

Baptism

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[0 : 00] Now, if you would turn with me to the portion of God's word that we have already read together. 1 Peter chapter 3.

We may read again from verse number 18. We may read through to the end of the chapter just to recall these words.

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah.

While the ark was a preparing wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure went unto even baptism doth also now save us. Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Who is gone into heaven and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. Now the portion of scripture that I, the part of the scripture that I wish to more particularly bring to your attention is the latter part of verse 20 and the whole of verse 21.

[1 : 29] That is, that Noah, in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

However, the like figure went unto even baptism doth also now save us. Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now the whole passage that I have read is, in some respects, in fact in many respects, one of the most difficult that we have in the scriptures of the New Testament to interpret to people's satisfaction.

It is, we might say, it is, we might say, bristling with difficulties. And I can assure you I did not choose this passage because of its difficulties, nor with any intention of trying to resolve them. There are, especially difficulties in connection with what it says in respect of this preaching unto the spirits in prison and so on.

[2 : 53] There are, in if difficulties in connection with the limited subject that we have chosen without involving ourselves in these more obscure problems.

What I want to do is to try and bring to your attention some thoughts concerning the ordinance of baptism.

Because today we are to administer this sacrament to the parents on behalf of their infant children. And this scripture helps us to gain some insight into the significance of this ordinance in the Christian church.

Now, coming to the point as quickly as I possibly can, there is comparison and contrast made here by the Apostle Peter, indeed for his own specific purposes.

[4 : 21] He chose this comparison and contrast in order to advance his argument. But there is a comparison and contrast made between one time in the world's history and the present time.

He speaks of a time when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah. Or, if you want to speak of it, he spoke of some time.

Some time, a time in the past. And you will notice that he speaks in verse 21 of the present. The like figure wherein to even baptism doth also now save us.

Now, there is, I might say, perhaps a greater emphasis upon the element of comparison than there is on contrast, but there is contrast as well.

And that thing in the past that he brings before us is the circumstances in connection with Noah's deliverance.

[5 : 40] At the time of the flood. And he compares baptism in this present time with the deliverance that was effected in the case of Noah at the time of the flood.

That much is clear. But it is not easy to see clearly every point of the comparison.

And even every point of the contrast. And I will not presume to make absolutely transparent every point of it.

But try to highlight those aspects of the comparison which will help us in our appreciation of the significance of the sacrament of baptism.

Now, as then, so now, the issue is the issue of salvation.

[6 : 59] It is the matter of salvation that is at issue. Noah needed to be saved. People now need to be saved.

And I think that I could go on and say that as water was instrumental in the salvation of Noah, so now water is instrumental in the salvation of believers, even the water of baptism.

I think that we have the main point of the comparison in that statement. And perhaps it is this that we should emphasize.

Now, let us look at one or two points of the comparison. It is said that Noah and his family were saved, or eight souls were saved.

And contrary to our common thinking about that particular event, what we have here stated is that he was saved by water.

[8 : 25] Or if one would be emphatic upon the most literal interpretation of the preposition, we could use it as being saved through water.

But it doesn't matter. There is not that great a difference between being saved by water or being saved through water, as long as we think of it in an instrumental way.

We are not to think that it was the water itself that was the savior. What is being said is that water was the means of Noah's salvation.

Noah and, of course, the other members of his family. Now, that, as I said, is not the way that we usually think of that particular event.

We are more inclined to think of them as being saved from the water. That they were saved from the water of the flood.

[9 : 30] But that is not what he said here. What he said is that they were saved by or through the waters of the flood. Now, that gives us immediately, that raises immediately a question about the nature of the salvation that was enjoyed by Noah and his family.

We are so ready to conclude that on our casual reading, that Noah's salvation consisted in his being delivered from being drowned by the water.

But the very fact that it was the waters that were instrumental in his salvation surely precludes that or implicitly suggests that there is something far more to the salvation of Noah than the fact that he was not overwhelmed with the water in the sense of being physically drowned.

And what was the salvation in the case of Noah? Well, when we read the scriptures a little bit more closely, we become aware of a situation that was developing.

And developing at an alarming rate on the earth. Men were becoming increasingly more wicked.

[11 : 06] To the extent that it is said that the thoughts of the imaginations of his heart were only evil continually. In other words, man was becoming dominated in his entire personality, in thought, in character, and in behavior by sin, by evil.

