

Looking Back on Your Baptism

Colossians 2:1-23

Halifax: 28 January 2007

Introduction:

Today in our worship service we have planned to baptise Abraham Benjamin Kubik,

- the son that was born to Andy and Danielle Kubik a little over a month ago.
- We also have planned to publicly welcome Matthew and Natalie Mann and their children, Lukas and Leila, into the fellowship of this congregation.

As I thought about what to preach on for this occasion,

- my mind went to a subject that I have been thinking about a lot lately...
- Recently, I was doing a little research on our city and our province,
 - and I discovered that something like 85% of the residents of Nova Scotia have been baptised.
 - *Eighty-five per cent! Baptised!*

Now you might think that would make me glad—and in a way it does...

- I am glad to see that the great majority of our region professes to be Christian...
- But in another way I found that I was greatly troubled when I heard this...
 - Eighty-five per cent are baptised into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but how many are really living in the joy of relationship into which they were baptised?
 - Not many!
 - The great majority do not even understand the relationship into which they were baptised—
 - much less are they enjoying the glorious benefits of this relationship!
- Looking at them is like looking at a whole bunch of impoverished people who have a huge inheritance that is just sitting in the bank.
 - They don't realise that it is something valuable that they could be drawing from!
 - It is there for them and they are fully entitled to it...
 - All they have to do is reach out and take it...
 - But they continue on in poverty.
 - I'm a preacher, and I want to make them understand what they have! God has sent me to do this!

- Or to use another illustration,
 - It is like seeing people who are dying in the desert...
 - And they have been brought right up to a marvellous oasis that has all the cool refreshing water they could ever want...
 - And they have been given authorisation to drink from it...
 - But all these hucksters have come along and they are directing the people to drink from other fountains...
 - fountains of water that look appealing, and that can even be satisfying for a time—
 - but that have no live-giving properties in them...
 - But the thirsty ones keep drinking from these other fountains, filling themselves with the things of the world, and the water that Jesus gives...
 - And they are going to die!
 - They have brought right up to Christ and baptised into Him,
 - but they are not receiving life from Him!
 - They are not living in the relationship into which they were baptised!
- I have a great desire to make all these baptised people see what they have in Christ!
 - I want to see them drink from Him and receive all His benefits!
 - They are so close to Him—if only they would take Him!
 - He has everything they need and it is theirs—if only they would take it!
 - It's awful to see them so close to Christ and to eternal life and yet so far away!

But now, what about you who are assembled here today...

- I dare say that most of you are baptised...
 - And today you are about to witness another baptism...
- But the question is,
 - Are you living out the relationship into which you were baptised?
 - I want each one of you to look at your own baptism...
 - and to ask yourself,
 - “Am I receiving the benefits of the relationship into which I was baptised?”
 - Some of you are members of Covenant Reformed and some of you are visitors...

- It doesn't matter...
- I want each and every one of you to ask yourself this question...
- You can be a baptised member of this church or any other church and not be living according to the relationship into which you were baptised...
 - Just as a person can be married and not be living according to vows he made in marriage.

This was the Apostle Paul's great concern when he wrote to the church at Colosse.

- Colossians is a letter that Paul wrote to the little city of Colosse.
 - It was a city in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey).
 - It had enjoyed great significance in former days, but in the time of Paul, was what has been called "a second-rate market town."
- Paul had never been to Colosse, but there was a man from there named Epaphras who Paul knew quite well.
 - Epaphras had met Paul when Paul had taught at nearby Ephesus,
 - and Epaphras had believed the things Paul spoke and had gone back to Colosse to preach the gospel to his fellow denizens there.
 - Many of them heard and believed and were baptised.
 - As a result, a little church had been established in the city.
 - It was a marvellous thing!

But some years later, when Paul was in prison at Rome,

- Epaphras went all the way to Rome to visit Paul.
 - He told him that the gospel was continuing to bear fruit at Colosse and that the people in the church were full of love for one another...
 - But he also told him some disturbing news...
 - he told him that some of the members in the church were being influenced by a brand of false teaching that has arisen at Colosse.
- When Paul heard this,
 - He immediately wrote to the Colossians to express His grave concern!
 - In the opening words of chapter 2,
 - Paul says he has a "great conflict" concerning them...
 - He is concerned that they will be led away from Christ by these false teachers!

