



JESUS GAVE US BAPTISM

Part 6 of Jesus Loves His Church

Pastor Mark Driscoll | July 29, 2012

QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISM

Jesus gave us baptism and at Mars Hill Church, one of the things we love is to see people get baptized, right? We love that. We're gonna explain that today, but first, I need to give you a good news report. In the last twelve months, we have had 1,305 baptisms at Mars Hill Church. Amen.

What this means is we got a lot of new people, a lot of new Christians, and they've got a lot of questions. And so, the "Jesus Loves His Church" sermon series is to welcome you, to get plugged in to Mars Hill Church, a Community Group, become a member, move toward being a deacon or an elder, serving according to the gifts that God has given you. Jesus loves his church, and he loves this church, and I love this church, and we love this church, and we rejoice that we get to be part of what Jesus is doing.

And when it comes to things like baptism, with this great number of baptisms, we don't assume that you all understand exactly what baptism is. So, I'm assuming that some of you've got questions about baptism. I hope to answer them today and also equip you to answer the questions other people might have about baptism. This might be your own children or grandchildren.

I had a cute conversation with a child recently. We had a baptism service and kids were up front, singing and dancing where people were getting dunked, and a cute little girl looked at me. She said, "I really like the bathisms." B-A-T-H-T-I-S-M. I said, "Oh, it's baptism." She said, "Oh, I thought they were taking a bath!" I mean, she just didn't understand. She thought, "It's so nice, they don't have to waste all that water. We can just use it over, and over, and over for the whole church." So, you know, sometimes kids will see what's going on, but we need to explain why we're doing what we're doing.

Sometimes even people who are Christians, been in church for a while, don't really understand why we do what we do. I talked to a pastor's daughter not long ago, I explained that baptism was about the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus. She came up, she said, "My dad was a pastor and I was baptized when I was a child, maybe 6, 7, 8 years of age, and I've seen people baptized my whole life, but I had no idea it had anything to do with the resurrection." She just didn't know.

And especially for those of you who are non-Christians. We love you and we have a lot of non-Christians come to Mars Hill. I had a great conversation a while back. I was preaching at Mars Hill Ballard and we had a baptismal Sunday where we had the tanks set up. This guy had been coming to church, single guy, and some guys in a Community Group were friends of his and invited him to church. "Why don't you come hang out with us?" He was certainly a nice guy, likeable guy. He was interested in Jesus. He had a lot of questions, so he'd been coming to Mars Hill for a little while.

And he walked in that Sunday, he looked at the baptisms, he had no church history or frame of reference. He said to me, "Well, that's cool. I didn't know you guys did hot tub parties," and he was serious. And I said, "It's not a hot tub party." He said, "But that's a hot tub." I was like, "That's a great point." And he then said, "And with these screens and this sound system, you could do a pretty epic hot tub party." I thought, "This guy's a genius." I'd never—at least date night could be pretty phenomenal with that kind of—so I explained to him, I said, "Well, we're gonna do baptisms," and he looked at me like a beagle that heard a whistle. He was just like, "What?" He didn't have any category—he'd never heard of baptism, had no idea.

We've found, in the history of Mars Hill, that the city in which we have ministered historically, Seattle, as well as other cities as the church grows and expands, every time we do baptisms, even outside, they come and take photos and put it on the front page of the paper because it's just this odd thing. And we rejoice in that, we praise God for that.

I want to take this opportunity to teach you about baptism, to answer your questions, and help you to answer the questions of others.

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

So, first question is: what is baptism? What is it? I'll go to Romans 6:3–6. It says, "All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus." So, first thing I want to say is baptism is all about Jesus. It's all about Jesus, and what we believe at Mars Hill Church is that we say the gospel and we show the gospel, meaning we'll talk about Jesus, we'll say things about Jesus, but then, in something called sacraments, baptism and Communion, we show our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, in Communion, and we'll get into this in the next few weeks, it's about Jesus' broken body, shed blood, his death on the cross for our sins, and that's Communion, the sacrament where we have this outward showing of this inward blessing that Jesus gives. And then, in baptism, we show Jesus'

resurrection. And so these sacraments are about Jesus, and they're all about his death, burial, resurrection for our sins. And so the gospel is said through preaching and teaching, and it's shown through baptism and Communion.

What he's saying here is all of us who have been baptized into Christ—he's talking about all of us, so baptism shows that you're connected to Jesus and it shows that you're connected to the church. So, when we see people baptized, it's all of us, meaning all of God's people. There are many denominations and traditions of Christians, but for two thousand years, Jesus' people have been getting baptized. All of us getting baptized. Doesn't matter what your race, your income, your gender, your ethnicity, your nationality, or your history, all Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus through being baptized. So, it's for all of us.

So, one of the reasons we like to baptize people in the church, as the church, is it glorifies God. We believe it also is a blessing and a benefit to the person being baptized. I could still remember the day I was baptized at the age of nineteen. It was a momentous day in my life.

It's also an encouragement to the church, and the church gets encouraged to see people are meeting Jesus. And he loves us, and he also loves them. He loves them by name, and when Jesus died for sinners, it includes that person whom he has great affection for. And so, we like to baptize as the church to celebrate as the church. Sometimes we'll do that indoors, sometimes we'll do that outdoors. There's certainly nothing wrong with getting baptized through Community Group or other situations, but we like to celebrate it so we can all be encouraged together.

