

BAPTISM

Ross Wills, Presbytery Word for week commencing Sunday 08 February 2026

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Good morning. As Nathan explained this morning, I will continue on the theme of baptism which I spoke on about a month ago. We are needing to thoroughly scrub ourselves from our propensity to think of baptism as a one-off event that happened when we were dipped into water in the tank or the pool or beach or the river. We need to be thoroughly scrubbed from that view.

We have been understanding afresh that baptism is a discipleship walk in which a person is being taught to walk in the culture of Yahweh's fellowship. Baptism is a discipleship walk. It is not a once-off event. We all have testimonies at our baptism - certainly the Sonseekers and the teenagers (which is about the age that we are baptising people). I am very aware that I am speaking to the whole congregation, but for the Sonseekers and teenagers, I will aim to use illustrations. Hopefully there are some word pictures that you can draw. I am wanting to engage you in this.

The word 'baptism' or the word 'to baptise' means 'to immerse' or [we could say it is] 'the process of immersion'. It fits really well with putting someone under water. We could also say it is referring to giving yourself to the fellowship of God - boots and all. There is a good picture. You are giving yourself to God - boots and all. You are getting totally immersed. It is wholehearted devotion. Total focus is baptism; immersion; total focus. The word was used of various washings and sometimes in the Scriptures the word is translated as 'wash'. We will look at that. We have often associated baptism with the washing away of our sins. Baptism does indeed wash away our sins, but not in an instant in the tank. Our commitment to walk as a disciple is redeeming us from all our iniquity - all our sins. It is used to describe the journey of obedience and suffering that Jesus walked.

Jesus said, 'I have a baptism to be baptised with.' He was not talking about being dunked in a tank. He said, 'I have a baptism. I have a journey of obedience and suffering that I must walk.' He said, '...and you will walk it too.' When we think of baptism, we are thinking about a walk.

It also refers to, of course, the practice of immersing people in water. We read of John the Baptist and the disciples baptising people. John baptised in the River Jordan.

The word was used among the Greeks to signify the dying of a garment. The word can be also translated 'dipped'. If they were dying a garment, they would dip it (or baptise it or immerse it) into the dye. I quite like that illustration because the dipping in the dye is referring to a transformation work that is taking place in that garment. Our baptism is a transformation work that is happening in our life every single day; not in an instant on the day, but every single day as we walk in our baptism. Of course, we are not talking about a transformation as in changing our colour. We are talking about a transformation to godliness. We are talking about a baptism, a discipleship walk that is transforming us to the fellowship of Yahweh - to the fellowship of His godliness. That is what we want to talk about. We want to thoroughly get into our head that baptism is a lifelong process. It is a lifelong walk.

Let us start at 1 Peter 3. I have been looking at this passage quite a lot and greatly appreciate the way Peter does this. He is talking about Christ having suffered for our sins, but then he moves to Noah. In 1 Peter 3 verse 20, he is talking about the ones who are 'formerly disobedient when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared in which a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water.' He says, 'There is an anti-type that now saves us.' An anti-type is the opposite of a type. It is the real thing. The real thing that saves you is baptism. We are saved by baptism. He clarifies that and he said, '...not the removal of the filth of the flesh' - the thing that saved you was not the dunking in the tank on that day, but it is the process of discipleship that you continue to walk throughout your whole life. That is what saves you. The anti-type that saves you is baptism - '...not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God.'

What are we saved from? It is good to walk slowly through this. If we are going to be saved, we must be saved from something. We will go to

Genesis 6 and the account of Noah. This is Genesis 6 verse 5. 'Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent and the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." ' You can hear the gravity of this situation. The Lord is saying, 'I am sorry that I have made man. I made man to reflect My glory. I made man to be in the image and likeness of Us that I might have fellowship with them and I am grieved that I made them, for their thoughts are continually evil.' The wickedness of man was great, so He says, 'I will destroy man.' We know that Noah was the only one who pleased God — [the only one that] He found righteous. So Noah and his family were saved by building an ark.

Now the Lord is not asking us to build an ark. He is asking us to respond to His word and be baptised. 1 Peter 3:21 says, 'Baptism now saves you, not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience to God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' Jesus Christ is our Ark, and our response is to join Him and His work.

