

## Message #4 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

*“What Is the Meaning of Baptism?”*

With Randy Smith

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today, I'd like to try to answer the question, "What Is The Meaning of Baptism? If you would, try and picture a setting where a mother and daughter come together for some serious conversation.

"Ariel, come set down by me for a minute. I want to talk to you."

"What about, Mom?"

"Well, about being baptized."

"Oh, oh!"

"Oh, oh? What do you mean by that, Ariel?"

"Oh, nothing, I guess."

"Nothing? Sounds more like something to me than nothing."

"Oh, Mom, I knew this would happen sooner or later."

"O.K., Ariel, you've got me completely baffled. What are you trying to say? You're making it sound like your head's on the chopping block. What's going on?"

"Well, I just don't think it's time to talk about it yet."

"About baptism?"

"Yeah."

"Well why not, Hon. You're twelve years old, going on thirteen. Don't you think it's time you were baptized? You've given your heart to Jesus. Don't you want to show others that you intend to serve Him?"

"But I don't want to be baptized, Mom. I mean, . . . I don't think I need to. I already confess that I love Jesus. I tell others about Him. Why do I have to get all wet too?"

“But Honey, everyone gets baptized. Your Dad’s baptized, I’m baptized, your older brother is baptized. Gramma and Grandpa are too? And Dad and I think it’s time you should be too.”

“But why do I have to be baptized just because everyone else is. What’s it for, anyway?”

“Why, um, it’s something everyone does if you’re a Christian.”

“Oh, Mom, I know that, but what I don’t understand is why everyone does it in the first place. It doesn’t make sense to me to get all wet in front of a lot of people, and everybody just staring at you. I can get wet in the pool. I’ve done it lots of times. Isn’t that enough?”

“Well, um, not exactly. It’s different.”

“But why is it different, Mom? What’s so different about being wet in the tank at church or wet in the pool? Isn’t my testimony of Jesus enough?”

“Um, well, . . .no, I don’t think so. You should do it in the baptismal.”

“But why, Mom? What does Baptism actually mean?”

“Well, Ariel, . . . I think this is something that your father should talk to you about. I can see we’re not getting anywhere. Run along, now. I’ve got to start supper anyway.”

So ends the conversation between mother and daughter. It might not be an unusual conversation. At least, most people can probably identify with the frustration of both the mother and daughter.

Maybe you’ve been baptized, maybe you haven’t. Maybe you know a bit more about it than the two in our illustration, but in any sense, most people don’t really understand baptism. But it’s a fascinating subject when you dig beneath the surface.

The word ‘baptism’ means to dip under. But more than just dipping under, it implies to be dipped so that the water ‘overwhelms’ you. The word ‘whelm’ comes from the concept of taking a plate of leftovers and covering it with a large bowl turned upside down. The leftovers are completely whelmed, or completely covered over.

For this reason, I believe baptism should be by immersion. Whether you do or not is not is up to you. But to me, to be baptized without being completely overwhelmed with it is somewhat less than total commitment to the calling God put on my life. When a person is baptized, he or she is overwhelmed by water. This is symbolic of their experience in regeneration. If you aren’t completely overwhelmed with Jesus Christ, and his gift of eternal life, then something is missing. When a person gives themselves to Jesus, they must give themselves completely and wholly. You can’t give only part of you to Jesus, and expect to go to heaven. Jesus isn’t going to take half a person to heaven.

Baptism is a rite or ritual that signifies our acceptance of the call upon our lives. If we truly accept Jesus as Lord and Master, then when we are baptized, we are making a statement to that effect. In essence, a person who is baptized is saying, “Father, in Jesus name I come to you wholly. I am a sinner. I accept Jesus Christ as my redeemer, my Lord, and my Master. I realize I have been purchased by Jesus Christ with his blood on Mt. Calvary, and I will now serve Jesus for the rest of my earthly life. I am wholly and completely yours to do with as you please. I realize that while on this earth, I only expect you to take care of me as you see fit, while I do

service to you as you desire. I realize that my reward will come when you return to Earth for me. I signify to others that by going under the water, my old carnal nature is being buried; put to death, and my new spirit nature is being born. By this symbolic death, I testify of my intent to die daily to the old carnal man, and to live in, and be led of, your Holy Spirit. From now on, I give myself to you.”

