

Today we've come out here for this wonderful day of baptism, and it's a really special occasion. But what is "baptism" about?... Why is a baptism special?

- Baptism isn't just a 'rite-of-passage' like having a 21<sup>st</sup> or an 18<sup>th</sup> birthday party.
- Nor is it a change of a physiological stage-of-life, like child-birth; or becoming a toddler; or going through puberty; or hitting menopause; or reaching dementia....
- Baptism isn't an **academic** graduation, like finishing kindy and stepping up to primary school; or graduating from high school and heading off to university; or graduating and beginning a working career.
- And it's not a physical achievement that we achieve through our own efforts: like earning a life-saving certificate; or being chosen to represent the South West; or breaking grade in a pistol shooting comp.
- And baptism isn't something we have done to us to inoculate us from hell. It's not like having triple antigen to protect us from (diphtheria, tetanus, & whooping cough); or a needle to protect us from Q-fever
- It's not some kind of insurance policy

So, what is "baptism" about? Why is this such an important event for those who are being baptised, and why is it so special for us as a church?

Well, Baptism is a physical representation of what God has done (and is doing) in our hearts. When someone becomes a Christian – when that person decides to follow Jesus (as His disciple), this is a response to what **God** is doing in their heart. Jesus said: <sup>John 6:44</sup> **No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. ....** And so a baptism, really has 2 parts to it. There's what we do (getting wet), but that's only a response to what **God** is doing.

And for this reason, people who think of themselves as “the most unlikely candidates”, can find themselves wanting to be baptised. Because (sure enough), God **does** call people who have been brought up in Christian families,,, but He also draws those who don't come from a church background – people who have never seen themselves as “godly people” or “religious”... The Lord draws those He has called...

And for these candidates today, this is a public declaration of their faith. They are standing here today, to publicly demonstrate, what God has **already** been doing in their hearts. It's a public declaration, that they have made a commitment to follow Jesus.

Righto, at this point, I want to turn to the Bible Reading. We've just begun our new series on the Book of Revelation (a very difficult book to understand, but I don't think we'll have too much difficulty today). Revelation 1:4-8.

<sup>4</sup> John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who

are before his throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. <sup>7</sup> Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

<sup>8</sup> "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

When we commit to being disciples of Jesus, we become a part of something which is far greater than ourselves. We become part of the Kingdom of God. More than that – we become His priests – that means we serve Him.

The Lord our God, is eternal, and He is all powerful.

- We don't need to ask "Where did God come from?", because He has always been.
- We don't need to ask "What ever is going to become of God?" Because He will always be.
- And we don't need to ask "Is God absent?", because no He's not. He's forever present, and for ever vigilant.

And the Lord is all powerful. We're told here, that all the kings of Earth, will bow before Him.

*The Forbes list of the world's most powerful people<sup>i</sup>, goes like this:*

1. *Vladimir Putin (President of Russia)*
2. *Donald Trump (President of USA)*
3. *Angela Merkel (Chancellor of Germany)*
4. *Xi Jinping (General Secretary of the Communist Party of China)*
5. *Pope Francis (Leader of the Roman Catholic Church)*
6. *Janet Yellen (Chair of the US Federal Reserve)*
7. *Bill Gates (Founder of Microsoft and the co-chair of Gates foundation)*
8. *Larry Page (co-founder of Google)*
9. *Narendra Modi (Prime minister of India) 1.25 thousand million people*
10. *Mark Zuckerberg (co-founder of Facebook)*

According to Forbes, those are the world's 10 most powerful people... Which one of them do you suppose will be able to stand before Jesus as His equal? Not a one. Every single one of them, along with you and I, will bow.

Either in adoring reverence, or in cringing fear, our knees will give way below us, and we'll fall on our faces, before the power and the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ...

He is the King of Kings. He is the Lord of Lords.

And when Jesus returns, that's going to be a great day – a day of celebration, but not everybody's going to be so happy about it.

V7 says: <sup>7</sup> Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him...