And as a consequence, the world was becoming an increasingly evil and corrupt place. Now, it is quite obvious when we read carefully the account in scripture that the salvation that was enjoyed by Noah was deliverance from this all-encompassing wickedness and corruption leading to destruction.

This is, we believe, a proper understanding of salvation in the case of Noah. He was, by the grace of God, a righteous person.

And God, in his mercy, delivered him or saved him from the prevailing wickedness, which was even endangering Noah himself.

Such was the, not only the power of wickedness, but the contagious influence of it, that even the righteous themselves were in danger of being engulfed by it.

[13 : 03] And in order to preserve a righteous seed to himself, God brought a flood of destruction upon the world of sinners, but that very flood was his means of bringing his people out of that desperately wicked situation, and thereby saving them.

Now, there is something to be emphasized here, which one would like to dwell on at far greater length in connection with this thought.

It is interesting that all through this passage, what is being emphasized is not, in any respect, a swiftness on the part of God to move to the destruction of a wicked world, but of tolerance and forbearance beyond all expectation, and only when the situation became utterly and totally hopeless, did God intervene in judgment.

And we have this figure of God, this figure of God extending his long suffering towards the absolute limit in order to effect the salvation of people.

And when you consider, if I may put it in concrete terms, when you consider that for 120 years or so, that God strove with people in order to effect the salvation of eight persons, then we have an insight into the reluctance upon the part of God to bring the judgment of destruction upon sinners.

[15:09] But when sinners will persist in their ungodliness, then it will come in accordance with his own threatening and promise.

But that was the case in respect of Noah. Now, to take out the time of the present time, what he is saying now is that just as in the case of Noah, that he was saved by the water, saved by the water in that the water, as it were, on the one hand, blotted out the corruption that was endangering him and brought him in the ark, of course, brought him in the ark into the enjoyment of a new life in, as it were, a new creation.

So, it would seem to me what he is saying is that water does the same now. That doesn't come out so clearly in our translations, either the English or the Gaelic.

But in the Greek, it does come out. And justice is only done to it when, first of all, the element of water is brought into prominence. But it is said, it is made clear that it is not water of any kind.

What is brought into prominence is the water of baptism, or baptism as it consists in the administration of this element of water.

[17:05] Now, that is perhaps a thought that really causes us to stop and to ponder, if not even to hiccup, at the very suggestion that water, even the water of baptism, now saves us.

What are we to understand by this? What are we to understand by this? Well, as you know, there have been, and there still are, and perhaps gaining more widespread currency today than perhaps for some time.

There is the notion that the waters of baptism mechanically affect the salvation of the baptized.

Even if we don't go so far as the Church of Rome and the Greek and Orthodox churches and perhaps some others, that there is no salvation without baptism, which is, of course, their position, that baptism is absolutely and totally indispensable to salvation, which we believe to be contrary to the direct testimony of the Word of God.

But even if we don't go that far, there is a tendency to think that whilst we would not exclude the notion of, whilst we would exclude the notion of the absolute necessity of baptism to salvation, yet that somehow or other that baptism itself or the waters of baptism do affect the salvation of those to whom it is administered, those who receive it.

[19:14] Now, oftentimes, when reference is made to that point, the doctrine of baptismal regeneration is referred to, and that is that without going into things in great detail, that the application of the water of baptism affects the spiritual renewal of the person baptized.

I will just leave it at that, that automatically or mechanically the waters of baptism affect the spiritual renewal of the person baptized.

But do you know that there was a doctrine of the efficacy of, or the certain efficacy of baptism to the salvation of the baptized.

There was a remnant of that present even amongst ourselves. I remember in my younger days when infant mortality was more prevalent than it is now, when it was unthinkable to allow an infant, a babe, to die without that babe being baptized.

Now, I have no doubt whatsoever, but that back of that kind of thinking was this, that somehow or other, that if the child was baptized, if the infant was baptized, his salvation was thereby at least made somewhat more sure.

[20:59] Now, there we might, we might consider that that is, that that was rather far-fetched, but we have to remember that some of the most prominent theologians whose works are most revered by us have held the position that every baptized infant is saved, that every baptized infant is saved.

and there are those today who think along these lines too. Well, what we say when we read such passages as this is that the scripture takes the matter not in the sense that this is universally and without exception true, but that it is where things are as they should be, where we have not only, as it were, the symbol, but where we have the reality, where we have the thing in its ideal, where we have baptism in its ideal, where we have that fulfilled, that then we can say that the water of baptism saves, not in the sense that it itself affects the salvation, but that it is when it is all that it is purported to be in the scripture, all that it is meant to be in the scripture, that then it does save. The water of baptism does save. Now, it would take far too long for me to go through the testimony of God's word to show that this is not making too high a claim in connection with the sacrament. But I wish to go on, what is the nature of the salvation that is affected by baptism? What is the nature of the salvation that is affected by baptism?