This may be what you confessed when you were baptized, or maybe not. But the ritual of baptism is fairly worthless without understanding why you are being baptized. To go through a rite just because that’s what everyone else around you does, is impersonal, and lacks that ingredient which is necessary in a relationship with Christ. In John 4:23-24 it says, “But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship him. 24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

In order to give value to your baptism, you must enter into the ritual with the proper intent. Rituals have no value in themselves, but only have value as a symbol of what is in your heart. If there is nothing in your heart except to do what others do, then in essence you are only saying, “Lord Jesus, I enter into this baptism because it is required of me.”

An illustration that may be helpful is the ritual of marriage. Marriage is very similar to your initial relationship with Christ, and in fact is used in many places and forms in scripture to indicate it. Can you imagine two people getting married, and the only vow the husband or wife makes is something like this. “Because it is required in order to marry you, I now dress up in this funny costume and say, I do.”

Wouldn’t that be a poor beginning to a marriage relationship? I think so. When two people come together in a relationship, they make vows to one another. They tell each other what the other can expect of them. It’s no different in baptism. The first thing you have to know, is what is required of you. If you marry someone, you will be expected to supply one half of that relationship. The vows you make are binding, and you will be held accountable for what you promise. In the same manner, the other person in the relationship will make promises to you, and you expect that, and you plan on holding them to it. In fact, if you did not trust that they truly meant to keep their vows, you wouldn’t enter into the contract with them in the first place, . . . at least, hopefully you wouldn’t. It’s no different with our contract with Christ. When we are called, we have opportunity to accept the call of Christ, or to reject it. When we accept it, we aren’t just accepting the promises given to us, but we are also accepting the requirements which will be expected from us.

James and John, disciples of Christ were told of this when their mother brought them to Jesus to ask that her two sons be allowed to sit on the right and left of Jesus in his kingdom. In Matthew 20:22 & 23, it says that Jesus asked them if they could accept the baptism that he was called to, and to drink of the cup that he would drink of. When they answered yes to these two questions, Jesus stated that they would surely be baptized with the baptism he was baptized with, and would drink of his cup. Notice that he is referring to a future event when he says, “you shall.” At this point in time Jesus had already been baptized with John’s baptism, and I would suppose that

James and John had also followed Jesus' example. So what Jesus was referring to was more than a baptism of repentance, and even more than that, it implied the WORK that James and John would do in response to God's will for their lives, and also the SUFFERING that would accompany their calling. James and John, like you and I, were confronted with baptism in a deeper form than just repentance. Another Bible verse gives us more understanding of baptism as being an answer to the calling of God.

In 1 Corinthians 15:29, it says, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?" The essence of this scripture is misunderstood by many, but simply means that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then why would we want to be baptized, thereby accepting the calling of God to preach the gospel to the lost, those who are yet dead in their sins. If there is no possibility of the dead receiving eternal life in Jesus, then what would be the sense in wasting your own short life here on earth and giving up your life to try and save the lost? If everyone who received Christ only had forgiveness from their sins for this earthly moment in time, then salvation would be almost worthless, for it would only be temporal and not eternal. No one would want to die to self for such a meager reward.

But the message of this scripture demonstrates again that the baptism we are baptized brings with it a responsibility. When we are baptized, we accept the call of God on our lives according as he wills. The calling is up to God, and is determined by what he desires, what he wills to happen. We don't set the terms of the calling, but only have the right to accept or reject them. When we do accept them, God expects us to tell him so. Maybe not in so many words, but at least with our whole heart according to our level of understanding. If we don't have much understanding at the time of acceptance, God understands, for he knows at this time we are like babies, and understand only a little. When two people marry, there isn't a very high degree of understanding of the implications of marriage either. It's something that comes with time. But the initial understanding must meet the minimum requirements, or the marriage will never take place.

It would be interesting to know how many times people have said the 'sinners prayer', and been baptized, but have never understood why they are being baptized other than that everyone does it. How many times has God rejected a potential 'mate' because their commitment was only copied from those around them? It's a scary thought. Even scarier is the thought that maybe I, myself, might be found some day to have been a Christian in name only, and not one from the heart.

Have you, yourself, entered into a marriage covenant with Jesus Christ, and taken on the vows of service to him? Or, have you symbolically demonstrated someone else's vows by being baptized without realizing what you were actually supposed to be indicating by it? If you were baptized, and only did it because that was considered the acceptable thing to do, maybe you should go back and find out what Jesus was vowing to you, and what he expected you to vow to him.

When John the Baptist was baptizing in the Jordan river, people would come to him and be baptized, not unto salvation in Jesus, but unto repentance, for John's baptism was only unto repentance, in preparation for the coming Messiah. When people were baptized with John's baptism, they were making a vow to turn away from their sinful life styles and start their lives

anew from that day forward. They wanted to be born again, not in spirit, but as a new man who's intent is to strive for righteousness in preparation for the coming Messiah. It was a different reason to start life anew than when being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the vows were different. The vows of John's baptism only required the people to vow to strive for righteousness, and to look toward the coming Messiah. When the people finally heard the message of Jesus Christ as Lord, their vows became much more extensive, as I gave in the earlier example.

When we answer the call to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we must realize that the responsibility that falls to us will be to fill that part of the two-party covenant which is subservient. God fills the part of the Master, we fill the part of the servant. Scripture is very clear in describing not only the vows of God, but just what God expects from us. Let me read a couple of verses to illustrate the point. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "What? Know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own? 20 For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

Notice that your body is stated as the place where God's Spirit will dwell. Your body is your graphical testimony which is supposed to bring glory to God. The verses also state that you have been purchased. You have been bought, and you no longer are your own person. You no longer own the right to determine where you live, where you work, what you wear, or what you drive. A servant has some rights, yes, but only within the guidelines set by the servant's master. If Jesus purchased you with his blood, then he is your head, not you. The head of the body tells the body what to do, where to go, and what to say. In 1 Corinthians 11 it says that the head of the man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God. This means your body is to be used by him to do HIS will, not your own will.

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The concept of living for the sake of Christ is a difficult concept for most Christians, for we've been conditioned by our social system to get all we can get and set goals to get even more. Yet, the Bible tells us to be content with such things that we have. Being content with what we have is a Christian value. Being content with what we have is not a value that is stressed by the world around us. Our society, even much within our own church society, encourages us to strive to get ahead, and to build ourselves a nice comfortable estate. But let me read another Bible scripture. In Luke 17, verses 7 and 8, it says, "But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say to him by and by, when he has come from the field, Go and sit down to eat? 8 And will not rather say to him, Make ready that which I may eat, and gird yourself, and serve me, until I eat and drink; and afterward you can eat and drink?"

This scripture clearly indicates that the role of the servant requires service to the master until such time as all that the master requires is accomplished, and THEN the servant can fulfill his own needs. Imagine what the master would say if the servant came in from the field and said, "I'm tired and hungry. I've been working in the field all day. You can get your own supper, because I'm going to get mine and then relax."

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out how the master would respond. Sure, God is merciful and loving, but nowhere in the vows does he say that we can call the shots. In fact, if we would read our Bible, we would find out what God requires from us.

I've heard many professing Christians say that God created all the things of the world for me to enjoy. Certainly there are things of God's creation which we enjoy, such as our families, flowers, trees, mountains, sunsets, etc. Our vows to God don't preclude these enjoyments, but our vows are supposed to tell God what we intend to do for him as obedient servants. We need to take on the burden that Jesus asks us to carry. Just as the old time prophets sometimes said in preface to their prophecy, "The burden of the Lord. The burden of the Lord." They were not out doing their own thing, but were actively involved in fulfilling the Lord's desire, to be burdened with what the Lord was burdened with. And the bottom line of any servant is to serve. If you don't serve, you're not a servant.

If you determine what the body does, where it goes, what it says, then you are the head of your body instead of Jesus. To be beheaded so that Christ may be your head, is what it's all about. Sure, you could have your head physically chopped off, but your body no longer gives any testimony after the testimony of physical martyrdom. The real martyrdom is being beheaded for the witness of Jesus, so that Jesus is your head, and controls YOU, instead of YOU controlling yourself, and that Jesus gets the glory and not you.

Jesus did the same thing for the Father. It says in Philippians 2:5-8, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, chose not to retain equality with God: 7 But humbled himself, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

You see how Jesus, being born as a man of flesh took on the role of servant? Jesus even said that he didn't do his own works, nor spoke his own words, but only spoke the words and did the works of the Father. As was pointed out in 1 Corinthians 11, the head of Christ was God. Jesus set aside his own head, and gave the Father the authority to be head over him. Jesus is asking the same from us, to be beheaded, and let him direct our thoughts, our words, and our actions.