We will go back to 1 Peter 3 verse 21 and refresh ourselves with what Peter said. 'There is also an anti-type that now saves us - baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ).' Being joined to Jesus Christ is better than needing to build a wooden boat and sail upon the water in a wooden boat full of smelly animals. I am sure you would agree.

Let us look at our baptism. Peter says what saves us is - '...but the answer of a good conscience [or the *appeal* of a good conscience]'. I wrote it this way: Our baptism that saves us is an appeal to God to walk as a disciple with Christ on His offering and suffering journey, being cleansed and renewed by His resurrection life. Romans 5 verse 10 says, 'For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.' Or we could say, 'We

shall be saved by being joined to His life that I now live.' Galatians 2 verse 20 says, 'The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.' We are saved as we are joined to the life of Christ that we now live.

I will make some comments on our conscience. Peter said that our baptism was our response (or our answer) to God from a good conscience. Conscience (when you look it up) it is a 'knowing with'. The critical thing is a 'knowing with whom'. As Tim said last week, while Adam walked with God and was in fellowship with God, he knew himself *with God*. When he fell from fellowship, he knew himself *according to himself*. The Scriptures call this an 'evil conscience'. Knowing ourselves in fellowship with God is a good conscience. We need to hear what the Lord is saying and see our consciences transformed.

While we are walking in fellowship with Yahweh and in obedience to His way, we have a good conscience. When we fall from fellowship with Yahweh, we can only know ourselves according to ourselves. This is considered to be an evil conscience. As we see with Adam, when he fell from fellowship, he hid. He had a wicked and fallen conscience when he hid. We will look at a few examples of this.

We know of King David's fall. As he was recovered, his appeal to God is in Psalm 143. It is interesting that this psalm in my Bible is entitled, 'An earnest appeal' - an earnest appeal to God. King David says in Verse 10, 'Teach me to do Your will.' It is our appeal to God that is saving us. Every day 'teach me to do Your will. For You are my God; Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness.' That is King David's appeal to God.

We will look at some other examples of the conscience. Luke 12. This is the parable of the rich fool. Luke 12 verse 16: 'Then He spoke a parable to them saying, "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully, and he thought within himself [he is knowing within himself], "What shall I do... [He thought within himself (a wicked or an evil conscience saying)] ...what shall I do since I have no room to store my crops? So he said, "I will do this [This is his conclusion to the matter. He is fellowshiping with himself]: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and

there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry." ' [It is like we are putting all our confidence in our superannuation policy. We have plenty of goods laid up for many years. Take your ease. Do not worry about anything. But we are still needing to walk in our baptism.] But God said to him, "Fool!" [There was no fellowship with God.] God said, "Fool! You do not know... [When we only have ourselves as our reference point, we do not know the wisdom of God. He said] ... Fool! This night your soul will be required of you. Then whose will all those things be which you have provided?" ' So that is a wicked conscience.

We will skip over to Luke 18. We are looking at our appeal to God. This is our appeal to God. The rich man's appeal to God was all about himself. 'I can have an easy life.' Luke 18 verse 9: 'Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves [This is a wicked or an evil conscience] that they were righteous and despised others. "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself. [Here is the evil conscience at work. He is praying with himself and he said, 'Do not I pray well?'] 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers [These are his judgements], or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' [This is the appeal to God that saves us. 'Be merciful to me, a sinner. I need to learn another way.] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified." ' The tax collector appealed to God for mercy from a renewed conscience. What had he heard? We imagine that somewhere along the line, he had heard what Jesus had spoken. He has heard something of Jesus. 'Be merciful to me, a sinner. I need to learn a new way.'

The first person that we read of in the Scriptures that came baptising was John the Baptist. I pondered on where the process or the practice of baptism came from because we do not read of anybody baptising in the Old Testament. No one is baptising until John the Baptist. There are reports that in Leviticus the priests would need

to wash before they put on their garments for their priesthood duties. We could think that maybe it is from there. But John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah. He was not coming from the priestly ministry line, even though his father was a priest. (We know his father was a priest, and the angel appeared to his father and told him that John was going to be born.) But he is not coming from the priestly line and ministering as a priest. He is ministering in the spirit and power of Elijah. The angel of the Lord declared to Zacharias (this is John's father) that John would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. This is the spirit and power of Elijah - turning the hearts of the children to the fathers. He said that he would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He would go before them in the spirit and power of Elijah.

