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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**September 10, 2023**

**Baptism 2023**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just again, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for this day and what it represents. I just thank you for what baptism represents. I pray that you would again give us the gift of the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us and accompany us as we open up your book and look into the concept of baptism. I pray that you would guide us and make this of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well today is the day of our picnic. You are all formally invited. We'd love to have folks all come out as we get together for fellowship and food and to provide an opportunity for folks to get baptized. I want to say even now we have one person right now that's set for baptism, if God's going to touch you, maybe we'll have more and that would be fine as well. We're just going to have a meeting up at the camp beforehand, if God is touching you about that and then meet with me and we can get that worked out. We're going to be at Camp Deerpark; they once again graciously extended

to us their hospitality.

And each year at this time, I basically raise the same questions that always come up, the questions that you really need to consider before you take the step of baptism. So this is kind of a repeat if you've heard it before. Let me just go over the questions that I want to address this morning. Number one, what is baptism; number two, what is the point of baptism; and number three, why should I get baptized?

And again, just to reprise, first what is baptism? Well the word baptize actually it's a transliteration of the Greek word baptizo and it simply means to immerse something in liquid. If the Greeks wanted to dye a garment or something like that, it was baptized by placing it into a dye-filled vat. And so the word baptize simply means to immerse in liquid.

What is the point of immersing not just something but someone in water? Well, the actual ritual of baptism consists of being plunged beneath the surface of the water and then immediately being brought back out of the water. And it's a powerful symbolic act that demonstrates three different aspects of a believer's new life in Christ. In that one act, there is death, there is burial and there is resurrection.

So first let's talk about death. You know, Covid-19 introduced all of us to the whole concept of a worldwide pandemic, a disease that affects the entire world. The very first pandemic that ever occurred was far more devastating and far more long lasting than Covid-19 and it occurred with the very first human and that was Adam. You have to understand, you see, mankind was designed to live perfectly forever. And when Adam and Eve decided to rebel against God they brought about this spiritual pandemic that affected not only them but it affected every single son or daughter of Adam since then until now.

Listen to how God puts it in *Romans 5*. He says: *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.* You see, it was Adam's sin that brought death to all of us. And what God is pointing out in that scripture there is that Adam really was the fountainhead, he was the source, he was the beginning of all of mankind. Every one of us is a son or daughter of Adam. And so when he sinned, this is what happened, he lost his status as part of God's perfect creation. But not only did he lose it but since he was no longer perfect, he passed on that imperfection of sin to every single one of his offspring including you and me.

You've got to understand God by his nature is absolute perfection. Mankind is now by his nature imperfection. Adam's sin created the ultimate spiritual disease because it rendered every single person who had a connection to Adam as imperfect, and that basically created a whole new type of creature, one who is no longer perfect and immortal but now imperfect and unfortunately mortal, subject to death.

I mean God says that *death spread to all men because all men sinned*, and what he means by that is that Adam's sin fundamentally changed our natures. It changed it so that every subsequent son or daughter of Adam is now born alienated from God with a nature that is now pre-programmed to rebellion and sin. Because all had inherited the results of Adam's rebellion, sinner is who we are by nature and sin is what we do by desire. It's the direction that our fallen natures bend toward. That also includes a deep unconscious resentment of anyone claiming authority over us. As our creator, God alone has that ability to make that claim. God says he's the creator; we are the creatures. He's the king; we are his subjects. And understand the nature of this relationship, God is still perfect; we no longer are.

And here's the part that people never really understand, God's demand of perfection from his creatures, it still remains and it

remains because that's who God is. And God laid out his standards for us when he gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. Those ten laws are what renders all of us unfit for heaven. And the reason why it does is because God demands that we follow all of those commands perfectly. I mean this is not just an Old Testament demand, this was a command given directly by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. This is what he said in *Matthew 5:48*. He says: *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

So what the Ten Commandments actually are is a set of non-negotiable demands that the king has placed upon his subjects, and violating any one of those commands in any way is a capital offense, a capital offense which all of us have earned. Virtually every one of us is under a death penalty. You see, if you've ever lied, stolen, lusted, if you've ever coveted or disrespected your parents or taken the Lord's name in vain, among other laws, if you've ever violated Jesus' command that we be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, you're disqualified; you are not worthy of heaven.

