

John 1:24-34

As we continue our journey through the Gospel of John, we come to a narrative that is contained in 1:19-24. The narrative tells of an interview John the Baptist has with some priests and Levites who were sent from the Pharisees. The two questions asked and answered were, “Who are you?” and “If you are not the Christ, Isaiah, or one of the prophets, what is your baptism?”

Verse 24-34 is where I want to focus this morning. In this passage, both answers are given by John. A second day begins with verse 29 in which John has an encounter with Jesus that I want to focus on.

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, and said to him, “Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” 26 John answered them saying, “I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. 27 It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” 28 These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

*29 The next day he *saw Jesus coming to him and *said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’ 31 I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” 32 John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ 34 I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.”*

Two weeks ago, I was looking ahead to see what was coming up in John’s Gospel when I saw these two questions. I sensed God wanting us to look at both of these questions, but begin with the second question. What is your baptism?

There are two kinds of baptism mentioned in this passage—the baptism in water, and Jesus’ baptism of the Holy Spirit. What are these? What mode of baptism does the scripture teach us that we are to observe, and what is the purpose of baptism.

There seems to be some confusion of what baptism is. Is it necessary to be baptized? Why are we to be baptized? So, let’s get into this in a structured way.

Baptism

If you saw the movie, My Big Fat Greek Wedding, then I’m going to sound to you like Gus, the patriarch of the family. Baptism is from the Greek baptizo meaning immerse, submerge, or plunge under.

This definition applies to both kinds of baptism mentioned in this passage.

Water Baptism

Water baptism is a symbol of that plunging under the authority of Christ as Lord of our lives. What is the method of baptism? Some practice baptism by sprinkling. Most sprinkling is done as infant baptism. In every instance where baptism is done in scripture, there is the mention that they went down into the water. I take it that infant baptism is a sign of covering for the child’s sin until such

time that the infant reaches the age where they can personally repent of sins. I have not been schooled in all of that.

Some practice the method of pouring water on the person being baptized.

I believe the proper method is by immersion, placing completely under water, and bringing back up. I don't believe this because I am Baptist. I believe this because that is the way I see it taught in the Bible.

Now, you may disagree with me. That's fine. I have brothers and sisters with whom I pray and fellowship with who do not agree with me with method of baptism. We get along just fine. They are very conservative in their beliefs regarding God, Jesus specifically, and salvation.

John's baptism

Now, as we look at water baptism, we notice the baptism of John. The Bible teaches that John's baptism is what we call baptism of repentance. This was a baptism reflecting a change of heart and life. This was a baptism that was a step of preparation for people who were looking to the coming of the Messiah. They were awaiting the baptism of Jesus Christ. We will talk of that in a moment.

Jesus' baptism

Jesus' baptism was not for repentance, obviously. He was sinless. I think that Jesus' baptism accomplished three things. First, He set forth a pattern of obedience for His followers. Before Jesus began His public ministry, He sought baptism from John. Our first step of obeying Jesus after our conversion is baptism. Second, I see that by being baptized, Jesus is identifying Himself with sinful humanity so as to be a model to follow. I am certainly not saying Jesus was sinful. He was identifying with the fact that He had the same human nature as we, but without sin. Third, Jesus' baptism was an affirmation of John's ministry.

Believers' baptism

Today, in the New Testament era, water baptism is called Believer's Baptism. It is the next step a new believer takes after becoming a believer. When a person becomes a Christ follower, a new believer, that person makes a break from living for sin and self. They ask God to forgive them of their sin, and tell Him of their willingness and desire to change. They, in essence, die to sin. They also commit themselves to Jesus as Lord, desiring Christ to live through them through the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is living Jesus' resurrection life within them. Believer's baptism in water is the public confession of faith where they tell the world that they have died with Christ to the old way of life. They are buried with Christ in baptism, being plunged under water. They are then raised to a new way of living, identifying with Jesus in His resurrection. Baptism is a declaration of the believer's faith, new life, and identity with Jesus Christ. We are not baptized to become Baptist. We are baptized to obey Christ and to publicly identify with Christ.