John is the first prophet of the New Testament. We know that between Malachi (in the Old Testament) and the New Testament there were 400 years. The religious practices of the Jews had been kept very strongly, but there was no word of a prophet. There was no present truth word until John the Baptist came. All the religious practices had been maintained, but there were pockets of people who were devout believers. We know that. John was coming to turn the hearts of the people back to God so that they could receive the coming Messiah. They had maintained their religious practices, but this was not preparing them to receive Jesus Christ. They needed to be connected to a proclaimed word by a messenger - not a religious system. We need to be connected to a proclaimed, present truth word, not a religious system. We do not want to be connected to a religious system. John was baptising many as they responded to his message of 'repent and turn again to the Lord'. John was coming in the spirit and power of Elijah, and he was baptising in the River Jordan.

As I considered where this process of baptising had come from, I could only think of Naaman. Elisha, who followed Elijah, had asked Naaman to go and wash in the River Jordan. I would like to just meditate on that for a moment. We will go to 2 Kings 5. It is a very interesting account. 'Naaman was a commander of the Syrian army. He was a great and honourable man in the eyes of his master' and he had leprosy. He had a

servant girl whom they had captured on raids to Israel. This servant girl said to her mistress, Naaman's wife, 'I wish my master was in Israel, because there is a prophet there who can heal him.'

This account starts with the humble word of a servant. It gets raised to the political level because they go to the king. The king of Syria says, 'Go now, I will send a letter to the king of Israel.' Naaman departs with the letter. It has risen to the political spectrum. Naaman goes to the king of Israel, and the king goes, 'What on earth is this? How can I heal anybody? He is just looking for a quarrel.' The word of the Lord comes to Elisha: 'The king is ripping his clothes because of this.' Elisha says, 'Send him [Naaman] to me.' It has gone to the political level, and it is moving back down to the messenger level. So Naaman comes to Elisha's door and Elisha just sends a messenger to him. He did not even meet him himself. He sends a message. It has got back to a word of a messenger. He says, 'Go down to the River Jordan and wash seven times.'

We know Naaman was furious and he is saying, 'There are far cleaner rivers back in Damascus.' Naaman is looking with his eyes, and he is looking at the Jordan River and all the reports about the Jordan are that it is muddy and rocky and not a very pretty river. Naaman is looking with his eyes. 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, 'What is seen is temporary, but what is not seen is eternal.' He is looking with his eyes and he goes, 'That river is dirty. There are far cleaner rivers. I am not washing there.' Fortunately, he seems to be surrounded by some pretty wise servants. A servant girl, and now these servants say to him, 'If he had asked you to do something mighty, would not you puff out your chest and go and do it? Can you just be obedient?' Basically, what they are saying is, 'Can you just do what he says? Go and wash.'

Now it is interesting, as I considered this, in thinking of the seven times washing, I was connecting it to Daniel when Nebuchadnezzar was humbled. We know that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and Daniel interpreted it. I will now connect Naaman and the seven times washing with Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar's dream was that he should be driven from men. He would end up in the field, eating grass like an ox.

The dew will wet him until seven-times passed over him. Nebuchadnezzar was connected to the seven-times process of God. We know that after the seven-times process of God (at the end of the time), Nebuchadnezzar lifted his eyes to heaven and his understanding returned. I will not go through the whole lot, but he says, 'Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.' Daniel 4:37. Nebuchadnezzar experienced the seven-times working of God, which Naaman is about to experience.

It does not give an indication of how this happened. But I am musing, Sonseekers - this is not in the Bible. I am musing that the servants say to Naaman, 'Can you not just do the simple thing that Elisha has asked you to do? Go and wash in the Jordan seven times.' I am imagining they set up camp. Naaman gets out of his chariot. He takes off his commander uniform. He wraps a towel around himself and he gingerly walks down to the river across the rocks (that is if his feet are like mine), and he goes to the muddy river to wash. He is mumbling to himself, 'What on earth am I doing here?' He has one wash and he comes up and he looks at his servant, 'Is there anything different?' And they go, 'Nothing.' So they camp the night. Next morning, he goes down again and washes. 'Is there anything different?' 'No.'