And we like to do it publicly so that other people can see the work of Jesus in your life, and we've seen God do miraculous things. I'll give you one cool example. Recently, at one of the Mars Hill churches, someone was preparing to get baptized, so they thought, "Well, I'm gonna invite my neighbors," because they're friends with their neighbors. And the neighbor came to the service, just as a non-Christian, just to support their friend, heard about Jesus, and after they got baptized, they saw their neighbor come forward, repent of sin, trust in Jesus, become a Christian, and get baptized that very same service as well. You just never know what God's gonna do. So, in obedience, you just go ahead and get baptized, and people see Jesus' love for you and your love for Jesus.

Because, as he says, "All of us—" so, it's this joyous celebration, for all of us, "—have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death," so, it's about Jesus' death. Let me tell you about Jesus. Baptism makes no sense apart from Jesus, right? It's just getting wet if Jesus isn't involved.

Jesus is God, second member of the Trinity, Creator of all things. He comes down from heaven, as a man, takes upon himself human flesh, declares himself to be God. He lives without sin, the absolute, perfect life we should live and have failed to live. And then he goes to the cross and he dies in our place for our sins as our substitute. The death we deserve is the death Jesus endures. And so, baptism shows that Jesus died and that he was buried.

He goes on to explain that, "We were buried." So, it's about the death and burial of Jesus. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

So, here's what baptism is about: Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus was buried, Jesus rose from death. So, it's the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus. That's exactly what he says, which is why when we baptize someone, we're saying Jesus died for them, Jesus was buried for them, and Jesus rose for them, and they love him, and he loves them. That's why even in the act of baptism, we are showing Jesus' death, burial, resurrection. That's what someone who's getting baptized is saying. "Jesus is my God, died on the cross for me, was buried, rose from death, and my faith is in him, and my salvation is from him."

And so, one of the reasons we get excited about baptism is because baptism's about Jesus, and at Mars Hill, we're so excited about Jesus. We love Jesus, and we love to see people meet Jesus, and baptism is one of those occasions for celebration.

He goes on to say, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." What he's saying is not only are there benefits and blessings to knowing Jesus in this life, forgiveness of sin, there is also eternal blessings and benefits on the other side of death. That just as Jesus died and rose, those who belong to Jesus will die and rise from death.

And so, what we're showing in baptism is, "Yes, I will die because of sin, but because of Jesus' resurrection and his forgiveness of my sin, there is a resurrection for me." And Mars Hill, I have great news for you. There will come a day—Daniel 12 talks about the day when multitudes who sleep in the dust of the Earth will arise. We're the church of Jesus Christ, and Jesus loves his church, and all of God's people—we know not the day, but we know that it is coming—the day of the second coming of Jesus who is alive in heaven right now. On that day, we who are in Christ will all resurrect together. We'll rise from death like Jesus did, and in baptism, that's what we're showing. I'm gonna die, but because of Jesus, I'm gonna rise to be with God's people together with Jesus forever.

And what this does, this utterly transforms how we approach death. It gives us hope beyond the grave. It gives us hope beyond the grave. And I have some dear friends that are struggling with health issues, relatives that are struggling with potential life-threatening ailments and illness, and let me say this: there's something worse than dying, and that's dying apart from Jesus Christ. For those who die knowing Jesus Christ, they will die to be with Christ, they will rise to be like Christ, together, forever. And it doesn't mean that we don't grieve suffering and death in this life, but we also have hope beyond it because Jesus conquered death.

He goes on to talk about: "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." What he's saying is this: because Jesus died for our sin, we can put our sin to death. We could put our sin to death.

And for those of you who are new to Christianity, we're talking about sin. We're not just talking about failures, and faults, and flaws. We're talking about disobedience and rebellion. That the Word of God gives us the will of God, and when we sin, we're disobeying, disregarding the very words of

God, and that's sin. And what tends to happen is we assume sin becomes our lifestyle, so we celebrate it, or we tolerate it, or we accommodate it, or we blame others for it, or we try to manage it, or we try to hide it.

Here's the good news: because of Jesus' death, we could put our sin to death. Whatever has ensnared and enslaved you, you can walk away from it, just like Jesus walked away from his grave, if you are in Christ.

And when he uses this language of being enslaved, most of us tend to think of slavery in terms of someone or something that we hate overtaking, overpowering, and overwhelming us against our will. When the Bible uses the word "slavery," it tends to refer to addictions, to sinful proclivities, and compulsions, and activities, things that we shouldn't do, things that we're ashamed of. This can include things like alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual perversion, addiction, sin, gambling, gluttony, pride, a lust for control. Whatever it might be, someone or something rules over you like a God and you almost feel powerless to it or to them.

And Jesus comes and he dies so that those false gods, those false lords can be put to death, and just as he rose, we get to walk away from our old life and walk in what here, Paul calls "newness of life." So, in Jesus, you get a whole new life, and I can assure you of this: it's true. It's true. And a Christian is not one who is yet perfect but is new. Their old life is buried with Christ, their new life is risen with Christ, and they're on the path to perfection on the other side of resurrection in the presence of Christ.

And so, what Paul is saying is baptism is about all of that! That's a lot of great theological, biblical truth that gets just unpacked in one act. It's wonderful. So, when you see people get baptized, realize all of this: Jesus loves them, Jesus loves the church, this connects them with thousands of years of God's people, this shows us our eternal resurrection, this shows us the love of Jesus, the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus, this shows us that our old way of life can die, that we're freed from our slavery to sin, and bondage, and Satan, and death, and one day we will have a perfected state, and until that day of resurrection, we have newness of life. So much joy! This is why we call the gospel "good news." This is all such good news.

