

## **Immersed in Jesus**

Friends, a couple years ago my sister was getting married and my daughter was going to be a Jr. Bridesmaid at her wedding. Very exciting! So after a few months of eager anticipation, we packed up and set out to the airport to fly out to Minneapolis to go to the wedding.

However, as we were checking in our baggage and confirming our tickets – the attendant behind the counter told us that our daughter’s passport had expired.

That was it, we couldn’t go – without a valid passport she couldn’t travel into the U.S.

Friends, as we are all aware, passports are important documents. They confirm that we are who we say we are; they prove that we have citizenship from a particular country; they allow us to gain access to certain rights and privileges – like the right to simply show up at an airport and board a plane to travel and enter the United States.

Well friends, the story does have a happy ending – expensive, after we paid to have a passport renewal expedited and purchased new plane tickets...but happy, nonetheless.

And I learned a valuable lesson that I need to make sure I pay attention to our passports and not just take them for granted.

And friends, you know – Baptism is very similar to a passport, its confirms who we say we are, proves that we have citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven and gives us certain rights and privileges – and its also very easy to forget about it and take it for granted.

So this morning we want to explore what the bible teaches us about Baptism so that we grow in our understanding of it, have our faith nurtured through it, and live our everyday lives out of it.

So where do we start looking to discover what the bible has to say about Baptism? Well some people might suggest Matt 28:19 where Jesus says *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”*

Others might point to the fact that Jesus himself was baptized in Mat 3:16

Others who are more tech savvy might take their Bible app on their Blackberry or Iphone and type “Baptism” in their word search and see what scripture passages come up and start there.

But friends, the bible is a complete story – it’s not just 66 books with their chapters and verses, and so we must seek to understand Baptism in the light of the story of the bible.

And the best place to begin is in Genesis chapter 3 where the pivotal event that changes the course of the world occurs. Adam and Eve rebel against God and the rest, as they say...is history.

One of the most significant consequences of Adam and Eve’s rebellion was that it alienated them from God. The relationship between God as the creator and ruler over the creation and human beings made in His image as his representatives on earth was destroyed.

Humanity would rule over and develop the earth as intended but they would do so without the benefit and guidance of a close, personal relationship with the creator – and over the history of the world we’ve seen the sickness, disease, violence, destruction and sorrow this has caused.

And this was not ok with God – He wasn’t about to give up on what He had intended for His creation, for us.

So God set out to take the initiative to restore the relationship between Himself and his creation. So He approached Abraham and introduced Himself – he revealed Himself to Abraham and He made a promise to him, and that promise defined His relationship with Abraham – His covenant with Abraham.

*<sup>6</sup> I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. <sup>7</sup> I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. (Gen 17)*

And God gave Abraham a sign to remind him of this covenant, and the promises which it contained.

*<sup>10</sup> This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. (Gen 17)*

Why circumcision? Not for medical reasons friends, but because the foreskin of a man represented a barrier to fertility, the promise was all about being fruitful and having many children, so the sign fit the promise – as the foreskin was removed so God would remove the barriers and make Abraham, and his descendants into a great nation.

This is also why only males received the sign of the covenant, since they produced the seed which bore children.

And last week we heard how God kept that promise – how Abraham’s descendants became the nation of Israel and how God delivered them from slavery in the land of Egypt and

brought them to the Promised Land. This is what the Passover was about.

And on the way to the Promised Land – God met with the people of Israel and with Moses and he introduced himself to them – He revealed himself to them even more. He extended the promise to them as a nation, a promise which defined their relationship together – a continuation and a maturing of the covenant he made with their ancestor Abraham. Remember he said “*I will be the God of your descendants.*”

God said to them - *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, (Exodus 19:5)*

But friends, God hadn’t picked Abraham and his descendants to have an exclusive covenant with because he was being arbitrary – no, God had said to Abraham – “*through you all nations on earth will be blessed*” and his intention for the nation of Israel was that they would be a light to the other nations around them, and show them the way to the one true God.

And if someone from outside Israel saw the light, if they wanted to have a relationship with the one true God, if they saw how good life could be... living according to God's law and they desired to become a part of the people of God, they could! – and they were given the sign of circumcision to show they were now included in the covenant.

But being in a covenant relationship with God meant that you had to live up to your end of the bargain – and as a nation Israel showed over and over and over again that she could not.

From the very beginning Israel showed her tendencies for being unfaithful. Just as Moses was receiving the 10 Commandments from God on Mt. Sinai – Israel was creating golden calves, and worshipping them as idols.

And later on when they entered the promised land, it didn't take long before they began to worship the gods of the nations around them instead.

So God sent prophets to call them back to obedience and faithfulness, and for brief periods of time they listened – but as

soon as the prophet died, they would go back in their old ways, worshipping false gods and being unfaithful to Yahweh.

Friends - I want to pause for a moment in this story here and ask you. Do you know what its like to be on the receiving end of unfaithfulness?

Have you ever had to put up with something, or someone that never lived up to their promises?

A car that was always breaking down on when you needed it most.

A dog that would not obey no matter how much time you spent training them

A friend or a parent who says they will be there when you need them but then isn't

A spouse who doesn't keep their wedding vow to forsake all others....

If you've experienced any of these then you know how much unfaithfulness hurts...and a little bit about how God feels.

But Friends, let me ask you something else, do you know what its like to be the one who can't stay faithful? If you do then you truly know yourself.

