*** Well, wait a minute. I'm going to go to people, and I'm to baptize them. In order for me to baptize them, to teach them to be obedient to everything, that tells me that to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ, you're to be baptized. Well, then that means me, if I'm going to go out and teach them, I got to be baptized. Oh, but by the way, if I'm going to make a disciple of them, I'm to go out and preach the Lord Jesus Christ and baptize them. That means they have to submit and be baptized. It's a command from the word of God that you be baptized, scripturally, after coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

I mentioned, Alion Belau, the greatest testimony to the meaning of baptism I ever saw among a people group in my life. This is the Moni tribespeople, and I hope you get to see this someday, Alion, because I was there, and you were probably a teenager at the time, a little boy at the time. Teri and I visited the Moni tribes. These people live at the 6,000, 7,000-foot elevation. There are no lakes. There are no pools. There are no ponds. There is one river, the Kemabu River, and it's down in the valley, and it rages like a fire hose. It is like a class five rapid constantly on this river. They have little bitty brooks that might trickle down, and they catch rainwater when it rains. The Moni's are deathly afraid of water. They have these string rope bridges that they try to walk on and hold two ropes here and one rope here with their toes to get across this raging crevice, and they fall into it like crazy and die. All they know is when you're submerged in that water, you're dead, and the gospel comes. They come to faith



in Jesus Christ. You gotta be obedient to the word of God. That means you need to be scripturally baptized. So what did John and Joy Cutts and what did Bill and Gracie Cutts do? Teri and I were there when they were having one of their very rare baptism ceremonies. They take bricks, stones, and logs, and debris, and they dam up one of these little streams, tributaries, little creeks trickling water off a hill, and it goes weeks and weeks. After a couple of months, it will build up into a body of water maybe five foot deep, maybe about the size of half of the worship center here, and then John Cutts takes these new believers in Christ, these Moni tribespeople, and they go, and they stand in that water. You understand, this isn't you and me raised in a Western culture with all the amenities, et cetera. These are people two or three levels above the Stone Age at the time. They've come a long way since, but still. With all of those fears and all they have known about water, they bathe, and like we do, you go underwater, you're dead. Think about the symbolism in baptism, buried with Him in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life. When a Moni gets baptized, they're telling this whole congregation, I am dead to self. I am spiritually dead to myself, but I want to walk in newness of life with my savior, Jesus Christ. We have the wonderful privilege of watching three people do just that.

As Brian comes to lead us in a hymn or two while we change, I'll ask the candidates to change and get ready as well.