And so, at Mars Hill, when people become Christians, we love to see them get baptized and we love to cheer and celebrate, because Jesus is listening and it's our way of saying, "Yes! Thank you! Please do it again!" Amen?

HOW DO WE BAPTIZE?

Second question, then, is how do we baptize? How do you do this? Well, the New Testament was originally written in the language of Greek, and the word here literally means to plunge, dip, or immerse. Used in secular, ancient Greek literature, let's say a ship would sink, they would say it got baptized. Right? It went under the water. Okay?

And so we take the literal meaning of the word, and even good, godly Bible teachers who would disagree with me on mode of baptism, like John Calvin and Martin Luther, they agree that the word "baptism" literally does mean to dunk, right? To get under the water. So what we do, we immerse. We take people and we put them under the water, and then we bring them up, otherwise they'll see Jesus prematurely.

I'll give you some examples. So, Mark 1:5. John the Baptizer, Jesus' cousin, he's preaching and people are getting baptized. It says, "Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him," that is John, "in the Jordan River." Why do you think he went to the Jordan River? Because there's enough water to dunk somebody, to immerse somebody. I think there was one translation of the Bible, I think it was in Dutch, and they called him John the Dipper. Right? I mean, talking about people going underwater, and that's why he went to the Jordan River.

It also says this in John 3:23. "Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because," there was, quote, "plenty of water." So, it's going to take a good amount of water to immerse somebody. That's why John the Baptizer was looking for places and rivers with large amounts of water.

How about Jesus' baptism? We would just say, be baptized in the same manner and mode that Jesus was. Mark 1:9-10, "At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth and Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." And then it says that Jesus, quote, "Came up out of the water." Went down into the water, came up out of the water, in the Jordan River.

I'll tell you, one of the most meaningful days of my whole life was in the Jordan River. I didn't know Jesus 'til I was nineteen years of age, and I was then baptized in a great church that to this day, I love so much, and started praying for my father. My father was a man that I loved, and he was religious and believed in God, but he wasn't committed to Jesus and didn't have that personal, saving relationship.

Well, lo and behold, my dad gets saved, which is awesome, and he's now at Mars Hill. And my son, Calvin, got saved, and so the three of us were in the Jordan River in Israel. I got to baptize my dad, I got to baptize my son, his grandson. One day, one place, the same river where the Lord Jesus was baptized. I got to see the love of Jesus and the grace of God on three generations of my family. And I dunked my dad and I dunked my son because Jesus was dunked.

Some of you say, "This seems simple." It is, unless you're a theologian, and then you make it complicated, right?

What happens then is after John the Baptizer's baptizing people, after Jesus is baptized, Jesus dies, he's buried, he's raised, and what we're showing is Jesus was totally buried. That's why we put people totally under the water. And when we bring them up, we're showing that he really did rise from death, that Jesus sent out the apostles to preach, and teach, and baptize, and then Jesus ascended back into heaven.

We read this in Acts 8:38. "Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him." Where did they go? "Down into the water." Now, some traditions will say that you shouldn't necessarily baptize through immersion, you should sprinkle or pour water on someone, and usually, they mean a baby. We'll get to that in a minute. The reason they don't immerse infants is because it's abusive to the child. Amen?

Like, how many of you would want to bring your newborn little girl, nice little bonnet, white dress, hand her to me, and have me slam her under the water? Right? That's not a sacrament, that's a crime. So, they created something where it's sprinkling water or pouring water, and the Bible does use those words, but never in reference to baptism. It'll say that Jesus' blood sprinkles many nations, or God poured out his grace, but it never speaks of sprinkling or pouring in reference to baptism. And so that is our practice and why you will see people baptize.

John the Baptizer baptized the converts to Judaism with a full immersion. That was the practice of the Jews. When a Gentile converted, they would be fully immersed baptized. Jesus was fully immersed baptized, the early church fully immersed baptism. That's the way it's to be done.

WHY DO WE BAPTIZE?

Why do we baptize? Why? Because it's an act of obedience, and like every act of obedience, there is a blessing. I can still remember when I was baptized at the age of nineteen as a college freshman. It was a big day for me. It was my way of going public and committing myself publicly to be on Team Jesus. And in places where there's hostility to Christianity—many of you are younger, living in urban areas, or you're students. Baptism is a big deal. It's going public, saying, "I'm on Team Jesus."

Jesus commanded it. After his death, burial, resurrection, before his ascension into heaven, he says this in Matthew 28:19, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit." That's the Trinity: the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So, we baptize people in the name of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and Jesus says that people are to be baptized and made disciples. And this means not just that they're baptized and they don't grow. For us, we welcome, invite those who are new Christians to be baptized and then into Community Groups for fellowship, and prayer, and Bible study, and mission, and growth. We also have Redemption Groups for those who are dealing with sin and suffering that's deep and difficult. We also have a membership class so that people can grow in the basics of Christian faith, classes that are offered. Yes. We don't want to see people just baptized, also discipled, so that they mature in Christian faith, because Jesus, frankly, commanded both: baptize and disciple.

And then, Jesus' own disciples preached the exact same command. I'll give you an example. In Acts 2:38, Peter stands up on the Day of Pentecost and he preaches, and the New Testament church is birthed, and the Holy Spirit saves people, and here's what he says: "Repent and be," what? "Baptized." Turn from sin, trust in Jesus, and get baptized to show what Jesus did for you, that you trust in him and let the world know you're on Team Jesus.