- How terrible it would be for those who had been baptised into Jesus Christ to be drawn away to trust in something other than Christ!
- How relevant this letter is to multitudes in our city who are baptised, yet are not living in the glorious relationship into which they were baptised.
- I have the same great conflict a minister of the gospel in our city that Paul had for the Colossians!

I. Look at some of the warnings that Paul issues here...these apply to us!

A. First, in verse 4 He say:

- v. 4: Beware of those who would deceive you with persuasive words.

1. False teachers can have very convincing words.

a. I can prove that quite easily—just look at how many people follow them!

- The New Testament is full of warnings about false teachers deceiving and being deceived...
- Even while the apostles were still alive, there were all sorts of problems.
 - Most of the New Testament is actually taken up with correcting all these false teachers...
 - The letter to the Galatians deals with legalism...
 - Corinthians deals with moral problems, idolatry, sectarianism, those who claimed the resurrection was past...
 - John's letters speak of "many deceivers and antichrists who have gone out into the world."
 - Peter speaks of "false teachers who deny the Lord who bought them" and of scoffers who say that Christ will not come again.
 - The whole epistle of Jude is about false teachers who encourage immorality...
 - I could go on and on...
 - The thing is,
 - many baptised people were following these false teachers!
 - You must not think this is something that never happens or that poses no danger to you!

b. It has been the same throughout the history of the church.

- The Arian heresy that denied the deity of Christ swept through the whole church for a time...
 - The Arians used persuasive words to get people to follow them.

- The Medieval church was nearly swallowed up by superstition
 - praying to saints and worshipping images.
2. And just look at what we have going on today in the name of Christ!
 - a. We have Christian ministers who use persuasive words to say that abortion and all kinds of sexual immorality are acceptable with God!
 - b. We have those who argue that the Bible is not really the word of God...
 - c. We have those who teach that salvation comes through mere rituals...
 - That if you get baptised and go to mass, everything will be okay...
 3. And let me tell you why false teaching is so effective—so persuasive!
 - a. It's because we are sinners and we don't really want to face the truth...
 - We are drawn to it because it is more agreeable with our sinful desires.
 - b. You may be one of those many people who doesn't want to go into all out rebellion...
 - That's taking it a little too far, you think...
 - You want to play along like you are a believer...
 - you want to do some religious time...
 - You don't want to truly bring your life under the lordship of Jesus Christ,
 - but you want to be known as someone who has some religion.
 - You don't want to acknowledge that you are such a sinner that only Christ can deliver you...
 - You want to think better of yourself than that!
 - That would be going a little too far in the other direction!
 - If you are like this, you are always vulnerable to the persuasive words of false teachers.
 - They are very persuasive with you because you like what they are saying!
 4. But how can you know what is right when there are so many different opinions out there...and they all sound convincing...
 - a. Well I will tell you...
 - You must come to the Scriptures to find truth.
 - Compare what you are hearing with what is written in the Bible!

- It is here that you have God's Word and you are to test everything by the Word.
- b. And let me tell you, if God is working in you and you are **really** seeking the truth,
- you will know the truth when you see it!
 - The truth is self-attesting.
 - Our biggest problem is we are not ready to accept the truth when we hear it.
 - That's why we are so easily deceived by persuasive words of false teachers until we have truly come to Christ.
 - If you really want to know God's will and to do it, you will understand...
 - There will be some differences on some of the details as we all learn and grow, but the basics will be clear.

B. Now let me show you Paul's second warning in 8:

- Col 2:8: Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit according the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of this world, and not according to Christ.
1. Every society has its traditions and notions and philosophies that has developed over the years.
- False teachers will appeal to these.
 - a. The Greeks had this idea that spirit was good and matter was evil—
 - This was a part of the thinking of the culture...
 - So the false teachers appealed to these common ideas to deceive people.
 - b. You see, the Word of God confronts every culture and challenges it...
 - And of course this rubs us because we have to change our thinking as Christians to conform to what God says...
 - we have to be accept certain things that are considered strange or unpopular.
 - We have to renew our minds according to the word of God.
 - And because it rubs us the wrong way to do this,
 - false teachers are given a way to bring in their false teachings!

- They can come, in the name of Christ, with doctrine that is adjusted a little so that it agrees more with our culture...
- That makes their teaching very attractive to us!

