

Unashamed
A Perspective on Baptism
Romans 1:16

Over the course of this morning we are baptizing eight people (1 in the 8:00, 3 in the 9:30, and 4 in the 11:00 service). In preparation for these baptisms I'd like us to think about the significance of believer's baptism. "Believer's baptism" refers to a person being baptized **after** they have believed in Jesus.

Many of you have seen a believer's baptism service similar to the one we're having this morning; others of you haven't. Whatever the case for you, consider with me what your experience would be this morning if you had never even heard the word "baptism"; you've come here today with no idea whatsoever about what is going to happen today.

You come in, sit down, sing songs, pray prayers, and listen to me give a short talk. You then watch a video in which several people talk about how they came to believe that Jesus is God in the flesh who died for their sins. And then you get to the moment in the service when the screen goes up . . . and you realize there's a tub filled with water back there. And then - this is when things get really interesting - people walk down the steps into the water. After one person makes some rather fierce affirmations, that person grabs one wrist with the other. . . and then the most unusual, unforgettable thing happens: the other person lowers that under the water (ALL THE WAY UNDER THE WATER!). And when they come up out of the water everybody starts cheering. The whole experience is unlike anything you've ever seen.

So what is happening here? Why would a person publicly, voluntarily let someone else put them under the water like that? Biblically, there are a number of ways we could answer that question. One way to answer it is that the person being baptized is declaring, "***I am not ashamed of the gospel.***" By being baptized publicly, the person is saying, "When I believed the gospel - the truth about Jesus - I experienced something so profound, so miraculous, that I have to declare it through baptism as believers have done since the first century."

You may recognize the statement, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," from the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans. That is the verse I'd like to discuss briefly this morning - Romans 1:16.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

In the preceding verses Paul has told the believers at Rome very directly, "I thank God for you. I pray unceasingly for you. And I want to come visit you and preach the gospel to you." Paul wanted to come and explain the gospel to believers and unbelievers alike. Beginning in verse 16 Paul explains why he was so passionate about preaching the gospel to them. Notice that Paul makes a negative statement, "***I am not*** ashamed of the gospel." Paul could have said positively, "I am proud of the the gospel." In other places he expressed himself that way; in Galatians 6:14 Paul said he "boasts" in the cross of

Jesus Christ. But by writing, “I am not ashamed of the gospel,” Paul is addressing any suspicion that he might be embarrassed or ashamed of preaching the gospel in a place like Rome which was the most sophisticated and cosmopolitan place in the entire Roman Empire.

The term gospel simply means “good news.” It is the news that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh who lived a sinless life, died on the cross as payment for our sins, was raised bodily from the dead on the third day, and returned to heaven where he is now enthroned at God’s right hand. That’s what Paul believed; that’s what many of us here believe; that’s what those being baptized today believe. But many people in Paul’s day and ours think that it’s simply foolish to think that your eternal destiny hinges on what you believe about a man who lived in a remote country in the Middle East two thousand years ago. Paul readily acknowledged this perception (and we should too). But that didn’t make him ashamed of the gospel - as if it were something he should hide or be embarrassed about.

Why? Because “it is the power of God for salvation to **everyone who believes**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” This gospel isn’t merely for Jewish people (like Jesus and Paul); it is for people in Europe and Asia and Africa and North and South America. Paul writes that to everyone who believes, this gospel is the power of God for salvation. The gospel **powerfully brings salvation** to everyone who believes. Of course, you only need salvation if you need to be saved from something, if there is something that threatens your life. Scripture tells us that all humans everywhere need to be saved from their sin. Scripture describes our sin as an incurable disease (Isaiah 1:5-6), as a crime that deserves the death penalty (Romans 6:23), as a crushing debt that we can never repay (Matthew 18:21-35). The gospel is the message that Jesus Christ dealt with that sin on the cross. Everyone who believes is healed from the disease of sin, is taken off of death row, and has their debt forgiven in full. Everyone who believes is fully alive in Jesus Christ.

That’s why Paul was not ashamed of the gospel. That’s why those being baptized today are not ashamed of the gospel. They are declaring as much by being baptized. We don’t have time to look at the passage this morning, but Romans 6 suggests that baptism is really an acted out parable which explains the gospel. There Paul says that if you have been baptized into Jesus Christ, you have been united with him in his death, burial, and resurrection. Going under the water symbolizes that you have died and been buried with Christ. Coming up out of the water symbolizes that you have been raised with Christ to a new way of life.

A story is told of a church in Africa that didn’t have water to fill the baptistry due to a drought. Instead they put a coffin on the stage. The person being baptized would go up on stage and lie down in the coffin to symbolize that they had died and been buried with Christ. Then they sat up and stood on their feet to symbolize that they had been raised with Christ to a new way of life.

Baptism is an acted out parable which explains the gospel. Those being baptized today are declaring, “I am not ashamed of the gospel. As a matter of fact, I love the gospel and

want my family and friends and acquaintances to know that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” When you think about, the only reason these eight will be baptized today is because they have family and friends and acquaintances who aren’t ashamed of the gospel. . . who shared the message of Jesus with them.

In a couple of minutes we’ll hear excerpts from the stories of all 8 being baptized today. In this service ____ of those will then be baptized. But first I want to read the affirmations that those being baptized will make (the children’s affirmations are a bit different) as well as the affirmation/response that we as a church will make after each baptism.

Affirmations for those being baptized:

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of evil in the world? **I renounce them**

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love? **I do**

Will you be Christ’s faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love? **I will, with God’s help**

Affirmations for the Church.

People of God, what is our response? **We receive you into the family of God! Live and proclaim the gospel of Christ, and share with us in life everlasting.**