So, why do we baptize? Out of obedience. How many of you are Christians, and you know you're Christians, but you've never been baptized? And one of the most common answers I get is, "I'm shy." But obedience says to repent of shyness, because your shyness might be a sin. If Jesus is saying, "Be my witnesses," which is exactly what he says, and then people are baptized, one way you are a witness is through your baptism.

So, let me encourage you today to consider: Are you a Christian? Have you turned from sin? Have you trusted in Jesus? And have you been baptized? If not, why is there disobedience? And I would tell you, your obedience glorifies God, it brings you joy, and it allows us to celebrate with you that Jesus loves his church. Amen?

WHO DO WE BAPTIZE?

Next question. Who do we baptize? Okay, here's where it gets complicated. There are two basic positions on baptism, and I know it's summer, school is out, you're not supposed to get a lecture, so I'll apologize in advance. A lot of this is a lecture on baptism, but we have people coming from different backgrounds, traditions, non-Christians, new Christians. You know? I just showed you, thirteen hundred baptisms. So, let me just clarify this.

There are two basic views, positions on baptism. One is called *paedobaptism*. *Paedo*, in Latin, means child or infant, so that's infant baptism. Have you heard of infant baptism? Catholics, Presbyterians, Lutherans, some Methodists, Anglicans, they're going to baptize an infant. Paedobaptism.

The other position is called *credobaptism*. *Credo*, in Latin, means "I believe." So, it's believer's baptism. It's for those who not only possess faith in Christ, they are practicing and articulating Christian faith. So, paedobaptism is where we baptize the babies. Credobaptism is where we wait until they're big enough to demonstrate and articulate Christian faith.

Now, let me deal first with paedobaptism, and let me say this: there are Bible-believing, Jesus-loving Christians who disagree with us. They're wrong. Okay? And in all humility, we love them and we want to fellowship with them, and we know that we'll rise from death and be with them in the presence of Jesus forever.

And we don't want to be mean-spirited or antagonistic, but we do want to be biblical, and they can use logic, or history, or reason, or tradition to get there, but there's not a clear path to infant baptism just from the Bible. It's just not there. And so, what I would say is, hear me on this, go back and do your own studies, but there is no evidence of any infant ever being baptized in the whole Bible.

So, let me deal with paedobaptism first. The general paedobaptist argument is that the Old Testament or Old Covenant and the New Testament or the New Covenant, they have something called continuity. And I know I'm giving you a headache. Hear me out. And what they're looking for is continuity between the Covenants, and they would then argue circumcision in the Old Testament is now, essentially baptism in the New Testament or New Covenant, so there's continuity.

I would say, first of all, I don't necessarily see that degree of continuity. I mean, circumcision was only for a Jewish male on the eighth day of their life. That's not exactly like baptism. It's for everyone who believes in Jesus at any point, male and female. And any guy would tell you, he would rather get

baptized if he had to choose between the two, right? So— Because they're different. I'll just leave it at that. Moving right along. So—

But let's assume their argument, because part of their argument is that each family has a head of household, the husband, father, and his children are born into a covenantal family. If he and his wife love and serve the Lord, then the children are born into a covenant family. Now, you could be born into a covenant family. My children were born into a covenant family. Grace and I love Jesus, Jesus loves us, but there's a difference between your birth and your new birth, and the New Testament makes a big distinction on this.

Your birth is all about who your dad is. Your new birth is about whether or not you've met God as your Father. So, in the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, there was a real focus on your birth. In the New Covenant, the New Testament, there's a real focus on your new birth. Have you met Jesus and received the Holy Spirit? Have you been born again, not just physically born but spiritually born again?

But let's just assume their position, which I don't agree with. Let's go all the way back. Who was the first guy who was ever circumcised? Abraham. Question: Did Abraham have faith or circumcision first? Let's read it from Romans. Romans 4:11, "He," that is Abraham, "received the sign of circumcision." That word "sign" is very important. I'll explain in a moment. "The sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised." I'll explain this. "The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe."

So, Paul in Romans is saying that Abraham is the pattern for belief. He is the father of all who believe. People who know the God of the Bible, they gotta enter into a relationship with him like Abraham did. Here's the story of Abraham: godless, pagan family, godless, pagan guy. He meets the God of the Bible, and one of the most important lines of the Bible, it says that Abraham believed the Lord, that he trusted in the Lord, that his faith was in the Lord.

And then, he was what? Circumcised. As what? Paul says here, "A sign." What does a sign do? A sign points to something else. So, circumcision was a sign pointing back to his faith in God. So, let's assume their argument is true, which I don't agree with. It still doesn't work for infant baptism, paedobaptism. Why? Because they would say, "See, circumcision and baptism are the same. They're signs." Okay, *after* faith, like Abraham, not before. Not before, after. Abraham wasn't circumcised and then got saved. Abraham was saved and then got circumcised as a sign pointing back to his salvation by faith. A sign works to point to something else.

I'll give you an example. This is a ring I wear as a wedding ring. This is a sign that points to— What does it point to? My relationship with Grace. This sign makes no sense if I don't have a wife. But, I wear this as a sign pointing to a relationship. So, baptism is a sign pointing to a relationship. It's showing Jesus loves me, I love him, we have a saving relationship. And so, the sign doesn't make any sense without the relationship.

So, here's the pattern for Abraham: faith in God, and then the sign that points back to the reality of the relationship with God. If we applied that to baptism, that would mean faith in God, then baptism as a sign pointing back to the relationship with God.