There is no saving power in baptism. We are not baptized to be saved. It is not part of the process of being saved. We are baptized because we are saved. Many who have gone through the waters have, in later years, come to the realization that they were not saved when they went through the waters. They become believers and are then candidate for believer's baptism. Didn't they get baptized before? Scripturally, the answer is no. They only got wet. There are many who have their baptism on the wrong side of salvation.

Many are afraid of being baptized because they are afraid they will fail Jesus in their living. They feel that they have to live perfectly once they come out of the water. I admire that kind of thinking. The reality is that though we have the nature of Christ in us, we still have our old sinful human

nature still in us as well. We WILL sin again. We WILL mess up. John writes that those who say they don't sin deceive themselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and He will forgive you of your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. The truth is if we all let this feeling keep us from being baptized, no one would be baptized.

Let me share two other things about believer's baptism. One is to answer the questions some of you may have now about loved ones who have died without having been baptized. I know of at least two who have passed away and had not been baptized. The reason they were not baptized is because they were physically unable to do so. They became believers in the midst of their illness. Because of their faith in Christ, they are in the presence of God. Two that I can think of right now came to faith in Christ, and I could see the change that came in them. There is no question in my mind of where they are now. However, that does not excuse us who are physically able to be baptized.

When we were in Round O, we had a lady who began visiting with us. In time, she became a Christ follower. She wanted to be baptized. She had a problem, though. Because of the steep steps of our baptistery in Round O, she was not able to get up them. She solved the problem though. She said, "I have a pool. Why can't I be baptized in my pool?" I said, "There's no reason why you can't." One Sunday night in the evening service, I said, "We will conclude our service at Linda's house after her baptism." We all drove back behind the church and gathered to her pool to baptize her.

For most people in America, there is no cost incurred for following Christ in baptism. But for some, there is. It is hard to believe that in our nation, the commitment to baptism comes at a cost. In South Louisiana, for example, where the predominant religion is Catholic, following Christ in baptism has and continues to have the cost of being disowned by families. They are treated as if they are dead. I know this for a fact, because I have met people who suffered that kind of treatment because they were baptized by immersion.

I had that happen in Georgia. We had a person who was baptized in an evening service. At 4:00 that afternoon, this person received a call warning that if they went through this baptism, they would be disowned. It bothered them, but it made them that much bolder to go through baptism. In some parts of the world, being baptized means imprisonment or even death.

So baptism is a serious matter. In many instances, it is a decision between physical life and death. What better way to show the depth to which one dies to self than to take a step that would literally cost them their life. Such commitment and dedication is most admirable.

Water baptism is the visual testimony of what has happened inwardly in the life of the believer. What happens inwardly? That brings us to the second kind of baptism seen in this passage.

Jesus' Baptism

In verse 33, John the Baptist tells us of the baptism of Jesus.

When a person surrenders to the Lordship of Jesus asking and receiving forgiveness of sin, they are plunged, immerse into Christ. The person dies to self, so that Christ can live through them. It is being placed under His authority over our lives.

Galatians 2:20 is the best verse to explain this.

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and ⁱⁿthe life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Galatians 3:27 - For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

The way Jesus places us in His authority is explained by John the Baptist when he said, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." That can be translated, with the Holy Spirit, by the Holy Spirit, or in the Holy Spirit.

When we give our lives to Jesus Christ, becoming a Christ follower, we are baptized in, by, or with the Holy Spirit. We plunge under His authority. He invades and brings about our dying to sin so He can bring new life to us which is the life of Jesus Christ. Once the Holy Spirit comes, He never leaves. We are believers for eternity.

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ. That means that the Holy Spirit will never call attention to Himself in you, but will call attention to Jesus Christ. He is the reminder that we have our identity with Christ. We die to sin as Christ died on the cross. We are raised to new way of life as Christ was raised from the dead. Water baptism is the expression that that identity.

The Holy Spirit seals us. He is God's mark of ownership that says we belong to God.

The Holy Spirit is the guarantee or the earnest. What God has begun in us, He will bring it to completion.

That is what it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Many of you have received Christ. Christ baptizes you with Holy Spirit the moment you surrender to Christ. Many of you have followed Christ in obedience to baptism. However, some of you have not.

This is the first step of obeying. It is what God wants you to do. You will not be perfect. But you will have the joy of knowing you are obedient to Him.

Many have not yet surrendered to Christ. I invite you to do so today.

Other decisions may need to be made this morning.