

Baptism into the Triune God

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[0 : 00] Our reading comes from the Gospel according to Luke chapter 18. Luke's Gospel chapter 18, and we'll read from verse 9.

Luke 18 at verse 9. To some who were confident of their own righteousness, and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself.

God, I thank you that I am not like all other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

[1 : 13] I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.

For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

A certain ruler asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Why do you call me good? Jesus answered, No one is good except God alone.

You know the commandments. Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not give false testimony. Honor your father and mother.

[2 : 25] All these I have kept since I was a boy, he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

Then come, follow me. When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Those who heard this asked, Who then can be saved?

Jesus replied, What is impossible with men is possible with God. Peter said to him, We have left all we had to follow you. I tell you the truth.

Jesus said to him, No one who has left home, or wife, or brothers, or parents, or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come, eternal life.

[3 : 38] Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

He will be turned over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again.

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

May God bless to us this reading. Let's turn now to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28. I would like us to read from verse 16 to the end of the chapter.

Matthew 28, verse 16. Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.

[4 : 46] Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. I'd like to look at that phrase in verse 19. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

We've been looking at the way in which God relates to man. The way in which he establishes relationships with man. In the Old Testament, he made this covenant.

And there were three things particularly connected with it. There was the promise of the covenant. I'm going to relate to you. I'm going to be your God, and the God of your descendants after you.

Then, later on, there was the blood of the covenant. The blood that was offered to God, and that was sprinkled upon the people. And then, there was also the sign of the covenant.

[6 : 05] In that case, the sign of circumcision, that marked out God's people as belonging to him, and that declared that the promises were true and valid. Now, we've seen certain things in the New Testament about these things.

In the New Testament, they still speak of the covenant. The promise of the covenant, we've seen, continues into the New Testament. Those that were strangers to the covenants of promise have now been brought near, and they've been made to participate in them.

There's still the blood of the covenant, but there's been a change made there. Instead of the blood of animals that was shed, now the blood of Christ has been shed.

Of course, the same meaning lies behind these things. The blood of animals declared that God required the giving of a life, and it declared that God was prepared to accept a standing and a representative.

And that, of course, is the very meaning that is attached to the blood of the New Covenant. The ideas remain the same. The basic meaning of it has not changed.

[7 : 18] It's just that now the blood of Christ has been given instead of the blood of animals. So we've dealt with the covenant promises, with the covenant blood.

Now what about the covenant sign? Is there a covenant sign in the New Testament? Well, let's see what the scriptures say about this.

I'd like just to mention two verses that seem to say different things about it. First of all, there's a verse in Genesis chapter 17 and verse 13 that says, My covenant in your flesh is an everlasting covenant.

It speaks about the sign of the covenant in their bodies, in their flesh, and he says, that will be an everlasting covenant. But at the same time, you get a verse like Galatians 6 verse 15 that says, Circumcision means nothing.

In the New Testament, circumcision, which was the sign of the covenant, means nothing. It's not valid any longer. It's got no importance. It avails for nothing.

[8 : 27] So, how are we going to understand these two things? On the one hand, it says, there's always going to be a covenant sign. That is an everlasting covenant in your flesh.

On the other hand, it says, circumcision is no longer of importance. Well, I think you'll see quite easily what the scriptures are saying.

There's always going to be a covenant sign. There's always going to be something done outwardly to the body of man that remains as a token of the everlasting covenant.

Back to the New Testament, it's not always going to be circumcision. Circumcision. Circumcision doesn't count any longer. And that means circumcision has been replaced by something else.

Just as there was the blood of the Old Testament covenant, and the same sort of thing tied on in the New, but it was different blood. So, in the Old Testament, the covenant sign has been replaced with something new in the New Testament.

[9 : 33] It's the same thing, administered in the same way, meaning the same thing. But it's a different sign that is used to do that. So the scriptures, it seems to me, teach us the New Covenant has got a sign as well.

A sign that will be meaning the same thing and administered in the same way as the Old Covenant sign. But it's a different thing that is used to mark out the people of God.