So, what do we do with babies? Well, we dedicate them. The Bible never commands us to dedicate children, but it does give us an example in Luke 2, where Jesus, he's a baby, his mom and dad take him to the temple and it says they, quote, "Dedicate him to the Lord." They're offering prayers, they're doing it in the presence of God's people, they're covenanting to raise him to know the Scriptures and to serve the purposes of God.

So, we do that at Mars Hill. We'll bring up moms and dads who love Jesus, and they're a covenant family, and they'll bring up their child, and introduce us to their kid, and we'll pray for them, and they'll covenant to raise their kid to know and love Jesus.

And as soon as their child is old enough to know and love Jesus and to be ready for baptism, then we will go ahead and what? Baptize them as a sign pointing back to the reality of the relationship that they have with Jesus by faith.

That position is called credobaptism, and the pattern in the Bible is always this: repentance, faith, baptism. Over, and over, and over, repentance (turn from sin), faith (trust in Jesus), then what? Be baptized. That's it.

I'll give you some examples. Act 2:38, "Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized.'" Baptism is for those who repent of sin. Repentance of sin is acknowledging, "I'm a sinner. Jesus is my Savior. I need him. I trust him, his death, burial, resurrection." And so, repentance is turning from your sin to Jesus, and then baptism is showing that your faith is in his death, burial, and resurrection for your sin. Repent, then be baptized.

Acts and 1 Corinthians also speak about two occasions where whole households became Christians, and those who hold the paedobaptist perspective, they will say, "Well, whole families got saved, and they all got baptized, and so there had to be babies in those families." And I would say, "It doesn't say that." You can have a household without a baby in it, right? You can have older children, like we have five kids ages six to fourteen. They all know who Jesus is. We have a household, but we don't have any infants.

And the two occasions in the Bible where whole households were saved—number one, the first occasion, I'll show you in Acts. It says that they all believed in the Lord. And in 1 Corinthians it says they all served the Lord. So, apparently, the children were old enough that they know and serve the Lord.

Acts 18:18, "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue." So, it talks about this guy who's a leader, and he's religious, and moral, and spiritual, but he doesn't know Jesus. "He believed in the Lord," he gets saved, "together with his entire household." So, the whole family got saved. "And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized." So, a guy gets saved, his whole family gets saved, they all get baptized.

We want this for you. We want your whole family to love Jesus. If you get married, we want you and your spouse to love Jesus. If you have kids, we want your kids to love Jesus. If you have grandkids, we want your grandkids to love Jesus. And we'll baptize them when they can articulate and

demonstrate their own faith in Jesus, relationship with him, as happened here. There's no indication there was an infant.

Some will ask, then, "Well, at what age should someone be baptized?" The Bible never says. But, I would say this. At Mars Hill, we let the parents and the church leaders work that out on a case-by-case basis, but it is possible for a little kid to know and love Jesus, right? Paul says of Timothy, "You've known the Scriptures since you were an infant, since you were a little kid."

I could tell you, my own kids, some of them I baptized young and some of them I've not baptized yet, because some of them I felt like they definitely knew the Lord and they were ready, and there were other children of mine that are in process, and I believe they do know the Lord and now we're working on them understanding baptism, and we're in the process of actually explaining and talking about all of this and them coming to their own deep convictions about it.

But, I'll give you an example with Buddy Zac. Buddy Zac is now twelve. He is my oldest son, my second child. And I came downstairs one morning and he was eating his cereal, looking through his kid's Bible. He was like, maybe five or something. I can't remember the age. He was young and he couldn't quite read yet, and so he was looking through the kid's Bible at the illustrations.

And he looked at me really serious. He said, "Dad, I need to get baptized." He's eating his cereal. I said, "Well, why do you need to get baptized?" He says, "Well, Jesus was baptized. Jesus says that if you're a Christian, you should get baptized. I'm a Christian and I think Jesus wants me to get baptized." That's a good argument. It's actually a perfectly fine syllogism. It's really good.

I said, "Well, okay, buddy. Let's think and talk about that. You know Daddy's not pressuring you?" Because sometimes parents can pressure their kids, or sometimes the Baptist grandma can really put the heat on. You know? "You're gonna go to hell. You know you're gonna go to hell, but if you get baptized, I'll buy you ice cream." Kid's like, "Hell's bad, ice cream's good. I'm in." You know? They may not love Jesus, they may just love ice cream. So, I want to make sure I wasn't pressuring my kids.

So I said, "Well, you know, Buddy Zac, we'll think, and talk, and pray about this." And he kept pushing it for a couple days. "Dad, when am I gonna get baptized?" I said, "Well, here's the deal, buddy. We're gonna go in and have you meet with the church leader, and they're gonna ask you questions and confirm your relationship with Jesus, and if they say you're ready, you're ready, and if they say you're not, you're not." "Okay."

So I drove him to the church, we scheduled a meeting, and he brought his little kid's Bible, went in. I sat out in the foyer, just waiting. He's in there in his meeting, and they asked him all the theological questions and his testimony, his relationship with Jesus. And they walked out, they said, "He knows Jesus and he is theologically pretty good for not reading. And if he was an adult we'd totally baptize him, so we don't see any reason why we shouldn't." So, I got to baptize Buddy Zac, and he knows Jesus, he loves Jesus, he's still in the Scriptures, he's growing in his faith. He's a Christian.