Because no one truly knows themselves until they have owned up to their own sinfulness – their own orientation to be unfaithful to God and to others. We all need to get to that place where we can admit to God and to others that we are unfaithful to our Creator.

And friends, to pick up the story again, this is exactly what the nation of Israel was struggling with when Jesus came along. Thinking that they were good decent law abiding people of God and they didn't truly know their capacity to be unfaithful to the covenant.

You see if they were aware of it, then they would have understood that God had sent Jesus Christ – the promised Messiah - the Word of God made flesh... to be the one who would faithfully keep the covenant in their place because He was perfect – He was God, and God always keeps his

promises. And they would have understood that Christ had come to offer his life in their place.

You see friends, in the ancient world when two parties made a covenant – it was a serious thing, so serious that it was always sealed in blood.

Animals would be taken and cut in half – and the two parties would walk between the halves of the animals to seal the deal – essentially saying, if I am unfaithful in this covenant may it be done to me as to these animals.

So when Jesus offers his life as a sacrifice on the cross, two things are happening simultaneously...

First, Jesus body is broken and his life taken so that the penalty for the broken covenant between Israel and God is fulfilled.

Second, at the same time his body is broken and his blood spilled to renew the covenant and fulfill the promise the God had made with Abraham.

Remember God had said it would be an everlasting covenant – which means it will continue forever. Through Jesus Christ, God makes this an everlasting covenant because Jesus has been a perfectly faithful human partner and His faithfulness can never be undone.

So, Jesus Christ secures a permanent relationship between humanity and God which will last forever. God has finally and fundamentally overcome the separation between human beings and himself which resulted from Adam and Eve’s rebellion.

And the good news is that this is available to all people – if anyone wants an unbreakable relationship with God, it is available through Jesus Christ!

God’s promise to bless all nations – all peoples – through Abraham has been fulfilled by Jesus. What is more blessed than to be able to have a restored relationship with the Creator!?

But if this relationship with God is only available through Jesus Christ – how do we get at it? Friends this is where Baptism

comes in, because Baptism literally means “to be immersed”. So if we have been baptized we have been fully immersed into Jesus Christ

Baptism is what unites us to Jesus Christ, so that we can get at the benefits and privileges of being included in this new covenant. Baptism gives us that unbreakable relationship with God through Jesus.

Now when we hear the term Baptism, it’s natural for us to think about water right away– because of the sacrament of baptism which symbolizes actual baptism. But “Immersion” is first and foremost a spiritual reality – a work of the Holy Spirit, who is active in our hearts and minds and brings us to faith in Jesus Christ.

Water Baptism – or being immersed in water – symbolizes and represents that spiritual reality of being immersed in Jesus which the Holy Spirit is working in our lives. Water Baptism has replaced circumcision and become the new sign of the covenant, of belonging to God’s people.

So when water baptism is performed by fully immersing someone under the water – it symbolizes how we are immersed in Christ, and it also represents how we have died with him, and have been resurrected to new life.

When water baptism is performed by pouring water on someone – it symbolized how the Holy Spirit has been poured out onto us in order that He may work in our lives

When water baptism is performed by sprinkling water on someone – it symbolizes how we have been pronounced clean from our sins by the blood of Christ – which sealed the new covenant.

Friends, isn't this incredible? That we may have such a sign – water baptism. A sign of the unbreakable covenant which assures us that we fit into the plan which God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has been working for thousands of years so that his original plan for humans and this world can be restored – in the new heavens and the new earth.

Friends you know what else is incredible is that God offers this sign to anyone. All are welcome to become part of God's family through being immersed in Jesus Christ.

Maybe this morning you are hearing about this amazing story the bible tells and you believe, and you want to have that “passport” that sacrament of water Baptism which proves you are indeed a part of God's people so you can belong, so that you have a place in the new heavens and earth.

Friends, if the Holy Spirit is working in your life and immersing you in Christ – then what's stopping you from receiving this sign? Come and speak to me about, let's get you wet☺

Parents, if you belong to God's people through Jesus Christ – then hear what the Apostle Peter says about the promises contained in Baptism “*this promise is for you and your children*”

You see friends, sometimes we think the sacrament of water baptism represents the fact that we've repented of our sins –

and so we wait to get water baptism for ourselves or for our children until we're certain that we're *truly* sorry, or we see that they *really* want to make a commitment to following Jesus.

But the good news friends, is that God didn't wait for Abraham to come Him, He revealed himself to Abraham and made covenant with Him before He ever did anything! And the Holy Spirit doesn't wait for us to decide or feel sorry before He starts working in our life either, before He begins to immerse us in Jesus Christ.

In fact it's being immersed in Jesus Christ that leads us to repent of our sins and be forgiven from them, its being immersed in Jesus Christ that prompts our will to make a decision to follow Jesus Christ!

What's stopping you from ensuring that you and your children have a "valid passport" that helps to assure them as they grow up that they belong to God in Jesus, that they can access the privilege of speaking directly to God through Jesus in prayer, that they can receive forgiveness for their sins?

Nothing should stop us – we should say along with the Ethiopian Eunuch, in Acts 8:36 *“look here is water why shouldn't I be baptized!?”*

Friends, God's promises are for you, for your children – So believe! And grab a hold of the sacrament of Baptism which He gives us to assure us that we belong to Him and His promises are for real. Amen.