Now, what is it? Well, what rite, what ceremony, what outward thing is there in our way of doing things that is a sign in the flesh that is applied to the body of man?

And there's only one thing that fits that, and it's baptism. And therefore, we can see, and we'll see this as it develops, there's nothing else that qualifies to take the place of circumcision except baptism that corresponds to it.

So therefore, we've got to look at baptism as the sign of the New Covenant. That's what it really means. It takes over from circumcision. It means the same sort of thing and does the same sort of thing, but it's got a fuller and deeper meaning because it's the sign of the New Covenant.

[10 : 54] So then, the New Covenant has got a sign and it's baptism. What does it mean exactly? Well, let's look at this verse here because here we've got a very important expression about what baptism means.

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

Here, we've got a blueprint for the New Testament church. Just as when God set up relationships with Abraham, he laid down things nice and plainly.

He gave a promise, he gave the sign, and he declared plainly how things were to be done. So now, there's a new stage reached in the church's experience.

Christ is about to go to heaven and to assume the authority that he has there, the right to rule in heaven and earth. And before going, he gives this blueprint to the church and gives them a pattern that their activities should follow throughout ages.

[12 : 05] Make disciples, baptizing, and teaching. So, that, I think, shows the importance of baptism. It's not something just to be passed over lightly, to think little about.

It's something that has been a very important place in God's way of thinking. And it's something that we should not think lightly of.

It's part of the blueprint that he has laid down for the church's activity to follow. people. What place does it occupy there? Firstly, it marks out those who are God's people.

Look at the way in which it's put here. There's one main activity in mind in this text. It's make disciples. Discipleship.

that's the thing that really counts. And everything else contributes to that. What does baptism contribute to discipleship?

[13 : 09] And I think we've got to say it is the badge of discipleship. It's the outward mark that shows that a person is a disciple of Christ.

those that are within the band of disciples have this administered to them as a sign and symbol that they have entered that band of disciples.

Now you see it's what baptism contributes to discipleship. It marks out the disciple of Christ. Now I don't want to enter into this in detail but folks obviously say well why baptise babies?

Why baptise children of believers? Well I would just like to point out that Christ seemed to accept them in a very real way as belonging to him.

When babies were being brought to Jesus some folks tried to keep them back and forbid them. After all how could babes and arms receive blessing?

[14 : 17] They didn't have faith. How could Jesus do anything for them? And he says allow the little children to come to me do not forbid them for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

They belonged to him. He took them in his arms he blessed them. For the sake of the faith of the parents that brought them he blessed these babes in arms.

And he didn't just bless them he accepted them in a very real way as his own disciples. to them he says to them and to such as them belongs the kingdom of heaven.

And that it seems to me means that in a very real way he saw them as belonging to his disciples. Now that's not all that can be said about the case for infant baptism there's an awful lot more than that.

But all I'm trying to say is this that we can legitimately see baptism as being the mark that marks out a person as being a disciple of Christ.

[15 : 20] That means therefore that baptism is a mark of belonging to God's people. It's an outward badge or sign of belonging to God's people. The other thing in this text that makes us say that is that it leads on to teaching.

Baptising and teaching. Baptism is a pledge of a willingness to learn. Baptism is something that introduces us to the teaching of Christ and that commits us to learning of Christ as a disciple ought.

Sometimes in our mission fields where most of the folks are baptized as adults when they embrace Christianity from other faiths. Sometimes folks say you've got to instruct one of these new believers and you've got to keep them within the church for several years and build them up in knowledge before you can give them baptism.

Now that isn't the way of looking at it in the scriptures baptizing and teaching seems to me a logical way of putting things. Baptism introduces you to the teaching of Christ and is a pledge of your willingness to learn from Christ.

Now you see it doesn't simply mean that baptism is a badge of the believer or of the disciple of Christ. It means that baptism is the first badge of the disciple of Christ.

[16 : 54] It marks the beginning of his discipleship. It indicates the time at which he enters the band of disciples of Christ. That is it isn't for the mature disciple it isn't for the person already well instructed and advanced it is for the beginner.