So, what I'm not saying is that until your kid is of a certain age, there's no possibility. What I am saying is let's take it on a case-by-case basis, and whoever is a Christian that presents himself for baptism, we'll investigate whether or not they have a relationship with Jesus, and if they do, we'll baptize them in Mars Hill Church and then disciple them to grow in their faith. That's our position. That's our position.

DOES BAPTISM SAVE?

Now, another question comes up. Does baptism save? You hear this one a lot. There are certain aberrant Christian groups, cult groups, that will say, "Unless you're baptized, you can't go to heaven." We don't believe that at all.

The classic illustration is Jesus is on the cross, being crucified. There's one guy on each side. One guy rejects Jesus, the other guy receives Jesus. That guy never did get baptized because he was being crucified. There wasn't time for that. And Jesus looks at him and says, "Today, this day, you'll be with me in Paradise."

People get really superstitious and think, "Well, if I get wet by a holy man, that'll do it." No, no. Jesus saves. Pastors don't save, churches don't save, baptism doesn't save. Jesus saves. That's our deep conviction. And what can happen is people want some assurance beyond Jesus. There is no assurance beyond Jesus, friends. There's nothing more secure to place your faith in than Jesus.

Well, what happens is some people can wrongly think they're saved because they're baptized. You can be wet and not saved. I'll give you an example. First funeral I ever spoke at, brand-new pastor, I was not ready for this. I grew up in a Catholic family. Many Catholics know and love Jesus. I have a lot of evangelical Catholic relatives that I'm gonna resurrect from death with and be in heaven with forever. We're Irish Catholic all the way back to County Cork, a long time ago. So, I'm not negatively bashing Catholics. Though I want all Catholics to know Jesus, some do, some don't.

My first funeral was a Catholic funeral and someone died, and I got asked to speak at the funeral with the priest. Now, I didn't know what I was signing up for. You know, I would have done it different had I known. So, I show up at the funeral and I'm outside, and because I'm a pastor, I'm just dressed normal. I don't have, like, a robe and a big hat and stuff. And I do a Jedi robe, but—

So, I'm outside and I'm talking to people before the funeral, and because I don't look like the priest, they just think I'm one of the attendants. So, there's a bunch of guys smoking cigarettes, and the guy who died ran a crew, and he was kind of a gruff blue-collar guy. So, I thought, "Well, I'll go over and talk to those guys." I said, "So, how do you guys know the deceased?" And they said, "Well, we work for him." They're all smoking. I said, "Well, I'm sorry for your loss." And I kid you not, here's what one guy said. He said, "No, we're just here to make sure he's dead." Not the nicest guy who died, like, the people showed up at his funeral to confirm that he was done with his life. I said, "Okay."

I knew this guy hadn't been to church in decades. I knew that he had no evidence of a relationship with Jesus, didn't have a copy of the Bible, the only time he said the Lord's name was in vain. I mean, the evidence was not, in any way, hopeful that this guy knew Jesus.

So, they bring the body in, open casket. The widow's sitting right in front of it, and I'm up there with the priest, and the priest says, "Mark's gonna say a few words, but first, I know it's a sad day, but the good news is even though he didn't walk with the Lord, he was baptized as an infant so we know that he's gone to heaven. Now, a few words from Mark." Oh man, really? Open casket, dead widow, crazy priest. Really? This is my first funeral. And I won't tell you the words that I was thinking. I don't remember what I said. I'm sure it was perfect, but— But I just thought, "He just put salvation in a human act of getting wet as a baby. No Jesus in this thing at all." We don't believe that baptism saves.

Here's what Paul says in Ephesians 2:8–10, and it's all about salvation, forgiveness of sins, relationship with God, eternal life with God. "For by grace you have been saved—" How are we saved? By grace from Jesus, the Jesus who's God, the Jesus who lived without sin, the Jesus who died for our sin, the Jesus who was buried, the Jesus who rose from the grave, the Jesus that we're remembering in baptism. That Jesus. Grace from him. Undeserved gift, unmerited favor, unexplainable love. That's our Jesus.

It says, "You're saved by grace through faith." The access to this grace is faith. It's trusting Jesus. It's trusting only Jesus, not anything in addition to Jesus, even baptism. There was a church in Galatia—Paul writes a letter called Galatians to them, and they were saying, "Well, to really be a Christian and have your sins forgiven, you need to believe in Jesus and get circumcised." And Paul very strongly rebukes them and says, "It's only Jesus. It's always Jesus. It's solely Jesus, because Jesus plus anything ruins everything." You don't need Jesus and baptism, you don't need Jesus and Communion, you don't need Jesus and speaking in tongues. You just need Jesus. That's it. Grace from him accessed by faith in him.

He goes on to say, "And this is not your own doing; it's a gift." We don't save ourselves. I can't save you, the church can't save you, baptism can't save you, Communion can't save you. Jesus saves you. If Jesus saves you, we'd love to baptize you to show how Jesus saved you. We'd love for you to take Communion, showing how Jesus saved you. We'd love you to be a member of the church to celebrate with the rest of God's family how Jesus saves us. But those things in and of themselves, they do not save. Jesus alone saves.

He goes on. "It's not a result of works." It's nothing that human beings do, including baptism, "so that no one can boast." See, I didn't save myself. I didn't save my kids. Jesus saved me, Jesus saved them. Any boasting is boasting in him. This is who Jesus is, this is what he's done. We love him, we appreciate him. That's it.