2. Take the doctrine of Hell as an example...

- Our culture is a very lenient culture...
 - We don't think anyone should be punished—we reject capital punishment, we reject the chastisement of children, and so on...
- And because this has become part of our make up as a society,
 - We don't want a god who judges, and certainly not a God who sends people to Hell.
 - So what do we have today?
 - A whole legion of churches that soft pedal the Bible's clear teaching about Hell...
 - They are teaching according to the philosophy and the basic principles of the world instead of according to Christ...
 - Christ speaks about Hell more than anyone else in the Bible!
 - It is doctrine according to man instead of according to Christ.

C. Paul's third warning is begins in verse 16:

- v. 16: Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths...
1. It is very common for false teachers to come with their own religious ceremonies and code of conduct...
 - a. The false teachers at Colosse had done this,
 - and they were apparently insisting that anybody who did not keep their rules was not right with God.
 - They required the observance of certain Jewish holy days and food laws which Paul describes in verse 17 as shadows that have passed away...
 - They were all things that pointed to Jesus Christ.
 - But after He came, they were done away...
 - b. And there were other things too that were imposed and practiced by these false teachers...
 - Verse 18 says they introduced the worship of angels...

- I mentioned before that the Greek idea out of which this grew was that God cannot be approached directly—and that we must approach him through beings that are halfway between men and God...
 - angels who were thought to be emanations from God.
 - Paul points out in verse 23 that all these things have an appearance of wisdom in self-made religion, but are really of no value in real sanctification!
 - A person denying himself of foods and multiplying holy days and claiming that God is too high to be worshipped directly can look quite spiritual...
 - but in fact, he is not!
 - Godliness has to be rooted in what God teaches and requires, not in what man thinks will look impressive.
2. The principle taught by Paul here is one we would do well to heed!
- He teaches that our worship is to be regulated by God, not by men and their traditions...
 - A church has no right to impose anything on you in the worship of God unless that practice has clear warrant from the Word of God.
 - It is not man, but God who decides how He is to be worshipped.
 - This is why we ought to lament both dead traditionalism (which is old fashion man-made worship)
 - and what is often called contemporary worship (which is the latest thing in man-made worship).
 - In verse 23, Paul calls it “self-imposed religion...”
 - it is things that man has come up with on His own.

TRANS> False teachers have always had a huge influence in the church...

- And that is why Paul gives the Colossians all these warnings and why I press them upon you.
 - The danger of being led away from Christ is not just theoretical!
 - I would submit to you that the reason there are so many baptised people in our city who have so little real life-changing knowledge of Jesus Christ is because they have been led astray by false teachers...
 - This is something that really does happen...and has happened right in our own city.
 - And I should say that it happened at Colosse also!

- The Church at Colosse did not hear Paul's warnings and ended up in full blown Gnosticism a century or two later.
- I am sure God preserved a remnant who did continue in the truth,
 - but the majority, though still continuing in baptism, went astray.
- False teaching is very dangerous and subtle...
 - It allows a person to satisfy his sinful inclinations without ever leaving the church.
 - It gives the false sense to you that you are okay because you have the outward form of Christianity.
 - But in fact, your heart is far away from that relationship into which you were baptised.
- We are all in danger of this, just as the Colossians were...
 - And so, having heard Paul's warnings,
 - we need to also look at what he directs them to do under the threat of false teaching...

II. Essentially, Paul shows that the Colossians need to look back to their baptism.

- **That is what every one of you needs to do too!**
- **That is what every Christian need to do...**

A. Paul puts it like this to the Colossians in verse 6:

- Col 2:6: As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.
- 1. The Colossians had only recently come to Christ—certainly not more than eight years before...
 - a. They were not Jews who had the Old Testament hope,
 - for Paul says that they were uncircumcised in the flesh in verse 13...
 - This means that they were not even outwardly in covenant with God until they were baptised.
 - So Paul is here taking them back to that beginning, when they first entered into relationship with God through baptism.
 - b. Paul shows that they had started out right...
 - 1) In verse 5, Paul says that he rejoices in their good order and in the steadfastness of their faith.
 - In other words, they began well,
 - They had made a good and proper start at their baptism.