This is how God puts it. He says: *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.* The whole world is held accountable to God and the penalty

that every single one of us is under is a death penalty. As *Romans 5* says: *And so death spread to all men because all sinned.*

We've just come to accept death as a natural part of living when it was never intended to be that way. But God had a better way. See, God knew that mankind could not fulfill the law even though he was still held accountable to it and so God himself became one of us and then he lived the life that we were supposed to live, a life of absolute perfection.

You know, Jesus didn't just talk the talk, he walked the walk. In fact he walked it so much that he made perhaps the most outrageous challenge a human being has ever made, he actually dared his enemies, the Pharisees, he dared them to find a single sin in his life. He said in *John 8:46*: *Which one of you convicts me of sin?* It's an astounding challenge and he could make that challenge because at the age of 32 he was figuratively and literally spotless. And having lived his life perfectly Jesus then went to the cross to offer up his life of perfection in exchange for our life of sin. And when we accept by faith Jesus as our Lord and Savior, he gives us the right to the exchange our sin for his righteousness and stand before God justified which means that our sin debt has been fully paid.

And we were, all of us, we were on our way to perishing when Jesus came literally to the world of the walking dead and offered them life. This is *John 3:16*: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not -- what? -- perish but have eternal life.*"

So make no mistake about it, God sent his son into the world to rescue us from a curse that all of us were perishing from. And Jesus knew precisely that the wages of sin is death because it was our sin that caused his death. But his death made it possible that *whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life*. I mean Jesus came to perfectly fulfill what the Ten Commandments demanded, and having done that he then stood in our place bearing the full guilt of our sin. It's why in exchange, we do the sinning and he does the dying.

Death is the very first thing that baptism is all about. You see, baptism first symbolically represents death. In baptism that plunging under the water is a living picture of what it means to die to the power of the law. We're talking about dying to one way of living and being re-created to live in a brand new way. And when we say we are dead to sin, we mean that the power that sin used to have over us has been ended by death, because once a person has died, he's been freed from any power that the law has over him.

I mean for all practical purposes everyone knows nothing can be touch a dead man. We know that in one sense a dead person's absolutely free, the only problem is he's dead.

But what if you had that same freedom, that no law could ever touch you because it saw you as already dead but you're still very much alive? That's the death that baptism represents. *Romans 7:4* says: *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.*

You see, in baptism, you're symbolizing that the day you placed your faith in Christ is the day you died to the law and its demand of perfection. And you died to the law because Jesus Christ stood in your place to receives your punishment. So you're now dead to its demands. You have been buried with Christ under the water, and you're resurrected with him as well. *Romans 6* says: *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.*

See the law no longer has any power over us. God's law, it says you must do this; you must not do that and we felt like we were bound and imprisoned by that law. Not only could we not do it, we



had no desire to do it in the first place. We were what Paul calls a prisoner of the law. You see, fallen mankind's default drive of rebellion, it's actually a unique form of slavery. It's a slavery that deeply resents liberation. It's a slavery that fights tooth and nail to remain enslaved. It's a slavery that completely blinds those enslaved to what that status really is. They think they are free as a bird. They're not.

You know, I have a great deal of sympathy for those who are addicted to tobacco because I was for many, many years. I remember somebody telling me after my tenth attempt at trying to quit, they said, "You haven't really quit until you can look at somebody smoking and not envy them." Well that's a strange thing to say. But sure enough by the grace of God when I was finally able to quit smoking for a good while, I remember I could actually look at somebody smoking and not envy them. Why would I envy them? Because they had the freedom to smoke and I didn't. I mean, I could see smoking for the addiction that it was, and I could see these folks now as enslaved to what I once was to nicotine.