If anybody ever tries to tell you that Jesus has already returned, don't you believe it for a minute. **every eye will see him... You will see Him.** When Jesus returns to this earth, you won't have to take my word for it. You're going to have a front-row seat. It's going to be a global event, that cannot be missed... But it says here, when this happens, all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him Κόψονται (kopsontai) like the wailing of grief at a funeral (howling in sorrow)...

Why???? Why the bitter sadness? If God is so loving, and if God is so wonderful, and if **we're** looking forward so much to Jesus returning, why will there be people from every nation and from every shire, mourning? Why will they howl in sorrow at Jesus' arrival???

I'll tell you why. What we choose to do with Jesus in **this** life-time, will determine how we feel about Him returning. The disciples of Jesus will be filled with an immense joy because He is our life. He is our purpose. We live for Him. Jesus is our salvation...

But those who reject Jesus in this lifetime, will be faced with the stark reality that they've made a very bad life decision – the consequences of which, are catastrophic. To them, Jesus won't be coming as "saviour", but as "judge".

And as we study the book of Revelation, we're going to learn more about this. We're going to discover an unfolding story of how God does everything in His power, to shake us and to get our attention, and to get us to turn to Him... But despite everything that He does, the sad reality is, Christians will

always remain in the minority. Most people on this earth, will reject God, and some will curse Him.

Now, this makes me ask the question, "Why does God even bother?" Why does God even want us to repent? Why does God even want us to turn to Him, and receive Him as Lord?

It's very simple really – love. *I desperately want my children to love me. Why? Because I love them.... I want my children to be in a loving relationship with me. I want them to love me as much as I love them...*

But I can't **make** them love me. And God's the same. Our Heavenly Father desperately wants us to love Him. Why? Because He loves us. He loves us so very much... But no matter what He does, He can't **make** us love Him back, can He???

V5 is talking about Jesus, and it says: **To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood**

How do we **know** that He loves us? Well, that's what the **cross** is about. <sup>John 3:16</sup> **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

Becoming a disciple of Jesus, is about being enveloped in the love of God – being drawn in to the reality that Christ died for us – as an act of love...

## Let's move on: V5 To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood

Without Jesus, there's something that **destroys** any possibility of us having a relationship with God – ... Sin.

To be right with God, sin has to be dealt with. And in Baptism, we have a demonstration of how that happens.

Jesus has told us, that to be saved, we have to:

- Repent of our sins;
- Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and
- Be baptised into the Name of Jesus

Let's talk about those 3 things:

Do you know what it means to repent of our sins?

It means to agree with God that some of what we've done [in my case – **much** of what I have done] is a rejection of God and a rejection of His ways... That's what sin is. Sin is **not** just the naughty things that we do – sin is our rejection of God Himself. (doing naughty things is a symptom of sin – it's a symptom of us rejecting God).... So even if I feel that "I'm a pretty good bloke, and so I don't need God" – that in itself (no matter how good I might've been in my behaviour) – that in itself – rejecting God, is sin...

No one is righteous – not one. And so the Scriptures tell us (quite truthfully), "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". And they also tell us that the wages of sin are death...

If I have **ever** done anything wrong... If I have **ever** rejected God, that is sin. And sin deserves death.

You know, a lot of people reckon that's not fair. They say, "I've done good most of the time. It's not fair that God would punish me for the few wrong things I've done".... But you see, if God just let us off, that wouldn't be just.

*Imagine someone was on trial before a judge, and they were to say, "Your honour, I have only ever stolen that one purse. I drive past hundreds of houses every day, and I only ever went into one of them and took money out of one purse. Most of the time I do lots of good things."*

*What's the judge going to say? "Oh, I'm sorry!!! We're lucky to have you in our community. Of course we'll let you off for only stealing money out of one purse!!!"* What would you think of the judge if that was his ruling? You would say that he wasn't just. Crime must be punished. And we have all sinned, And justice demands that all who sin, be punished.

So, what do we do about that?