It marks out the beginning of our relationship to Christ as a disciple of him and a learner of Christ. So then baptism is administered at the beginning.

It's what some folks call the initiatory right, the beginning, the entry right into the Christian faith because it leads us on to the mature development of our understanding and of instruction in the things of God.

So then baptism has this purpose. It doesn't just mark out God's people but it marks out the beginning of their discipleship.

It marks out them in their entry into these things. It's the first step outwardly of our relationship to Christ as a disciple of him.

[18 : 03] Now you can see quite plainly that that corresponds exactly to what circumcision meant. Circumcision marked out God's people. Those that had that belonged to God, those that didn't have it didn't belong to God.

God, it was given to them as soon as they were established in that relationship with God as parents or as children and it said this is God's people marked out by that sign.

Baptism just does the same thing in the New Testament age. The two things correspond very closely. Now there once again there's something important for us.

God wants a people who are marked out as belonging to him, who are a body of people committed to him as disciples and committed to learning from him. Baptism introduces us into that people.

Now that I think is very thought provoking for us who are baptized. Is that the way in which we think of God's people? Is that the way we think in baptism? And are we pledged to learning?

[19 : 07] Are we really learning? Are we really accepting the teaching and living as disciples? Baptism is made to mark out the beginning of that relationship. Now that's the easy bit.

There's another thing that this teaches is about baptism. It's baptism into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We want to look at that bit now.

This is very very important, this statement for two reasons. The first reason is because it tells us about the nature of God.

here there is one name but there are the three persons mentioned. And that speaks to us of the fact that God is one God but there are the three persons in the Godhead.

It's not into the name of the Father and into the name of the Son and into the name of the Holy Spirit. There's one name, one being, one character, one essence if you like.

[20 : 15] But there's still the three persons linked equally with that one name. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are put on the one level and they are linked together as one.

Now the Jehovah's Witnesses deny that Jesus or that the Son is really and truly all that God is. And they deny that the Holy Spirit is really a person like God the Father is.

And for that reason here's a very important verse because it links Father, Son and Spirit together equally as one God, as one name, as one person, as one being.

And that speaks to us therefore about the nature of God and it's for that reason very, very important. But the other reason and the main one for our purposes is that this speaks to us about all that baptism means.

It doesn't mean, this phrase doesn't mean simply that when baptism is administered the formula is used, I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 28] It doesn't just refer to that. It means that baptism is connected with the work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. The Father, that baptism tells us and teaches us about and speaks to us all, the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

Now, I feel that baptism isn't properly understood. I was in Hillhead School the other day, I took the three upper classes and I asked each of them, what is baptism?

In each class only one person could tell me and it was the exactly same answer that was given because these were Roman Catholics that gave the Catholic definition.

Nobody else knew a thing about baptism and that is very, very sad because it means that in the Presbyterian tradition baptism isn't properly understood.

It seems to me that the greatest thing, the worst thing that's happened is that the meaning of baptism has been very, very limited. The Baptists believe that baptism means union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection.

[22 : 42] And we wouldn't deny that for a moment, but that's only a very, very small part of what baptism means. It goes much, much wider than that.

They wouldn't, for example, teach perhaps that it's a sign of the covenant. We, what do we think in baptism? Sprinkling perhaps, or going a bit deeper, washing away of impurity, cleansing.

Perhaps that's the way we think of it. But that's again very, very limited. It's focusing attention on one thing, whereas baptism means something much bigger than that.

What has sadly happened is this, I think, that the meaning of baptism has been limited to what we think is symbolised in baptism.

And that is just what we can't do. We can't limit it, we can't restrict it to what is actually depicted in the way in which we administer baptism.

[23 : 47] The teaching connected with baptism, the declaration that it makes, goes far, far beyond anything that is actually depicted by the way that we administer it.

It's not just union with Christ in death, burial, resurrection. It's not just sprinkling and cleansing. The whole range of God's activity as Father, Son and Spirit is declared in baptism.