Well, I think that there is comparison and contrast here with the case of Noah. we saw that in Noah's case, the salvation was a salvation from the sin and corruption, the iniquity and filth with which the world was, of which the world was so full that even the righteous were in danger of being engulfed by.

[23 : 58] And it seems to me that this is the reason why the apostle Peter put such emphasis not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God.

Now, what I think that this does here is that what we find throughout the New Testament scriptures as a whole, that when we come to the matter of what we are to be saved from, the scriptures of the New Testament are much more penetrating than even those of the old.

Penetrating in the sense that they make much more explicitly clear that sin is not a problem that is exterior to us or external to us.

It is not merely the sinful world that we are saved from, although we are saved from that. The apostle Paul speaks that Christ gave himself a sacrifice for us in order that he might deliver us from this present evil world.

And Peter himself speaks of having been delivered from the vain kind of life which we had received by tradition from our fathers. There is a pattern of life, external as it were, to our psyche that we are saved from.

[25 : 22] There is no question of that. But it goes far deeper than that. And that is why I think he says here, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh.

I don't think that Peter is merely saying, look, baptism is not a washing of the body. What he is saying is much more than that. He is saying salvation in the sense that baptism brings it goes as it were to the root of what the flood was only symbolica.

The flood cleansed as it were, the world in its external character from sin. Baptism does not, the efficacy of baptism is not limited to any external purgation.

That is, the removing from the life of a lifestyle that is corrupt and sinful, or the separating us from a world that is evil and sinful.

It does that, but it does much more. But the much more is very difficult to really understand.

[26 : 33] He speaks of it here as the answer of a good conscience toward God. It's the answer of a good conscience toward God. Now, one of the things that I have been amazed at in those who have tried to interpret these passages that there is, as it were, a disjunction between the salvation that is said to be effected by baptism and the answer of a good conscience.

I think that the answer of a good conscience toward God is the very heart of the salvation that baptism effects. But what does it mean?

The answer of a good conscience toward God. there are some who taking the thing as we have it translated here in the sense of that when a person has the questions that are properly addressed to him at baptism, when he gives the answer of a sincere and true faith to these questions.

Do you believe, for instance, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only savior of sinners? And do you believe that through his atoning death that you have deliverance from all your sins?

That if you can reply with a sincere faith in the affirmative to that, that it is the affirmative sincere answer to these questions that is implied here.

[28 : 03] But there again, I am left with the fact that that has not gone to the root of the problem. All important as the response of the heart is in that respect, there is something I think that is deeper than even the response of the heart.

It's the actual state or condition of the heart itself. There are some who have suggested that because they find some difficulty with the term answer, that they have gone to the sense of an appeal to God or a prayer to God, a request that it is a request that is being made in the acknowledgement of sin and the exercise of faith that God would cleanse us through the waters of baptism.

But I cannot myself accept that. And what I feel is signified here is that baptism saves us how? That it saves us by the fact that it gives us, as it were, the appeal of a good conscience toward God. Now, what is a good conscience toward God?

What is a good conscience toward God? Well, Peter speaks in the foregoing context of a good conscience. There he speaks of oppression leading a blameless life, so that when we suffer, that we are not suffering on account of wrongdoing, but that we have a good conscience in that way. [29 : 45] But here, it is not necessarily the same thing that he means, and I don't think it is the same thing that he means. I think that what he means here is what the scriptures generally teach by a good conscience toward God, and that is, a heart that has been cleansed from sin by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, or if you will here, by the water of baptism, which signifies and seals as well as represents the purging power of Christ's blood.

And what he is saying here is baptism affects salvation. How? because where baptism is truly received as it is administered in the gospel, then the result of baptism, or what baptism signifies then, is that that person as to his conscience, as to his standing before God, has been absolved from his sin, and that not only is his guilt removed, but we can also go on to say that the corrupting destructive power of sin in his heart has been broken, but I think that the emphasis is particularly on the judicial aspect, the fact that sin, although there has been as it were cleansed, purged, washed away in the blood of

Christ. baptism, and how is this? Well, in baptism, we have this appeal before God, the appeal that we have, or that we stand before God upon the ground that we have been washed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, of which our baptism is not only a representation and a sign, but also a seal of it upon our hearts.