- They had been baptised in a place where the truth was taught.
- 2) Understand, of course, that not everyone starts out right...
- a) Some are surrounded by a lot of false teaching from the very start...
 - I was.
 - The minister at the church I was baptised as an infant did not even believe in the resurrection...
 - He told me that—he didn't believe that Jesus literally rose again.
 - b) Paul's counsel to go back to where you started cannot be applied in a wooden way to someone like me...
 - I would be going back to error...
 - But for someone like me who did not start out right,
 - I can be admonished to go back to what baptism **really** means according to God in His word...
 - Baptism still means what it means, even if it is administered by the hands of wicked and false teachers who distort the truth.
 - It is not men, but Christ who determines what it means.

TRANS> But the Colossians had started out right, so Paul advises them:

2. As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him...
- a. In other words, don't veer away from the good direction and the right relationship with which you began...
 - This is like you might say to a person having marriage problems...
 - When they married, they began by promising that they would love their husband or wife until death parted them.
 - That was a good start!
 - Go back to that and walk in that!
 - b. Paul says to walk in **that** relationship into which they were baptised... in which they began...
 - v. 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding with all thanksgiving.
- 1) When they were baptised, they put their roots in Jesus Christ...
- They began to draw nourishment and life from Him!
 - The covenant relationship they entered was one that called them to come to Him to find life—and they had done that.

- So Paul is saying, don't let the false teachers spoil the plant...
 - Don't let them uproot you and plant you in teaching that is contrary to the faith you first received!
- 2) He says, go on and be built up in Him, established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding with all thanksgiving...
- Brothers and sisters, you cannot grow outside of Christ...
 - You cannot grow in the teachings and traditions of man...
 - You can only grow in Christ as He is in truth.
 - If you would have eternal life, you have to be established in Him alone.

TRANS> From here, Paul reminds them of just what they had in Christ at the beginning...

B. What is that relationship into which we were all baptised?

- Not what was it necessarily to you, but what was it properly...
- If you going to live in the relationship into which you were baptised, you need to understand how God defines that relationship...
 - You need to understand not what you may have thought it was, but what God says it is in the Scripture.
 - Let's see what Paul says...

1. First of all, He describes the person into whom you were baptised.

a. Of course we are baptised into the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit.

1) Baptism therefore brings us into a covenant relationship with the Triune God for salvation.

- The whole Trinity acts to bring about our salvation...
 - The Father planned it all and sent the Son...
 - The Son came to earth in human flesh to die for our sins and to give us the Holy Spirit...
 - The Holy Spirit changes our hearts to believe and to love God.

2) But central to all this work is the Son of God...

a) Sometimes, the scripture says simply that we are baptised into Jesus Christ.

- He is the one that Paul is particularly focused on in Col. 2, so we will focus on Him as well.

- b) He is the One who left the glory of heaven to come to this earth in human flesh.
 - Because of our sin, we did not have a right relationship with God...
 - We were cut off and sentenced to death because we, as the whole human race, rebelled against our heavenly father and creator.
 - It was only just that we should be condemned.
 - c) But the Son of God has always had (and still has) a perfect relationship with God the Father and God the Spirit.
 - For all eternity the three persons of the Godhead have been loving each other, giving and receiving in an eternal relationship of joy and fullness.
 - And Jesus came to earth in order that He might bring us, the members of this fallen human race, into this right relationship with God.
- b. Paul makes it clear to the Colossians that because Jesus is actually God in human flesh, He has **everything** we need.
- 1) In verse 3, he says that in Him are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
 - Paul doesn’t mean that they are hidden away where we cannot find them...
 - He is rather telling us where they are! They are all in Christ!
 - In other words, you don’t need to drink from the polluted fountains of this world—
 - you have **everything** in this one person!
 - It is in Christ and Christ alone that you are taught how to really live...
 - It is here that you are given precious doctrine that leads you to eternal life...
 - Don’t rely on your own wisdom or your own understanding...
 - Here you learn what you really need to know!
 - It is **all** to be found in Jesus Christ...
 - And as I said before, when you find it, you know it...
 - You don’t want to go sniffing around in the garbage cans of this world because you know that all the treasure is here.

- Let me ask you then,
 - are you, or are you not drawing from this wisdom—are you shaping your whole life by His Word?
 - or are you leaning on your own understanding or on the understanding of this world?
- Here is a test to see...
 - What do you base your knowledge of what is right and wrong on?
 - Is it just what you think, or what seems right to you, or is it the truth of God set forth in the scriptures which are the very word of Christ?
 - Remember in verse 8, Paul warned you to not let anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit according to traditions of men or according to the world that is not according to Christ.
 - It is in Him that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found...