And that is what is said here. Baptism into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit means that there is a declaration made in baptism about the Father's work in salvation, about Christ's work in salvation, about the Spirit's work in salvation.

And unless we see the whole range of that work, we have limited the meaning of baptism unduly and we're as guilty of that as anybody has been. So what all is included?

Well, we do not for a moment differ from the Baptists in saying that baptism speaks to us of union with Christ in his death, in his burial and in his resurrection.

[25 : 01] We believe that that's the way that the covenant blood was shed. When he died, when he was buried, when he rose, we were united in him.

We were one with him. And baptism declares that because it's baptism into the name of Christ. But that's not the only thing, or even perhaps the main thing that baptism declares about the work of Christ.

By Christ we are washed from our sins. Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, says Ananias to Saul at Damascus.

Washing away of sins is something that Christ has given us. Sprinkling us so that we are consecrated to him, that's something that Christ has done for us. and that too is declared in baptism.

But we don't stop there. We go on from there. How does this become a reality to us? How do we come to know Christ as the one that died for us at Calvary?

[26 : 07] How do we come to experience the washing with his blood and the sprinkling from an evil conscience, as the scriptures say? We come to know that through the work of the Holy Spirit.

And therefore it's into the name of the Spirit that we are baptized as well. The Spirit was poured out upon us abundantly when we came to know Christ.

He was given to us, we were baptized by the Spirit so that we came to know the Lord as our Saviour and Master. And it's that work of the Spirit too that is spoken of in baptism.

It declares to us that this is the way that God brings a person to himself by the baptism of the Spirit, by the outpouring of the Spirit upon us abundantly in Christ.

That's then the way in which the Spirit is brought into baptism. Baptism declares his part in bringing us to Christ. It speaks of his part in making salvation real to us.

[27 : 13] But what lies behind this? Well we saw this in connection with circumcision. What lies behind this is the eternal purpose of God. The everlasting covenant.

The Spirit was given to us by the Father. The Son was given to us by the Father's will. And behind all that happens in salvation there is the will and the purpose of the Father.

God the Father was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. God the Father did not spare his own son but freely delivered him up for us all.

The Father was seeing that the circumstances were right so that Christ might offer himself. God the Father prepared the way for him and ensured that he would go to the cross.

And God the Father was involved in all that Christ did. God the Father is involved in what the Spirit does for us because he sends the Spirit. But more than that the Father purposed this from all eternity.

[28 : 23] He chose us in Christ. That was what the Father did. That was his particular work in regard to salvation. He chose us in Christ. He said I elect you in Christ Jesus.

That means that he ordained who his people would be and he chose them for himself. And he didn't just do that. He said Christ is the one to whom you are united so that he is the one that will act for you.

What the Father did was that he declared his willingness to receive the sacrifice of Christ on behalf of his people. He united them there and then with Christ so that what Christ would do it would be for them acting for them.

And God the Father indicated from all eternity his intention that by that means salvation would be accomplished. He appointed Christ then as the representative of his people and therefore he gave his people to Christ so that they might be in him when he accomplished his work at Calvary.

We are united to Christ in his death burial and resurrection because God so ordained it when he chose us in Christ. Now what does baptism mean?

[29 : 50] Can we dare we limit it to one particular aspect like death, burial and resurrection with Christ or cleansing, sprinkling with his blood? Dare we limit it to that?

The answer is no. If we limit it to that we are limiting scripture because baptism is a declaration about what the Father, what the Son and what the Spirit do in regard to us in salvation.

There is no means of applying water to us that adequately symbolises all that. The meaning of baptism goes far far beyond what is symbolised in the act of baptism.

So what we've got to realise is that here there is a declaration. It's a declaration by God about the baptised person.

It's not first and foremost a declaration by ourselves about our faith or about our relationship with God or our knowledge of Christ. It's a declaration by the Father about his own saving work that involves the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

[31 : 05] And that's the way and the only adequate way in which we are going to do justice to the vast range of teaching in the New Testament about what baptism means. It embraces the whole plan of God, Father, Son and Spirit in regard to salvation.