You know, you can say the same things for all kinds of things, pornography included. According to statistics there are millions and millions of Americans who are now addicted to pornography but very few of them see that as one of addiction. They see it instead

as this is a freedom that they have and that others, particularly Christians, don't have. And again, it's only when God has given you victory over sin, that you see, when you die to that sin that you can kind of look back at the same folks who think that they're free and see them as the ones who are enslaved.

I've spoken many times about the encounter I had with my non-Christian friend Tom in San Francisco. There was that time when he challenged my freedom to look at a *Penthouse* magazine that he had sitting there right on this table. Tom pointed to the magazine on his kitchen table, he said, "You Christians, you don't even have the freedom to look at a *Penthouse*." I pointed to the magazine and I said, "And you don't have the freedom to not look at it." I said, "I can look at the cover of that magazine and walk away. You can't." And I remember saying, I mean, he instantly got a grin on his face because he knew that what I said was true. You see, he knew that he didn't have the wherewithal to not look at that magazine. And he hadn't realized it before but he realized it in a sense that he was enslaved to it. And at least he had the honesty to recognize with that grin that what he had been touting as freedom was really a form of slavery. And because I had been freed by God from that sin, I could challenge him instead, asking him who was free and who's not, and I suggested that he didn't have the freedom to walk away from the magazine and I did.

And whether or not it's lust or envy or bitterness or jealousy or gossip or all the other sins that plague us, without Christ we are all helplessly enslaved to sin. And Martin Luther summed it up perfectly. This is what Luther said. He said: "Scripture represents man as one who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick, and dead, but in addition to his other miseries is afflicted, through the agency of Satan his prince, with this misery of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, unfettered, able, well, and alive."

My friend Tom never realized in fact that he was a prisoner. But here's where the prisoner part becomes self-evident. You see, Tom knew where he was, he may have even hated where he was or not, but he also knew that he lacked the will to change where he was. And he also knew what the right thing was because God has embedded into the hearts of every one of us the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. I mean, *Romans 2* says: *The work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.*

So Tom knew the difference between right and wrong, I mean he knew deep down that pornography was a destroyer of relationships, of purity and even of marriages and that the right thing to do was to

avoid it at all costs. But here was his problem. He didn't have the ability to want to do the right thing enough to do it. That made him a prisoner of the law. This is how Paul puts it. He says: *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* You see, as long as we live this law has the power to demand what we cannot supply. So we all wind up doing what we really don't want to do thinking that we're free when we're not. I mean it's only when we die to sin that we experience freedom from sin.

You know, all of this talk of death and burial and resurrection might sound too spiritual to some. Let me make this as practical as I can. I've raised the question about dying to sin this way. I say I lust, I envy, I lie, I gossip, I steal, and then I get baptized with Christ and all of a sudden everything just goes away. Well, actually that's not what happens. See what happens is this: I become born again first. And when that happens God's Holy Spirit begins to live inside me. *Romans 8:9* says: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*

So here's what's happening. First when I'm born again I become

this new temple of God's Holy Spirit and he now begins to change my sinful desires; they literally begin to transform. Well, baptism represents the dying of that old man with those old sinful desires. It means that the law can no longer legally touch you because you died with Christ. It represents the death of the old man that I used to be, the man who was held accountable to God for my sins, the man who's simply awaiting physical death to confirm the spiritual death I'm already under. Baptism represents the death of that man.

Secondly, going under the water, that represents burial. But here's the good news about the death and burial that baptism represents. You see, this is a death that you get to choose. It's a death that you choose to die and it also represents the door to life. Jesus said: *"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* And baptism represents your willingness to lose your old life for Christ's sake and Christ partnering with you in this brand new life.