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Here's the pattern: saved by Jesus, grace from him, access through faith in him, that leads to a life of good works. Baptism is a good work. Communion? Good work. Church membership? Good work. Doing ministry? Good work. Giving generously? Good work. Caring for widows, orphans, the poor, those in need? Good works. We're not saved by our good works, we're saved by Jesus to our good works. You get that? We're not saved by our good works, we're saved by Jesus' good works: his life, his death, his burial, his resurrection. It's Jesus' works that save us. We're saved by Jesus' works to our good works. We live a new life because we're new creations because of Jesus.

Now, where this gets particularly emotional is with children. In the ancient world, they sometimes would not name the child for the first week because infant mortality was so high. Children died. I was reading in preparation for the Ephesians study that's forthcoming, and in the ancient Persian Empire, the children, often times, would not even meet their father until their fourth or fifth birthday, because such a high percentage of children died in infancy that they didn't even introduce them to the father until they had passed through a certain birthday. So, children died. Medicine was not at the place that it is today.

What can happen is parents, sometimes with good intentions, they're worried about the soul and the eternal destiny of their child, and so then they get a little superstitious. They're like, "Well, if we put him in a nice outfit, and we take him to a holy building, and we hand him to a holy man, and he puts him in the holy water, maybe that'll make sure that their sins are forgiven and they're with Jesus forever." There's only one holy man to put your children into the hands of, and his name is Jesus.

Here's the truth: Jesus decides who goes to heaven, who goes to hell. Whether it's unborn children that die in utero, like Grace and I, we suffered a miscarriage, whether it's an abortion or a baby who's born and has a short life before they can come to understand the grace and the goodness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, here's the answer: Jesus decides. Are you okay with that?

I'll tell you what, I am. I trust Jesus to do what's best, and good, and right. The Jesus that I see who loves kids, and welcomes kids, and says that the kingdom of God was made for kids, and tells us that God is a Father who loves his kids, trust him with your children. Trust him with your children's children. We do. When we miscarried—we'd have six kids were it not for the miscarriage. Our kids all asked us, "What happened to the baby, the baby that died in mommy's tummy?" I told the kids, "Jesus makes the decision." Here's what my kids said, "Phew! That's good. Well, then we'll see the baby in heaven." I think my kids are right. In fact, the Jesus who's been so good to me, I trust him with my children.

Do you understand that? I can't save your kids by holding them and getting them wet, but Jesus can save them, and he loves your kids more than you do, and we trust him to make the right decisions, even with the babies.

But what we don't want to do is give the impression that getting wet saves you, because if those kids do grow up, they could look back on their baptism rather than back on their Jesus as the source of their hope for their salvation. And one day, at their funeral, somebody could say, "Well, they hated Jesus and they lived a reprobate life, but they got wet, so we're not worried." And that's false assurance, because the object of faith is not Jesus.

SHOULD I BE REBAPTIZED?

Last question, should I be rebaptized? How many of you were baptized, maybe as a baby like I was? My parents were Catholic, they followed the teaching of their church, so I don't fault or criticize my parents. I was baptized as a newborn, little baby, and then when I became a Christian in college at age nineteen, because I can tell you, I wasn't a Christian. I just wasn't. And then at nineteen, I got saved. I met Jesus. The Holy Spirit dropped in my soul and I became a new person. I said, "Okay, I think I should get baptized, but should I get baptized if I was baptized as a baby?"

How many of you were baptized in a cult: Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, some weird group? You're going, "Do I get rebaptized now that I've met the Jesus of the Bible and I truly am a Christian?" What about if you got baptized in a church as a non-Christian, maybe because you felt pressure, or because your parents scared the heck out of you, or your Baptist grandma offered you ice cream, but—and then it wasn't until years later that you really met Jesus and became a Christian? Should you get rebaptized?

Paul says it this way in Ephesians 4:5. He talks about "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." So, our view is Christians shouldn't get baptized over, and over, and over, and over. Like, my wife and I, we don't have weddings all the time. You know? Sort of, we got married, and now it's the relationship. You know? I mean, it's not like every Tuesday, "Hey, where's that dress?" You know? "I'm glad it fits. The tux doesn't. I gotta get a new one again." You know what I mean?

So, a sign points back, and once you have the relationship and the reality, you don't need to keep coming back to do the sign over, and over, and over. So, we don't believe that Christians should get rebaptized all the time, but if you didn't get baptized as a Christian of your own volition, it wasn't even baptism, biblically. It was getting wet.

So, there is an occasion in Scripture where some guys were baptized, but they didn't know Jesus, and so they went ahead and got baptized as believers in Jesus. Acts 19:1–5 explains it this way: "He [Paul] found some disciples. And he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?'"

What happens is, people try to find evidence of whether or not you're a Christian. They'll say, "Well, were you baptized? Did you take Communion? Did you go through this class? Did you raise your hand when they gave the salvation invitation? Did you come forward for the altar call?" You could do all of those things and be a non-Christian. The only true evidence that someone is genuinely a Christian is the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, he resides in them, he's given them a new nature, he's made them a new person, he's taken away their sin, and he's connected them to the living Jesus.

So, Paul sees these guys. They're religious, maybe like some of you, they're moral, they're decent people, they believe in God, they even got, quote unquote, "baptized." And he says, "Yeah, but do you have the Holy Spirit? Have you been born again?" Here's what they say: "We have not even heard there is a Holy Spirit." So, the answer's no. They're like, "Who?" "The Holy Spirit." "We don't know who you're talking about."