I am linking this to Elijah when he defeats the prophets of Baal. Elijah says to Ahab, 'Go eat and drink, for I hear the sound of the abundance of rain.' This is Elijah's prophetic word to Ahab. Then Elijah goes up to the top of Mount Carmel, and it says that he bows his head to the ground between his knees and he is praying. He is praying that the word of the Lord that he just prophesied would come to pass. He says to his servant, 'Go now look to the sea. Tell me what you can see.' So he comes back, 'Nothing.' 'Go again.' 'Nothing.' 'Go again.' Seven times he goes, and on the seventh time he says, 'I see a cloud the size of a man's hand rising.' Elijah says, 'That is it. The rain is coming.' 1 Kings 18.

I am thinking Naaman is going down to the river, morning and evening, for washing. He has done it one afternoon for three days. Each time he

looks to his servants, 'Is there anything different?' 'Nothing.' He comes back on the seventh time. 'Anything different?' They go, 'There is a little patch there that is healed.' He says, 'Let us pack up and get out of here.' They pack up, and by the time they have packed up, his skin is as white and as clean as a child's. He goes, 'Now I know.' He goes back to Elisha and he says, 'Now I know that there is no god in all the earth except the God of Israel.' He says, 'I will give you all this stuff.' Of course, Elisha says, 'I do not want anything from your hand.' He [Naaman] says, 'Well, give me two mule-loads of dirt.' From this muddy river that he wanted nothing to do with, now he wants the dirt that has been floating in the river. And he said, 'I am going to take that back, and I am going to stand on new ground, and I am going to worship the God of Israel.' The seven-times process of God connected him and he said, 'Now I know...' As Naaman returned to Damascus, to Syria, his repentance was demonstrated by the fact that he did not worship the god, Rimmon. This was the god that the Syrians worshipped. Now he worshiped the God of Israel on new ground.

Our repentance will be seen in the life that we now live. Our repentance needs to be seen. Our repentance, our baptism, will be seen in the life we now live. John the Baptist was very clear that he was baptising unto repentance as preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. I am linking the baptism unto repentance and Naaman and Nebuchadnezzar as 'now I believe'. And as we know (and it has been ministered to us), to *believe* is not enough. It is not enough just to believe. I need to *abide* as a disciple and *learn* a different way of living.

John the Baptist was baptising unto repentance as a preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. He was connecting them to the seven times wounding journey of Christ. Jesus said of this journey in Mark 10, that it was His baptism. This was the third time that Jesus predicted His death and resurrection. 'This is Mark 10 verse 32. 'Now they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him. "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests

and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And on the third day He will rise again." ' This is His offering, suffering journey. We go down to verse 37. 'They said to Him, "Grant us, that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?"' Of course, they said, 'We are able.' But what Jesus was explaining to them, was His offering journey. We are very clear that this was not going up to a pool and being dunked in the water. It was His offering, suffering journey which was His baptism. He said to His disciples, 'You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptised with you will be baptised; but to sit on My right hand and My left is not Mine to give.' Jesus then added another element to baptism.

(John [the Baptist] connected the people who would hear and be baptised to the seven-times processing of God, which is the seven-times wounding event that Christ would walk through. We will experience the same. Christ's followers will experience the same offering, suffering journey as they are joined to Him as the Author of this journey.)

I will finish with this: After Jesus had been resurrected and appeared to His disciples, He commissioned them to make disciples. He commissioned them and He said, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all these things that I have commanded you...' As the disciples were obedient to the commands of Christ, they were teaching fellow-disciples to walk in the same way that they were walking. There is a very helpful comment in Vines. He says, the phrase in Matthew 28, 'baptising them into the name', would indicate that the baptised person was closely bound to... (we have been using the word 'immersed', and we could use that here) ...closely bound to and immersed and become the property of the one into whom they were being baptised. We could paraphrase by saying, 'Make disciples of all

nations, binding them and securing them to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.' We know this is what the disciples did.

I can continue this another time, but we see that the disciples went about doing this and it was not just an action of dunking people in the water. It was a discipleship action. They taught the disciples and established churches that the glory of God might go out through all the earth. I will leave it there and we can continue this another time. Thank you very much.