

Baptism: A Physical Picture of Spiritual Realities

Romans 6:1-11

This morning five people will be baptized. In a few minutes we will watch a video in which each person being baptized expresses his or her faith in Jesus. After watching the video, we will have the actual baptisms. In preparation for these baptisms, I want us to look at a passage of Scripture for a few minutes in which Paul uses the imagery of baptism to point to spiritual realities in the life of a believer. The passage is Romans 6:1-11.

I'm sure many of us have seen the bumper sticker that says, "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven," right? Usually, it's on the back of the car that has just sped by you going twenty miles an hour over the speed limit! On one hand I agree. I'm not perfect and so I'm grateful that I AM forgiven. But the slogan communicates another sense that sets a pretty low bar for our lives as Christians. It subtly communicates the idea that as believers we can't expect our lives to look much different than the rest of the world, but, hey, at least WE are forgiven.

Paul teaches a grandeur vision of the Christian life in this passage. The gospel certainly is about forgiveness, but in Christ there is forgiveness and so much more. And the reason why is illustrated in what we will be doing here today in baptism. Paul uses the imagery of baptism to point to the spiritual realities that make a substantial difference in our lives.

And so let's look at this passage. In chapter 5, Paul has been discussing the role of the Law and in 5:20 he says this:

²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

He says that the law came to reveal sin. It came to make us aware of sin and so in this sense sin increased. But the amazing thing, Paul says, is that as sin increased *grace abounded all the more*. Paul's point is that as sin abounded, grace super-abounded. There is no measure of sin that grace cannot cover. In saying this, Paul anticipates a question that might be asked. He says in 6:1:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

If grace abounds more and more with sin, wouldn't it be better to sin more so that grace has an opportunity to super abound and thus glorify God more? Paul's answer to this is the teach about who we are in our union Jesus, and he uses the symbolism of baptism to make his point. He says:

² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

This is your spiritual reality if you are a believer in Jesus. You have died to sin. You no longer live in the realm of sin. It is no longer a dominating power in your life. And since that is true, it is

unthinkable that you would continue to live a life characterized by sin. He is not saying that we won't ever sin, but rather that we can no longer live a life dominated by sin. Such a life is impossible because we have died to sin.

As he goes on in verse 3 and 4, he uses the imagery of baptism to point to this spiritual reality for believers. He says that **baptism points to the spiritual reality that believers have died to sin**. Look at what he says in verses 3 and 4:

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, . . .

Everyone who has experienced conversion through faith in Jesus has been *baptized into Christ Jesus* and as such you have been *baptized into his death*. In verse 4 he adds, *we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death*. Burial is the proof of death.

And so, we have died with Christ. His death is your death. And in verse 6, he gets really clear about the spiritual realities of this:

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin.

Before we came to faith in Christ, we were enslaved to sin. Sin was an indwelling presence that controlled our lives. But in our union with Christ, we have died and been buried with Him. Christ's death was our death. Christ's burial was our burial. In our union with him we have died to sin and as such we have *been set free from sin*.

But there is more. Not only have we been united with Jesus in his death, we have also been united with him in his resurrection. And so **baptism points to the spiritual reality that believers have been raised to new life**. Let me read verse 4 again:

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. ⁵ 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.

The purpose of being united with Jesus in his death is so that just as Jesus was *raised from the dead . . . we too might walk in newness of life*. Paul is making it clear that the gospel is not just about forgiveness it is about a new life.

Before Christ, we were spiritual dead. And we could do nothing to experience spiritual life. But in our union with Christ, we are raised to new life. We participate in his resurrected life, a life of power and holiness. In verse 11 he says that we are alive to God. In chapter 8, he will go on to

say this new life is a life in which the very Spirit of God is given to us to empower us. In our union with Christ in resurrection, we have been given power to obey and live a different kind of life.

And so are we JUST forgiven? No! We ARE forgiven, but there is so much more. In our union with Jesus, we have died to the dominating power of sin in our lives. And, in union with Jesus, we have been made spiritually alive. We have been raised to new life in which we have the power to put away sin and walk in increasing obedience. Baptism is a physical picture that points to these spiritual realities!

And so today, as each person is placed under the water, it symbolizes the truth that he or she has in fact died to sin in their union with Christ. Each one has been set free from the reign of sin in his or her life. But we don't leave them under the water, right? They are raised up out of the water symbolizing the spiritual truth that in Christ they are raised to a resurrected life, and they now walk in newness of life.

We call this a baptism celebration because we are celebrating that these spiritual realities are true of each person being baptized today. But for all of us who are in Christ, we are reminded today of our own union with Christ and the reality that we have died to sin. We are no longer enslaved to sin. And in our union with Jesus, we have been raised to newness of life in Christ. And so we celebrate these truths in our lives as well.

A word to unbelievers: If you are not yet a follower of Christ, we want you to know that what Jesus did in his death and resurrection, he offers to you. He died on the cross to pay for your sin. And he rose from the dead so that you could walk in newness of life – a life of resurrection power. You can't earn this, it is simply a gift that you receive by faith. But if you will receive this gift, you too will be united to Jesus and experience the reality of dying to sin and being raised to a new kind of life.

I would encourage you to listen carefully to the testimonies of those being baptized this morning. Their stories are different in some respects; but they have each experienced the miracle of having their sin forgiven. . . they have each become new creatures in Christ. Please know that you can have this same experience through faith in Jesus.

As we get ready to move to the baptisms, I want to describe what is going to take place. Each person being baptized will make a series of affirmations that expresses their commitment to deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Jesus Christ no matter the cost. In these affirmations they are expressing that they understand that in union with Christ there is much more to be expected than just being forgiven, but it is about a life of walking as a disciple of Jesus.

Here are the three affirmations for the age group of sixth grade through adults; the affirmations for fifth grade and below are a bit simpler and shorter, but they express the same commitment. You can see those on the back of your bulletin.

Baptism Affirmations: Those being baptized will be asked these three questions:

- 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.**

The Church's Response: After each baptism, we will be asked for a response.

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!**