Now, he says that it's through the resurrection of Christ. Now, as we know, there is in salvation, as I tried to show even in the case of Noah, there is a destroying of the old, and a building of a new, the creation of a new, and let me just say this, you know, there are a lot of people who represent conversion today, and the work of the grace of God in people's heart, something along this line, look, your life is not complete, you don't have Christ, your life is not complete, and you need Christianity in order to complete your life.

Let me tell you, friend, the old life is not something that has to be completed, it's something that has to be destroyed. It's not just something that is not just adequate in itself.

[32 : 59] Scripture never speaks of the life of unbelief, the state and condition of unfaith, as being, as it were, an incomplete, it speaks of it as an evil state, and as a thing that will have to be destroyed, and taken away.

And I think incalculable harm is being done by saying to people, just add a touch of Christianity to your life, and you'll be complete.

No, the old has got to be destroyed, and a new has got to be created, and in baptism that is done. Salvation is the deliverance from the old, the destruction of the old, and the creation of the new, the creation of the new, or if you will, the appeal of a good conscience toward God.

What can't? Not in the sense in which we say how righteous I am, how pure I am, how holy I am, or anything of that nature, but of being in Christ Jesus a new person, cleansed, and made anew in the Lord.

and just the emphasis is here on his resurrection because the emphasis is upon the newness of the life that we have in the salvation that is ours, of which baptism is the sin.

[34 : 33] Now, there is much more that one could say upon this point, but I think that our time has passed and we better conclude there. Let us pray.

O Lord, our God, we pray that thou wilt bless to us our meditations upon thy holy word. We confess that we are not thither worthy to receive the least of thy gifts.

We pray that thou wilt, O Lord, our God, make all of us partakers of that salvation, of that new life, of which we have learned a little anew today from thy holy word, that it will be with us through our baptism as it was with Noah, through the water by which he was saved, that our baptism will be unto us, the dying unto the old life of sin and the rising with Christ in the newness of the life of the

Spirit, looking forward to that glorious and blessed hope of which our Lord and Savior assures his people that he shall bestow upon them.

Pardon our many sins for the Redeemer's sake. Amen. Psalm 127.

Psalm 127. We may sing the whole psalm. The whole psalm the tune is Kilmerna. Sorry. The tune is St. Andrew.

[36 : 10] Psalm 127. Psalm 127. The whole psalm the tune is St. Andrew. Except the Lord to build the house, the builders lose their pain. Except the Lord the city keep the watchmen watch in vain.

It is vain for you to rise betimes or late from rest to keep to feed on sorrow's bread. So gives he his beloved sleep. And so on. The whole psalm to the tune St. Andrews...

of its mesmer of the storm L doty and save the Lord to him.

That is he here as both OF C we're from Arch to the service and set the glorious city of what should watch remain. We sing for you to Christ he lies for his own friends to be to be because all your friends so in his beloved seed

Lord children are not heritage that most are not not not not not not not not not not not not not not not not That's right.

[39 : 13] Let us read our warrant for administering this ordinance.

We may read it as we have that given to us in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 28. We may read at verse number 18.

Amen. Amen.

There we have a warrant from the Word of God for the administering of this ordinance.

Now, in the former part of the service, I was trying to bring to your notice something of the significance or the importance of baptism.

[40 : 49] In that it is said in Scripture to save us now at this present time. I tried, I hope, to disabuse your minds of any thought that it would automatically or mechanically do so.

But I want to return to the, just briefly, to this notion that why baptism?

Why baptism? When he said, did he just sort of think of Noah and then say, oh yes, that's wonderful.

Now I can use this incident of Noah and bring in a reference to baptism. Surely that was not the way that the Holy Spirit would move a holy man of God to write.

No, there was deliberation. There was purpose. He had a reason to single out baptism in this connection. And the reason for it, I think, is this, that in fact we can say that there were two reasons, particularly before his mind.

[42 : 16] One was that the apostle was concerned to look at this matter of salvation from its very inception.

As well as looking towards its conclusion. And there baptism figures not only as that through which, or the acceptance of which, or the undergoing of which, the professing person was recognized as being one of the Lord's redeemed.

It was that. Baptism was, in that sense, a profession or a badge of the profession of their faith. By this they professed their faith in Christ.

Or, if you want to put it in another way, at the reception of baptism, they, at that particular point, professed their faith in Christ.

But, I think more than merely from the point of view that it was the initiating act by which they were recognized as professors of the true religion of Jesus Christ.

[43 : 39] The one and only Savior. The one and only Savior. But, that baptism signified, in a particular way, salvation in its, may I use the word, begunness.

In what it is, as it were, at the beginning of the process. It focuses attention. It did and it does.

It focuses attention upon the fact that, by nature, that we are sinners. And, that we need to be saved from our sins.

And, that by nature, we do not have a life that is of benefit to ourselves. Or, that is to the honor of God.

But, that we have a life that is under the curse. And, that is ruinous. And, that is to the dishonor of God. And, baptism points us towards a life.

[44 : 41] Even the life of the Spirit. The life that we have in Christ. And, the life that is to the glory of God. And, of course, in its other aspect.

It brings to our attention the triumphant nature of the Christian life. For, baptism is not only into the death of Christ.

But, also, a baptism into his resurrection. As we have been planted together in the likeness of his death. We shall also be, and we are, in our baptism, planted into the likeness of his resurrection. If you think that I am not careful in my use of the scripture. Then, you have the scripture saying that we are risen again with him. In our union with him, in baptism, we are risen with Christ. And, it is this triumphant resurrection life. Which we have begun to enjoy now. As, we have been blessed with our baptism into Christ.

[45 : 51] But, which also anticipates and looks forward to that great day. When, as sons of the resurrection, God's believing people will live through and through.

When all signs, when all evidences of the old life of sin will have been, we might put it away, washed away forever. And, when not a vestige of its ruinous and evil effects will have been left upon our nature.

And, we shall have been holy made new in Christ Jesus at the resurrection. And, so, the emphasis is upon baptism and upon the resurrection.

In that great passage that we were considering. And, where the reality is and not just merely the symbol. We can say that that is effective.

And, I trust and pray that this is the way that it will be. With all of those who are present here today. And, I would ask the parents to please stand as the fathers take upon them.

[47 : 02] The vows in connection with baptism. Do you own and acknowledge the word of God to be the holy scriptures and the only rule for our living to God's glory and to our own good?

And, do you confess that you believe the one only living and through God?

Three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit to be your God. Do you confess that all your hope of salvation is in Christ?

In what he did and what he is doing at the right hand of God? Do you promise to raise up your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord?

That by your teaching and by your example that you will set before them the pattern of a life of godliness and inculcate that upon them? The vows of the Lord God are upon you.

[48 : 20] Let us pray. Let us pray. O Lord our God, we come into thy presence and we confess each and every one of us that even in the commitment of our faith, which is most sincere, that there is much weakness.

We confess that none of us have ever been holy and totally true without exception to our commitments and to our vows and to our profession.

We have sinned grievously against thee in these matters. And we pray that thou wilt in mercy look upon us all here, not only those who have professed anew today and vowed afresh, but upon all of us who have made similar profession and made similar avowals.

Have mercy upon us in that we have fallen so far short of what we ought to have been and what we promised to be. And we pray that thou wilt especially bless the parents that are standing here before us and their little ones that they are presenting to thee.

We ask of thee, O Lord our God, that as we set some of this water aside from a common to unholy use, that it may please thee to make this the element not only of an external administration, but that thou wilt be pleased to so bless what we are doing to those who are receiving it, that the reality of what this is put as symbol will be sealed upon their hearts.

[50 : 14] That as Christ is outwardly represented to us all here present in the water, the benefits of the new covenant are represented to us here in the external symbol of the water, that this will be represented to them in the vision of the soul.

And that as these things are received literally upon the bodies of the infant children, that the glorious provisions of the gospel of thy grace will be received believingly into the heart.

And even these little ones that are yet incapable of conscious faith, that they would have this applied to them by thy Holy Spirit. We ask of thee to grant unto all of us here the blessing of thy grace that we may have.

This means sanctify to our use. Help the parents not only today, but in the days that lie ahead, to discharge the responsibilities to thee and to discharge them to their children, that they may raise them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

And when they have a care of their persons, not only in providing food and caring for their health and well-being in general, may they remember their particular stewardship and respect to their children's souls and pardon no many sins for Jesus' sake.

[51 : 44] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.