So then when an adult is baptised the water is applied by whatever means to their body so that there might be a sign of the everlasting covenant in their flesh.

And that water when applied to them is a declaration by God. This person belongs to me from eternity, chosen by the Father. About this person the Father said he will be in Christ so that Christ will die representing him.

About that person baptism declares he was united to Christ. When Christ died, he died. When Christ was buried, he was buried. When Christ rose, he rose, because he was united to Christ.

Baptism declares here's one that is assigned by God to know washing with the blood of Christ and sprinkling with his blood. Here's one assigned by the Father to know the work of the Spirit who comes upon him in power, poured out on him in the baptism of the Spirit.

[32 : 25] That's the declaration made about the baptized person. That's the declaration made about the baptized baby as well. Because those that are in the eternal purpose of God for salvation, they already have died with Christ and been buried with him and been raised with him because they were united to Christ by the Father's will and purpose from all eternity.

To the work of the Spirit has not yet been theirs. the experience of the fullness of the Spirit upon them is not yet theirs. But that is secured to them by the Father's purpose and by what Christ has done for them.

And there you see therefore is the way in which baptism declares the full purpose of God in regard to a person's salvation. In that too we see how it's like circumcision.

Circumcision spoke about the promise that God had made. Circumcision declared this promise really is true, really is valid and it confirmed what God had said about Abraham and his seed in regard to salvation.

It's precisely that that baptism says too. Now there is something that you will find hard to believe. I didn't believe it all until I came to prepare the sermon for this.

[33 : 50] I didn't grasp it all so thoroughly and I wouldn't be surprised if folks find it difficult. Why shouldn't it be difficult? We're dealing with the immense riches of God's grace. But let's seek to try and grasp what baptism means.

Let's seek to think especially about our relationship to this. You are baptized. Is it true to say that you are united to Christ, to God the Father from eternity, and that you have known the work of the Spirit?

If baptism has been administered to a person that does not know that, something has gone wrong somewhere. Because the sign and what it speaks of are meant to go hand in hand.

If you have been baptized as an infant and have not come to know Christ to the work of the Spirit, then there's something wrong. And I'm telling you this, it's not something wrong with God.

If you cannot therefore say to yourself, yes, I know the Father's electing grace. I'm resting upon the Son's infinite love. I've known the work of the Holy Spirit.

[34 : 59] If you are baptized and do not know that, there's something wrong somewhere. And I would suggest therefore that the matter of greatest urgency for you is not to ask about the doctrine of baptism that allowed you to be baptized, but the greatest thing for you is to come to Christ and know that salvation.

And therefore our attention is ultimately directed not to the sign of salvation which is baptism, the sign of the covenant, but our attention is directed to our own personal experience of that salvation that is declared in baptism.

The salvation here is described in the most wonderful terms and that is the salvation that is offered to you in Christ. Forget for a moment whether you're baptized or not, at least forget in the sense of don't rest upon that, don't rest upon that fact, but ask yourself whether what that declared is a reality to you.

And if not then, come to the Lord while there is time and opportunity. Entrust yourself to the Saviour, respond to the influences of the Spirit so that you'll know the work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in your heart and life in a personal fashion.

May God bless to us this meditation in his word. Let's pray. Our gracious God, we thank you for all the wonders of your grace that go into making up, to making salvation what it is.

[36 : 40] We thank you that it is not limited to the time when we receive Christ or personally come to know him through the work of the Spirit, but that the Father was involved in this before the worlds were begun, that the Son accomplished salvation before we came into existence in this world.

And we thank you that there and then a basis was laid for our salvation, because already in the purpose of God, your people were united to Christ in that experience.

We pray that we might seek to understand and appreciate what is said in your word, but that you would especially teach us to look at this in a very personal way, that we might not simply ask whether the sign of salvation has been administered to us, but whether the experience of salvation has indeed been ours.

So grant, O Lord, that we may reflect on that matter until we come to the assurance that we were chosen by the Father in Christ so that the work of the Spirit might be ours.

Bless to us then your word for Jesus' sake. Amen.