We repent.

- We repent of our ongoing rejection of God; **and**
- We repent of our wrong-doing

That means we turn

- We turn from our old, self-centred life – where it's all about us.
- And we turn to a new, God-centred life – a Christ-centred life, where we begin to do things His way.

And when, in true repentance, we confess our sins to God, He forgives us.

The second thing is "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"

Now, that doesn't mean that we just need to believe that He exists. We have to believe **in** Him. {Climbing rope example}.

Now, to believe in Jesus, is this:

- Because of my sin, I deserve to be punished. Our God is a just God, and He can't just let me off.
- And so Jesus died in our place. The perfect man. The sinless man. The Holy one – died for the unholy. He took our punishment upon Himself.

Do you believe that???? Yeah, well that's good. Even the devil believes that. Even the devil knows that Jesus died, so that our sins could be dealt with.

That's believing **about** – not believing **in**. What does it mean to believe **in** Jesus? It means to trust Him with your whole life. To trust Him with your eternity, and to trust Him with your present.

To become a Christian, is a major, life-changing event. It's as if our old self is put to death, and a new self is born. Our old self – that old man who once used to reject God – or that old woman – or that old boy – or that old girl... – the person we once used to be – well **that's** not who we **are** any more ...

**That** person has died, and now we have a new life, because we're not believing **about** Jesus – we're believing **in** Jesus.

And this is such a radical transformation, that Jesus described it like this – He said “You **must** be born again”... You know, some people say “*I don't so much mind the Christians – it's those 'born again Christians' who annoy me – always going on about Jesus....*”... And that really amuses me, because as far as God's concerned, there is no such thing as a Christian who has **not** been born again.

There **are** those who maybe mess around the edge of Christianity a bit – they might live a bit of a ‘Christianised’ sort of a life – they might even go to church... But unless they take this radical step of submitting to Jesus as their Lord, they're not born again, and therefore they're not saved.

Which brings us to baptism. **Baptism**, is a physical demonstration, of this spiritual rebirth... When we go down under the water, it's like our old self is dead and buried.

- That old self that used to reject God, is dead.
- That old self that used to work in self-interest, is dead
- That old self that had no problem with breaking God's laws
- And that old self – of self-righteousness

Is dead....

We are buried with Christ in His death.

And when we come up out of the water, we are rising to our **new** life in Christ. Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and now He lives forever. And when **we** come out of the water, we are

rising to **our** new life – a renewed life – a Christ-centred life – eternal life in Christ Jesus.

The Bible reading this morning said that He **has freed us from our sins by his blood<sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father**

We have a new King – King Jesus. We are free from our sins – we are now holy – nothing to hinder the perfect loving relationship between God and us.

There's what God does, and there's what we do.

What is God doing in your heart, today?

You might've never thought that this would ever be happening to you, but here you are, and the Lord is drawing you to Jesus... - to be born again...

What is required of us?

- Repent of our sins;
- Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and
- Be baptised into the Name of Jesus

Let's pray, and if the Lord is touching your heart today, I urge you – don't put it off. Pray along with me. You can use these very same words...

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, I am so sorry.

In so many ways – for so much of my life, I have rejected  
You.

The wrong that I have done, my evil thoughts, my evil words,  
are all an expression of the sin that lives within me.

Oh God, forgive me.

I don't want to be what I was.

I desire to be a new man – a new woman.

I repent of my sin.

I turn from being who I was,

To being who You want me to be.

I turn from doing what I did,

To committing to do, what You would lead me to do.

I turn from trusting in myself,

To trusting in You.

I **believe** in You Lord.

By Your power, I desire to be born again.

A fresh start. A new life.

Freed from my sins, by Your blood.

And I thank you Lord,

For Your saving grace – something that I didn't deserve.

But a gift You've given to me, because You love.

Thank you.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forbes\\_list\\_of\\_The\\_World's\\_Most\\_Powerful\\_People](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forbes_list_of_The_World's_Most_Powerful_People)