

Baptism: John, Peter, Ananias, Paul  
(Lk 3:3; Ac 2:28; 22:16; Rm 6:3-4; Gal 3:26-27; 1Pt 3:21)

Turn to Luke 3. In this sermon we're going to look at six Scriptures, each one or two verses long. Baptism is in each of these sentences. We're talking about this today for two reasons. One, we are planning to have a baptismal service next weekend at our church camp. We're planning to baptize Celine there, and maybe someone else will yet come.

Two, we talk about baptism only because it is a part of something bigger. Baptism is a part of a person coming to Jesus, becoming a follower of Jesus, and in that way becoming a child of God. No matter how long we have been followers of Christ, it is good for us to remember again how that happened.

Jesus is alive but not with us. How do **we** come to Jesus Christ? How do **we** become his followers? How do **we** come to God and become his children? Let's be clear on this.

We need to hear again how God himself describes, through his words in the Bible, this change that has happened in us. When the Scripture speaks about how we came to God, how does it speak? Let's have that clear for ourselves, and also to guide someone else.

**1, John the Baptist** (Luke 3:3; our next text will be in Acts 2.) *John went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* (Mark 1:14 uses the identical line about John.)

John preached as a forerunner to Jesus. Jesus was around, but his public ministry had not started. John prepared the Jews to receive Jesus. John was preaching a particular baptism. I don't know what other baptisms were around. But we know about John's, it was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

"Repent" means "decide to live in God's ways." "God, I will live in your ways, I am determined to obey your words about right and wrong, I will not be perfect, but I will give myself to this."

And God says, "Good, that's very good, and I for my part will forgive your sins. And you will keep living in my ways, and I will keep forgiving your sins, let's have that arrangement with each other." That's what John's baptism meant.

Suppose I said to John, "I want to live in God's ways, and I want God to forgive my sins, but I do not want to be baptized. Don't see why I should be baptized." What would John say?

Something like, "then you have not decided to live in God's ways." For John, baptism was how we entered, how we said "yes" to repenting so God would forgive us.

**2, Peter** (Acts 2:37-8; next is Acts 22). *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

*“What shall we do?”* These people had done a terrible thing. They were supportive of the Jews giving Jesus their Messiah to the Romans to be crucified. That has to be about as bad as it gets. How could we offend God more than that? Not sure. They were worried.

*“What should we do?”* Good question. But God wants people like that. He’s made an answer for them, he ready to receive the worst. *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Peter sounds much like John the Baptist: repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. Repent: I decide I am going to live in God’s ways. Repenting is a choice to walk away from sin and live my daily life in God’s ways.

And be baptized, but this is after Jesus, and Jesus Christ is the Savior at the center, so Peter adds *in the name of Jesus Christ*. We live in God’s way, and through Jesus God forgives us. And there is a big bonus: the Holy Spirit. We receive God’s great gift, the Holy Spirit.

This all was God’s offer to Jews who supported getting rid of Jesus because he was an evil deceiver, when in fact he was the Son of God. *“Brothers, what shall we do?” “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

Suppose I was there, and I said, “Peter I want to repent, and I want forgiveness and the Holy Spirit, but I don’t think baptism matters.” What would Peter say to me? He’d say, “You asked me what you should do. I told you. Come back when you want to know the answer.”

**3, Ananias** (Acts 22:16; next is Romans 6) *Ananias said, “And now, Paul, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”*

Paul is in Jerusalem, 20-25 years after Peter preached his Acts 2 sermon we were just reading. Angry Jews arrested Paul, like they did to Jesus, and Paul is telling them how came to Christ.

Paul was on the road to Damascus, going there to persecute Christians, and the Lord Jesus appeared to him on the road and said, “you’re persecuting me, Paul, and that needs to stop. Go to Damascus and I’ll send someone to tell you what to do.”

On the third day after this, Ananias came to Paul who was waiting in Damascus, and this is a part of what he said. *“And now, Paul, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”*

There is urgency here. *“And now, what are you waiting for? Get up!”* There is something important you need to do, and not delay. *“Be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”* This line is a bit different, but all the lines are a bit different. There is no tidy formula. But you can see how they more or less all say the same thing.

Three things go together as the package here: 1, be baptized; 2, wash our sins away; 3, call on the Lord Jesus. That’s how we come to the Lord, that’s how we become Christians, that’s how we become children of God.

Suppose Paul said, “I want to wash my sins away and want to call on the Lord, but I don’t want to be baptized.” What would Ananias say? “Paul, the Lord told you on the road that someone would come tell you what you must do. He sent me to tell you what you must do, and I told you. You are now refusing the Lord.”

We are not making baptism more important than washing away sins and calling on the Lord. But we have no business leaving off what God’s word tells us is an important part of coming to him.

Now, we will turn to Paul. Paul has his own emphasis on baptism. For Paul, coming to the Lord Jesus means being joined to him, becoming bound to Christ and Christ to us. Paul has a strong sense of our union with Christ. And for Paul, baptism is the place where we are joined to Christ.

**4, Paul** (Romans 6:3-4; next is Galatians 3) *Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him, through baptism, into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

Paul is answering this question: “How is it that Christians can life a new life, that we can life a life that’s changed, that’s very different than if we never heard of Christ. How does that happen?”

Answer: we were joined to Christ in his death and burial and resurrection. That’s how we can life a new life. This brings up a second question: “how are we joined to Christ’s death and resurrection? How does that happen? How do we actually become a part of Christ’s death and resurrection, so that we get to share in his death and burial and new life? Answer: “Baptism.”

*Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him, through baptism, into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

How is it possible for Christians to life a new life? By being joined to Christ in his death and burial and resurrection. How are we joined to his death and burial and resurrection? Baptism.

*Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him, through baptism, into death, in order that, just as Christ was*

*raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

For Paul, at baptism we are joined to Christ's death and new life, and that is why we too may live a new life. This is our story, my brothers and sisters. Christ has changed our lives.

We are not perfect, we still need often to say, "Father, forgive us our sins, as we forgive others." But we live quite differently than if we had never met the Lord. Why do we live differently? Because we were joined to Christ's death and new life. How were we joined to Christ's death and new life? Baptism.

I am not separating baptism from repenting and from receiving the Holy Spirit. That's all a part of this. But baptism is certainly one of the essential ingredients of coming to the Lord.

**5, Paul (again)** (Gal 3:26-28; next is 1 Peter 3). You will again see here how Paul sees baptism as where we are joined to Christ. *In Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Faith makes us all sons of God. Question: How does faith make us all sons of God? Answer: Faith makes us all sons of God because baptism clothes us with Christ, the Son of God. When we were baptized, we put on Christ, the Son of God. THAT is how faith makes us all sons of God.

According to this Scripture, it never occurred to Paul to separate faith from baptism. Faith makes us sons of God because of what baptism does. Paul cannot imagine faith in Christ apart from baptism into Christ. They are always together.

(NIV does not want to be sexist here, so it changes "sons" into "children," "you are all *children* of God," to make it kinder to girls and women. Most of the time, it is a good idea when the NIV does that. But here, I don't think so. We are all "sons" here because Christ was the "Son," and we are all clothed with Christ the Son, so we all share Christ's status as honoured son, whether we are male or female, which Paul is careful to say.)

Faith makes us all sons of God. How does faith make us all sons of God? Faith makes us all sons of God because baptism clothes us with Christ, who is the Son of God. When we were baptized, we put on Christ, the Son of God. THAT is how faith makes us all sons of God.

*In Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

**6, Peter (again)** 1 Peter 3:21 *Baptism, which corresponds to this [water that carried Noah's ark], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

In the paragraph just before this, Peter wrote about Noah and his family being saved from the flood by being carried safely in the ark. *Baptism, which corresponds to this [water that carried Noah's ark], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

*Baptism now saves you.* What a line! The way some of us were taught about baptism, those words were false teaching of the worst kind. We could not say it was false, because it was part of God's word to us, so we ignored the line.

Peter writes that, and then he tells us how baptism saves us. He's answering the question: How does baptism save us? First he tells us how baptism does NOT save us, and then he tells us how baptism DOES save us.

How does baptism not save us? Not by what our body does with dirt, but by what we say to God. How does baptism save us? Not by what our body does with dirt, it removes dirt; but by what we say to God, we ask God for a clean conscience, that is, we ask for forgiveness.

There is some doubt about how to translate the Greek words. The NIV has "the pledge of a clear conscience" and the ESV has "an appeal for a good conscience." These are both legitimate possibilities, and I do not know which to take. "The pledge of a clear conscience" would amount to repenting, a decision to live in God's ways. "An appeal for a good conscience" would amount to asking for forgiveness of sins. Since the contrast is with removing dirt from the body, it seems to me the closer parallel would be forgiveness of sins. Baptism removes not dirt but sins. For that reason I prefer the ESV.

Let me ask a different question. In this Scripture, how do we ask God for a clean conscience? How do we say to God, "I ask you, God, please forgive my sins." *Baptism now saves you, as an appeal to God for a good conscience.* We ask God by being baptized.

## Conclusions

1, Coming to God is a cluster of things: repentance, baptism in Jesus' name, forgiveness of sins, receiving the Holy Spirit, being joined to Christ. What do people do to get in? Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus are pretty standard. Agree to live in God's ways, and be baptized in the name of Jesus.

2, Children, what about children who are not baptized yet? The NT does not solve that, and I am not sure. In keeping with ancient church tradition, which comes from how Jesus grew up, we do not baptize before twelve years of age. There needs to be some kind of a choice here, and our tradition is that it could happen after twelve, but not before.

Do children before 12 have real faith in God? Absolutely. Jesus speaks of that often, and once told his apostles that if they did not act more like children, they would not even enter the kingdom of God! Children with faith are delightful to God, and God receives them openly.

3, We have been taught that we are saved by faith. Does what I am saying about baptism not contradict that? No.

In the six Scriptures we read today, only one mentioned faith, Paul in Galatians 3. But many Scriptures say faith is important in this, so we know that faith is important. Please pay attention here: we do not decide if faith is important or not by the Scriptures that do not mention it. We decide that faith is important because of the Scripture that do mention it.

So let's not decide if baptism is important from the Scriptures that do not mention it. Let's decide what baptism means from the Scriptures that do mention it, just as with faith. If we approach it that way, it is clear that faith and baptism are both essential here, and they should never be separated or played off against each other.

Some say baptism is to show our faith to others. It's hard to see where they get that, isn't it. Repentance is not for others, nor is faith. Repentance and faith are for God. Why would baptism be for others?

4, God offers us salvation. He offers us forgiveness of sins, he offers us his Son Jesus as our Hero and Champion and Master and Defender, and God offers us the Holy Spirit to teach us and fill us and guide us. This is the offer.

God also tells us in his words how to accept this offer, how to turn to him and receive from him what he has, and that is what we've done. We've been talking today about how we actually turn to him and receive what he offers. It is a very good story.

Everyone who takes him up on this has won the eternal lottery, the best thing that could possibly happen to any human has happened to us, let us never envy any other human, because the greatest good fortune that can happen to a person has come to us.

*To him who is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen*