

## IF YOU BELIEVE

Acts 8:25-40

Psalm 107:2 says, *“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.”* Let the redeemed express it! That’s a call to praise God with the vocal cords He gave you for His work of grace in your life! But you know, that’s not the only way we express our redemption that has come through faith in Christ. One of the ways that we who have been redeemed say so, and say so *publicly*, is through water baptism. We want the world to know through this act, this beautiful ordinance the Lord Jesus gave us, that He is our Lord and Savior.

We’ve had a handful of folks in our church interested in getting water baptized lately. The plan is to baptize a couple of young men this morning, and we’ve had a few others also opt for getting baptized at the lake when it warms up a bit more. But with that being the case, **it’s important that we understand what we’re doing when we’re getting baptized. What does it mean? What does it signify?** And as you’re going to see today, it signifies a lot! It has so many rich, theological and spiritual implications behind it and I’m excited to communicate that this morning. What’s great is that this is not only informative for those who are new in Christ or seeking truth, it’s also encouraging for each of us who have been baptized – to look back on the work of the Spirit in our hearts when we believed and remember how great a salvation we have! And to remember that when we got baptized we told the Lord we believed and would follow Him. So we check ourselves and rededicate ourselves to that. But it’s a time of rejoicing for all of us!

We’re going to be looking at several verses today from all throughout the New Testament, but I want to use the personal story of one man’s baptism in Acts 8:25-40 as the main thought conveyor for it all.

*“So when they [that would be Peter, John and Philip according to verse] had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.) So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join his chariot.” Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of Scripture he was reading was this:*

*“He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he does not open his mouth. In humiliation his judgment was taken away; who will relate his generation? For his life is removed from the earth.”*

*The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized? [And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”] And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.”*

Alright, so we are going to learn some ideas and thoughts that are associated with baptism today from the book of Acts but I want to **refamiliarize ourselves with this this book and the context.**

It's **written by Luke** as a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Both Luke and Acts are written to a Roman official of some kind named **Theophilus**, and he's **recording** in detail from eyewitnesses what happened with the life of and events surrounding Jesus Christ. The gospel of Luke focused on Christ's life and ministry but apparently Luke literally ran out of papyrus and so the next volume, **volume 2 (Acts)**, he records what happened *after* Jesus' life and ascension on another papyrus. The title *Acts* is an attempt to define what takes place in the book. Historically, it's been known as ***The Acts of the Apostles*** and later some tried to change it to *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*. But I like what one man proposed, "*The book is the record of the on-going works and words of Jesus, by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles.*"<sup>i</sup>

In first few verses of the book, Luke says that after Jesus was raised, He presented Himself alive with many convincing proofs and gave orders to the apostles before He ascended back into heaven, promising the Holy Spirit would come to empower them to do it. Well, Acts records just that.

💧 **Acts records the history of the early church and the spread of the gospel.**

Right before Jesus left, He said this according to Matthew 28:16-20.

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"*

**Matthew 28:16-20**

He also said,

*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."*

**Acts 1:8**

These orders are what we call The Great Commission.

**The Great Commission = Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them.**

And I point this out because that's exactly what you see going on in our account on with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Up until the beginning of **Acts 8:1**, the Church was mainly a Jerusalem Church, comprised mostly of Jews, but at the beginning of this chapter "*a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.*" The gospel starts to spread beyond Jerusalem!

And there's a neat contextual principle in that too. God can use even things we struggle with and don't understand at first, like persecution, to spread the gospel and do His work. The persecution was the wind that scattered the seed of the gospel as believers were forced around to other areas. That's something to remember – not all is lost when things aren't exactly looking up. God is working there too.

💧 **Contextual Principle: God's plan often unfolds in unexpected ways.**

And because Philip gave his life to God, to be used of God, God used him to reach those dreadful Samaritans. You can read about this a little earlier in the chapter but Philip basically becomes the Billy Graham of Samaria and many are coming to Christ, and Peter and John come to help baptize them and to unite them as one with the Jerusalem church. But then God calls him away from this effective work to reach one man near Gaza on his way home to northeast Africa (ancient Nubia, near Ethiopia/Sudan). What you're seeing here is God reaching the African continent for Christ through this. The gospel is going out!

This context is vital as we go to baptize these individuals because it's all of this is in accordance with the Great Command of the Great Commission to make disciples. It's commanded. In fact, the early church it seems wouldn't conceive of a believer remaining unbaptized because it's part of the task – and our task.

**Baptism Truth #1 – Baptism is associated with the Great Commission to make disciples. (Matt. 28:19)**

And I say it's part of our task as well because this commission is like a baton in a relay race that is constantly being handed to the next disciples of Jesus. We make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples. Like **Jude 1:3** says “*the faith has once for all been handed down to the saints.*” We've been entrusted with it. We entrust the teachings of Christ to faithful men who teach others, who teach others, who teach others. Church is not a race to see who can build the biggest church and have the largest attendance and coolest worship services. It's about making disciples who will go and make more disciples. It's not a consumer mindset but a reproducer mindset; not a country club but a mission agency!

That's why we have the vision that we do, of having **deep roots** and **bearing fruit**. We want to have to have deep roots in God's Word but that's not an end in and of itself. We want to bear fruit, too. We want to make disciples. We want to pass the message on. We want to continue to see lives transformed by the gospel. That's why the mission statement of the Berean Fellowship is, “*Planting and strengthening churches to make disciples to reach the world.*”

But what is a disciple? Well, a disciple is someone who like Philip has said, “*Lord, you saved me by grace through faith in Christ, and I want to live for you! I want my life to count for eternity and I want to live the life you want me to live, whatever that looks like for me.*” And that's what you see in the book of Acts, is the disciples of Jesus Christ doing just that. Men who have been saved by God's grace and indwelt with the Holy Spirit, living their lives to make Jesus known. **But if you're going to be a disciple, you have to understand the gospel first** – that you are a sinner who needs a Savior and forgiveness of sins is granted for the one who believes (places all of his trust or faith) in Jesus Christ. Only that will make you a person born-again by the Holy Spirit. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ.

**Baptism Truth #2 – Baptism is associated with repentance (belief in Christ as Savior) forgiveness of sins.**

That's the message you see this preached by Peter at Pentecost in Acts 2 where the Church is birthed through his preaching to repent and be baptized. And by the way, that's always the order. You have **repentance, a change of mind towards Christ (believing in Him as Savior from sin), which results in forgiveness of sins, and then being water baptized as a way of confession or displaying your reception of that good news**. Peter says baptism is more than an external washing but a *cleansing of the conscience* towards God through faith in Christ (1 Peter 3:21; Heb. 9:9). The gospel fixes your conscience. You see yourself as a sinner who can't save himself but then as a saved sinner, you're set free by grace and empowered to live by the grace in Christ. Those who believe are to be baptized.

*“So then, those who had received his word were baptized;  
and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”*

**Acts 2:41**

Notice, those who “had received his word” were baptized. They, past tense, had received the gospel (accepted it in their hearts as true) and were baptized as a result. This is not something you do to try to cover your sins but something you do as a result of having had your sins forgiven by faith in Christ.

### **Baptism Truth #3 – Baptism is to be pre-conditioned by faith in Christ.**

Getting baptized in and of itself won't save you. Not your baptism. Not taking the Lord's supper. Not your good deeds. Not your tithing. Not some spiritual experience. But faith in Christ (Romans 4). That's why Philip said, "***If you believe with all your heart, you may.***" And he answered and said, "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*" The early Church emphasized a clear testimony of faith in Christ for baptism.

What else is baptism saying? Well, one could imagine that this man had an entourage with him. Others were there and they witnessed his baptism and they understood he was identifying with Christ.

### **Baptism Truth #4 – Baptism is associated with identifying with Christ.**

What do we mean by that? Well, throughout history...

💧 **Getting baptized was seen as a public declaration to everyone that you associate with someone, some group, some message, or some event.**<sup>ii</sup>

So sometimes in the OT, a Gentile (non-Jew) who might want to convert to **Judaism** (proselyte), trading his false idols for Yahweh God, would be baptized. **John the Baptizer** baptized everyone who believed in his message that there was a coming Savior to prepare to meet. But get this, some of John's disciples would be baptized again when they wanted to identify with the clear gospel message that Jesus died and rose again from the grave (Acts 19:1-5). The apostles baptized John's disciples when they believed the gospel!

And when we get baptized, we are associating ourselves with *someone* who is Christ, some *group* which is the Church, some *message* which is the Gospel, and with some *event* which is yours and Christ's death, burial and resurrection. You are saying I have died to myself and my ways and am living for Christ who caused me to be born again – raised to new life in Christ. And that last part about my own personal but spiritual death, burial and resurrection, is the hardest thing to understand about baptism and why so many are confused today. Most read Romans 6 and think water baptism, but it's referring to spirit baptism.

💧 **Water baptism is physical picture of an inward, spiritual baptism.**

Remember when Philip asked the Ethiopian if he understood what he was reading and the man said, "*How could I unless someone guides me?*" Well, that's a good point when it comes to baptism because many are confused about it and treat as a religious work, a sacrament, that merits them grace. But it's an outward expression of the grace already received through faith in Christ. And like my professor Joe Buckley said, the Ethiopian's response shows us that "*This world needs Bible teachers!*" – people to explain this stuff.

### **Baptism Truth #5 – Baptism is associated with Spirit baptism.**

The moment you and I believe in Christ, the Bible says we are baptized by the Holy Spirit. That's a spiritual thing. The Holy Spirit comes into us to **indwell** us. To understand this I want you to think in terms of canning and pickling old mason jars as we read a couple verses. First, Titus 3:4-6.

*"But when the kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the **washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit**, whom He **poured out on us richly** through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*

**Titus 3:4-6**

There you see the Spirit's coming into our lives in **water-terms, water language**. We are washed clean as He is poured out on us and in us. What do you do when you can vegetables? You wash and sterilize the jars. That's what the Holy Spirit does. He comes into our life and gives us a cleansing, the perfect righteousness of Christ before God. And He comes into our lives to indwell us. The indwelling of the Holy

Spirit, by the way, shouldn't be mistaken with the filling of the Spirit and I did a special devotional on that in your bulletin. But **every believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God** (Romans 8:9) and we can quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19) and grieve the Spirit by sin (Eph. 4:30), but the Spirit isn't going anywhere because like in canning, we are **sealed by Him** with a seal no man can break. It's God's seal on us for eternity.

*"In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance [like a down payment on eternity], with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory."*

**Ephesians 1:13-14**

Isn't that great? Sealed for eternity for God's glory.

💧 **Spirit baptism washes us, indwells us with God's Spirit, and seals us.**

Now think about this: Whereas before, we only had the fleshly sin nature to live by and walk by, now we have the Spirit of God in us which means we have a new and divine nature. **2 Peter 1:3 says that in Christ we have become partakers of the divine nature.** And that's great but it also means life is going to get harder because now there's a war between the flesh and the Spirit going on (Gal. 5:16).

But this reality, when you think of it, is just like Christ's death and burial and resurrection. Like Christ's death, we've died and through Christ, have begun to really live – we have new life in Christ. And I want to read Romans 6, but look at it as a dry passage (not dry as in boring but dry as in talking about spirit baptism, not water baptism). Paul's answering the question that since we are saved and when we sin, grace increases – does this mean we should continue in sin so that grace increases? He says,

"May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin."

**Romans 6:1-4**

The Greek word for baptize, *baptizo/baptisma*, means "to immerse". Like a sinking ship is immersed in the ocean; or "To dip" like dipping a cloth in dye. When you dip a white shirt in dye, it takes on the color of the dye, it "*identifies*" with that dye. Well, we have been immersed or dipped into Christ by the Spirit and taken on a new color and we live for a new color. We've died to the flesh and walk by the Spirit.

💧 **Spirit baptism unites us with Christ's death, burial and resurrection.**

That's what baptism pictures and why I think immersion is to be the preferred method of baptism. Immersion portrays the spiritual death, burial and resurrection life (vv. 1-7). Going under the water is like being buried in the grave and then coming back up is like being raised to resurrection life. It's the most gospel-centered method of baptism and how we see baptism performed in Scripture.

The **meaning** however, is always more important than the **mode**. Not all people are even physically capable of being submerged under water and so some have been sprinkled (clinical baptism) or have had water poured on them (affusion). Those are biblical thoughts as well, but I see immersion as the preferred method because it best depicts the death, burial and resurrection (Mt. 3:16; Acts 8:36-38).

Another word to point out is that word “*united*” in **verse 5**. It’s a neat word too. It can be a botanical word, a plant word (*symphatōi*). It means “*to grow together*” or “*to plant together*”. Sometimes plants will grow together, grafting together. That’s what it’s like with us and Christ – we’ve grown together. The KJV actually translates it, “...*we have been planted together with Him*” – grafted into Christ and His work. When He died, you died. When He was raised, you were raised. You have been united with Christ.

💧 **Spirit baptism signifies death to sin and new life in Christ.**

It’s only for those who have the life already and want to identify with Him publicly.

Lastly, Spirit baptism joins us to the universal body of Christ.

💧 **Spirit baptism joins us to the universal body of Christ.**

*“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”*

**1 Corinthians 12:13**

This isn’t talking about the local church that is the church visible, but the Church universal and invisible (with a capital C) consists of *all true believers in Christ who have the Spirit*. We have been baptized into one body and those who are part of that body rejoice when others become part of that and through baptism, will say it confidently and boldly! It builds comradery and fellowship and rejoices everyone’s hearts!

This is why baptism is so important and so awesome! It’s a **public declaration** of so many good and rich spiritual truths. It tells everyone who sees and hears that there is more to life than what you see: that you can be forgiven; you can be set free from sin; you can have a new beginning; there is grace; there is mercy; and it’s a free gift (Rom. 3:23-24). There is a resurrection life now and later! And this is a message to offer to all persons. It’s a personal, individual message. The account of the Ethiopian eunuch proves He cares about individuals – He’ll leave the 99 to go after one sheep that is lost. He’ll go to great lengths for one!

Think about how this Ethiopian feel traveling home. He has travelled all the way to Jerusalem to worship, but because he’s likely missing some reproductive parts (eunuch), he found out there’s some religious privileges he was withheld from enjoying. There were lawas like **Deuteronomy 23:1**, which excluded eunuchs from certain religious privileges. There were areas he couldn’t enter and things he couldn’t do. And don’t get mad at God for that because God was teaching us an important lesson: it requires perfection to approach Him and to be in His presence. It was all pointing us to Christ. And knowing His imperfection was an act of grace on God’s part. Because until you see your imperfection and separation from God by sin, you won’t see your need to be saved. His thoughts of imperfection coupled with the desire to be with God is what led him to the Lord as Philip explained **Isaiah 53** for him, the passage about the Suffering Servant who was cast out to die on the crosse so that outcasts like the eunuch could be brought in.

I wonder if Philip turned to **Isaiah 65** as well, which predicted the removal of the eunuch’s reproach:

*“Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely separate me from His people.’ Nor let the eunuch say, ‘Behold, I am a dry tree.’ For thus says the Lord, ‘To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.’”*

**Isaiah 56:3-5**

That is good news for this man. He just learned about Christ died for him so he could be saved and enter the holy of holies in the heavenly places. If that's true, who wouldn't want to identify with Christ in baptism? Who wouldn't rejoice as this man does! Did you notice that? "he went on his way rejoicing."

 **Baptism is associated with rejoicing!**

*Lord help us to understand or be reminded this morning of how important baptism is because of all the rich, spiritual implications it teaches us. I pray that if we've believed in you, we would say so by getting baptized. It's a big deal in a world that has rejected Christ, to say, I accept Christ – publicly. And then may we be like Philip, a man who wanted in on what God was doing in his day and made himself available to do Your sovereign work. May we be filled with Your Spirit, empowered by Him to do the work of the ministries You've entrusted us with. Lead us into those ministries and keep us sensitive to Your leading. You don't need our help but like Philip, invite us to be a part of it and we praise You for that.*

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<sup>i</sup> John Stott, cited by Bryan Clark, <https://www.lincolnberean.org/sermon/daring-to-be-the-church-acts/daring-to-be-the-church>

<sup>ii</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), 488.