And when you go under the water, the amazing thing, it's not just you alone going under that water, there's just one person going under that water, there's two. You are there symbolically participating in the death that Jesus died when you go under that water. When you go under that water, you are symbolically saying

when Jesus died, I died with him. And again *Romans 6* says:  
*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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 we're dead, we're dead and we're buried with Christ as we go under the water. Just what does dead to sin mean? I lust, I envy, I lie, I gossip, I steal, I get baptized and it all just goes away? Well, the answer to that question put that way is no. Baptism doesn't do that at all. See, baptism doesn't confer new life because God alone can do that. Baptism simply demonstrates that new life has already taken place. Paul tells us in *Ephesians 2* that *we are all by nature dead in our trespasses and sins*. No matter how hard we tried, we still lusted, envied, lied and did all those other things that God's law had forbidden. We all had hearts that were dead set against the will of God. But baptism is a symbolic way of demonstrating that that person with a heart that was once dead set against the will of God, that person has died.

So first we have death to our old life. Secondly we have burial. We are buried with Christ in our sins. And thirdly there's resurrection. Quote -- *"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."* We are raised and released. In Christ we are now dead to sin. As we come up from the water, we visually demonstrate that truth.

Now again, you know, I've heard this many, many times, some folks mistakenly think that the waters of baptism are designed to cleanse us from sin. That's just not true. They don't have the power to do that. The only power to do that lies in the blood of Jesus Christ. You see, baptism doesn't cleanse us from sin, it is instead a sign that that cleansing has already taken place. Baptism is actually a celebration and a demonstration of a successful heart transplant undertaken by God himself. And that event God makes perfectly clear in Ezekiel 36. You've heard me quote the scripture countless times. What you might not realize is it has a connection to baptism.

*Ezekiel 36:25 says: I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you -- not because of the water. He says -- and I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

You see, when God speaks about burying the old life in baptism and coming out of the water celebrating the newness of life in Christ, he's talking about something far more profound than just simply cleaning my act up. *Colossians 2:13* says: *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.*

What God's talking about is literally dying to one way of living and being re-created to live in a totally new way, of having an ice cold heart of stone surgically removed and a living, breathing heart of flesh surgically implanted. God says: *And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* For all of us that's a brand new way of walking. I mean like Christ, we are now coming out of that water resurrected. You've died and you've been buried under the water representing your death with Christ. As you come out of that water you now represent his glorious resurrection.

As a born again believer you may also now find that your very desires are brand new. They're not the same desires that you had all along. These are desires that are now beginning to line up with God's desires. I mean you start to do what the law used to require but now you do it for the pleasure of doing it. You know,



worship and obedience and giving and singing and praying, these are all things that I could have done quite nicely without, thank you, before Christ came into my life, but now they're unthinkable. I mean we now do those things not because we have to but because we want to. The difference is now our heart of stone has been replaced with a heart of flesh and we freely do now what that law requires.

Jonathan Leeman summed it up beautifully. He sums up the freedom this heart transplant provides. He says this: "Biblical freedom is this a remarkable state in which we want what God wants. How does this happen? How are we set free to want what God wants? At one time God's righteous law imprisoned us, but now, we are free to be 'slaves of righteousness' and Jesus and Paul want to call that 'freedom.' How is that possible? It is possible because of the new covenant. The spirit gives us new hearts. He creates new desires in us so that we desire to love God and love our neighbor which is to fulfill the law."

I'm 74 years old, I mean, for fifty of those years now I've been a new creature in Christ. But I can still remember my first 24 years. I remember that time when I was a prisoner of the law. And I remember hating my life but hating the thought of God even more. I mean, if someone could have ever stopped me back then and

described for me what my future life would be including my likes and my dislikes, I would never have believed them. If someone were to tell me at age 24 that the second half of my life I would be going to church, studying scripture, praying, all of that for the pleasure of worshiping God, if somebody told me that back then, I would have burst out laughing. In fact I'm sure I would have laughed in their face.

See, the newness of life in Christ means a brand new set of appetites that God has placed inside me. And again I need to make a distinction here. If someone said, well, you know, as a grow older maybe you're going to feel the need for God, maybe you're going to feel the need for religion, for church, some kind of order and maybe as a forty- or fifty-year-old man I would have paid some attention to that. I might have seen some positive benefit for my kids, maybe for my family in just in doing the God thing. Perhaps I would have been willing to hear that. I might have even been willing to do the religion thing for its obvious benefits. And make no mistake about it, religion, any religion has its benefits.