TRANS> Look at what Paul says in verse 9-10

- 2) “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”
 - a) Paul is saying that Jesus has joined divinity to human flesh!
 - This is what the Greeks of Paul’s day had such a hard time accepting because they attributed all our problems to our flesh...
 - But Paul is saying that Jesus is full deity appearing in human flesh!
 - b) Look at some of the things He said about Him in chapter 1.
 - 1:15: the very image of God
 - 1:16: the creator
 - 1:17: the pre-existent sustainer of all things
 - 1:18: the head of the church
 - 1:18: the first to be resurrected
 - 1:19: the fullness of deity in bodily form
 - 1:20-21: the reconciler.
 - c) Wow! All the fullness of the Godhead indeed!
 - And as a result, Paul says in verse 10, “and you are complete in Him who is the head of all principality and power.”
 - Of course we are!
 - We truly lack nothing in Him!

- He has the authority to turn the whole universe to do His will!
- How foolish the Colossians were to look for power from their rituals and from the worship of angels and from the severe treatment of their bodies...
 - The false teachers taught that *power* was to be found in these things...
 - But Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth!
 - He is God in human flesh!
 - He bends the universe for us!

TRANS> **This** is the One that you are united to in Baptism...

- And now I want you to see,
2. Secondly, He describes the benefits of the relationship into which you were baptised...
 - that is, he explains what happens to those who are joined to Him...
 - He shows us in what way He makes us complete...
 - a. In verse 11-12, He speaks directly of circumcision and baptism...
 - 1) Because they were Gentiles, the Colossians had never been circumcised in the flesh, nor did they need to be...
 - but they had received all that is signified in circumcision...
 - namely the cutting away of sin from their heart so that they became a new creation in Christ.
 - Paul calls this the circumcision of Christ.
 - The Old Testament sign of circumcision was a symbol of the cutting away of sin in person's life that occurs when he enters into covenant with God through faith...
 - In Romans 4, Paul describes circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that Abraham had by faith.
 - It was given to infants, not because infants can express their faith in God,
 - but because they are born into a home where they will be brought up in the faith (or at least ought to be).

2) In verse 12, Paul moves on to speak of essentially the same benefit in baptism...

a) Baptism was done with water because water is the universal agent of cleansing...

- In the OT, clean water was sprinkled on objects and persons to make them ceremonially clean.

b) When we enter into covenant with Christ by baptism,

- the result of the relationship of faith is the washing away of sin...

- Paul speaks of it as dying with Him (to our old self) and being raised with Him (to live a new life).

- In other words, our sin is washed away!

c) To understand this, we need to look at what Christ did for His people.

- You must look at them as one body in Christ...

- When Christ came to earth, He joined Himself to them as their head...

- Then He took all their sin upon Himself.

- And He took that sin to the cross so that He might bear God's curse for it all in His own person.

- His sacrifice was accepted of the Father—

- He conquered our sin, and so He was raised again with victory.

- Now when you live in the relationship into which you were baptised,

- you trust in Him and in His finished work to take away your sin.

- You are united to Him by faith in such away that the death He died is applied to you—

- it is as if you have already paid the penalty of your sin and been raised to live a new life in the power of the Spirit.

- You are cleansed from your sin by Christ!

b. This is what Paul goes on to describe in verse 13-14.

- You see that there are two aspects to the cleansing that Jesus gives to those who are joined to Him by faith...

1) First there is the giving of life...

- explain—new heart, new life, new power, love God's commandments.

- 2) Secondly there is the forgiveness of sin.
 - explain—guilt, atonement

TRANS> These are the marvellous benefits we have in Christ from the outset!

Conclusion

But now we need to go back to where we started...

- Many people who are baptised with water do not have the cleansing of baptism that God promises.
 - They have neither the new heart that delights in God's commandments...
 - Nor do they have the forgiveness of their sins.
- How can this be if God has promised it?
 - This can be because even though it is promised in baptism, it is only promised to those who have faith—
 - that is,
 - to those who truly want to be cleansed...
 - not just forgiven, but also transformed to live a new life...
 - and to those who look to Christ alone for this cleansing—not another cleansing, but this cleansing from sin.
 - This is why teaching that calls you to rest on anything but Christ is so dangerous.
 - It draws you away from Christ, and away from Christ there is no hope.
 - Let each of you come to that to which you were baptised.