"And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?'" What kind of baptism was this? "They said, 'Into John's baptism.' And Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

So, maybe like some of you, they went to religious meetings, they're moral people, they believe in God, they're trying to do the right thing. They heard they're sinners, they realize they're sinners, they got baptized in John's baptism, but John's baptism was to prepare people for Jesus. See, Jesus hadn't showed up with his preaching, and teaching, and healing yet. So, they knew they were sinners and they didn't know about Jesus.

So, Paul comes along. He said, "Well, let me tell you about Jesus." They're like, "Oh! Well, then baptism makes a whole lot more sense." It's about Jesus' death, burial, resurrection for our sins, and, hear me in this, like water cleanses us from filth, so Jesus cleanses us from sin.

I want you, every time you wash your hands, every time you take a shower, take a bath, every time you do your dishes, every time you wash your clothes, every time you wash your car, remember, "Jesus makes me clean. I'm forgiven. I'm clean in God's sight. Jesus' righteousness is my righteousness. I'm not just a guilty sinner. I'm a guilty sinner who is forgiven. I'm a guilty sinner who's clean. I'm a guilty sinner who's loved. I'm a guilty sinner who's righteous. I'm a guilty sinner who's new because of the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus." And just like water takes away filth, so Jesus takes away sin.

So, he tells them about Jesus and then they become Christians. They place their faith in, receive grace from the living, resurrected Jesus, and then they're baptized in the name of Jesus.

REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED

How about you? How about you? I want you to respond. For those of you who are not Christians, the problem is sin, the answer is Jesus. He is God. He died and rose to conquer sin and death. He loves you. There's nothing you can do—here's the good news. There's nothing you have to do to become a Christian. Trust in Jesus. Amen? And give your life to Jesus today and become a Christian, and you know what we'll do? Guess what we'll do? We'll baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, showing that your faith is in that work of Jesus. We've got a wonderful opportunity to baptize you.

Some of you are here and you've been baptized, but you're not growing in discipleship. You're not maturing in the grace of God. Jesus doesn't want you just to be baptized, but also be disciplined. The root of a disciple is one who's disciplined. We want you to grow in a disciplined, Spirit-empowered

life for the glory of God. What do you need to repent of? Where do you need to grow? It's not that you need to become a Christian or get baptized again, it's that you need to continue forward as a disciple of Jesus, maturing and growing.

Third category, are you someone who, in hearing this, has been disobedient? You are a Christian, you do know Jesus, he does love you. You understand what I'm talking about, but you've never been baptized. Why are you disobedient? Obey him. It's for God's glory, your good, and our joy, and this will be a great day for you. Be obedient.

And some of you say, "Well, I don't feel like it." We don't feel like being obedient, otherwise it wouldn't be obedience. Obedience is, by definition, sometimes doing what you don't feel like, trusting that if you obey, God will change your feelings. Don't make your decisions on anything other than the commands of God. Jesus says, "Baptized." That's what he wants for you. Be obedient to that today. Let us know so that we can baptize you.

And, if you are someone who was baptized in a cult, or long before you knew Jesus, or as a baby and you didn't have anything to do with it and didn't come to know him until much later in life, today would be a good day for you to present yourself for baptism, to be baptized, making your own public testimony about your relationship with Jesus.

And some of you will ask, "Well, what about those who disagree with us, like Martin Luther and John Calvin? Would you deny them membership at Mars Hill?" Here's what I'd say: "They're dead, but if they were alive, I would welcome them." First, however, I would sit down, open the Bible, and argue with them. Probably lose, but I would give it a shot. And I would say, "You know? I see just as many unicorns in this book as I do infant baptisms." A grand whopping total of nothing, okay? So, I would contend for the position of the Bible.

If you're here and you disagree with us, and you're not going to be difficult or divisive, we love you, welcome to Mars Hill. We don't want to have a fight, or a debate, or a divorce over this issue, but we all want to obey the Scriptures, and the clear, plain teaching of Scripture is repent of sin, trust in Jesus, and be baptized. And some of you need to do that because Jesus loves you and he wants you to share that with us. Amen?

Okay, and when people are baptized at Mars Hill, you know what we do? We cheer.

Father God, I thank you for the Scriptures. I thank you that I get to teach the word of God freely and unhindered at Mars Hill. God, I thank you that even with a bit of a lecture on something a bit more theological, it's still all about Jesus and it's imminently practical. Jesus, I pray for those who don't know you and I ask, Holy Spirit, that you would bring the life of Jesus into those who are not yet born again and give them saving faith, right now, in Jesus' name. For those, Lord God, who got wet as a baby but didn't get saved until later, I pray that they would own their own faith and be witnesses to it through baptism. For those, Lord God, who do know you but they've been disobedient and they've been withholding baptism, I pray they would see today that it is an important issue and it's an obedience issue, and I pray you would compel them to obedience, not so that you will love them but because you already do. And Jesus, for those who were in cults or abusive teaching or places, I pray, Lord God, that they would understand that it's by grace, it's about Jesus, and that we're a church that loves and welcomes them, and that they would feel safe here, to love Jesus, and grow as disciples, and be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. And God, for our kids and our grandkids, of course we want them to know Jesus. We also don't want to give them false hope that a decision that Dad made or Mom made is okay when it's perhaps not a decision they've made. God, I pray for my kids. I pray for all the kids at Mars Hill. I pray for the two thousand kids under the age of ten at our church right now, that they would know Jesus, that they would love Jesus, and that they would be baptized because of a personal relationship with Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.