Romans 3:10 tells us there's actually nobody who genuinely seeks for God. We know on any given Sunday morning there are hundreds of thousands of churches and synagogues and temples and mosques that are filled with people apparently seeking God. What God says in

reality they're seeking the benefits of seeking God rather than seeking him himself. This is what God says. He says: *As it is written "none is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God."*

No one seeks God on their own; no one. And every religion offers some kind of sense of security, a sense of belonging, a sense of structure, a sense that you're part of something bigger than yourself. It can make it seem very attractive. There's a benefit there that can have nothing to do with seeking God. And lots of contemporary westerners now choose religion like you would any other life-style choice, on the basis of a perceived benefit. God's really got nothing to do with it.

I know for a fact had God not intervened in my life, had he not done a spiritual heart transplant, I, too, would have made that kind of life-style choice. What I never would have believed is someone telling me that I would be worshiping God not for the benefit but for the pleasure of it. If someone had told me even later in life that the joy and the deep satisfaction of a relationship with Jesus Christ would far surpass anything I would have imagined, I would have dismissed that as the rantings of a madman. But that's what the newness of life in Christ is all about. The amazing thing is we start loving what Christ loved; we

start hating what he hated. We start valuing what he values because the Spirit of Christ begins to take up residence in us. Again he tells us: *And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* And all of this is symbolically captured by the simple act of baptism. We are dead in our sins, buried with Christ under the water and then raised with Christ as we come back out of the water.

So to review, we go back to the original three questions. What is baptism? It's nothing more than just plunging something under water. What is the point of baptism? It is a symbolic picture of our death, our burial and our resurrection in Christ. It is not a cleansing from sin but rather a picture of a cleansing that's already taken place through the blood of Christ. And finally we look at question three: Why should I get baptized? Well, there's a real simple answer to that and the simplest answer is because God tells you to.

After Peter's first sermon in Acts, the people are cut to the quick and he flat-out told them that they were responsible for crucifying God in the flesh. This is what he said: *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."* Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of

*the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"*

Here's the whole crowd clearly under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, they asked Peter what do we need to do, and Peter says what? He says: *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* That wasn't a suggestion; that was a command.

Peter in that first sermon was doing exactly what Jesus had commanded him to do, and God clearly was pleased with Peter's approach, I mean, *Acts 2:41* says: *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

In *Acts 10* once again we have Peter, he's speaking to a group of Gentiles who have been gloriously saved; they were in the process of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter tells these believers there's still something else you guys need to do. This is what he said: *While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then*

*Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.*

And again Peter said that because shortly before that day, shortly before Jesus was ascended into heaven he gave them a final parting message, and this is what Jesus said. He said: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all 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 have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Well it's more than 2,000 years later, we are basically repeating the very same process.

And that leads to an even more basic question than the question why be baptized, and that question is why are you here? Why are you here? I mean if you are a member of the kingdom of God then God the Holy Spirit is living inside you, he's uniquely conforming you into the image of Jesus Christ and he's shaping and molding the very appetites that you have and that includes the appetite that has caused you to want to be here in the first place. I've said it many, many times, there's a thousand other places you could be this morning. So again, why are you here? I mean, isn't it because God has placed within you a desire to meet with other believers, to share worship and the word of God, to become part of a chosen,

called-out group of fallen sinners that God has selected and elected to pour his blood, his grace, and his mercy into in order to display his glory? That's what the living body of Christ is. That is what the church is. And that's all part of the newness of life that's represented when we come up out of the water in baptism.

You see, the ceremony of baptism affirms the death, the burial and the resurrection of Christ and my resurrection along with him. Again *Romans 6:4*: *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.*

And understand that newness of life, that's always displayed within the context of the local body of Christ that is within the church. Baptism is oftentimes the very first opportunity to publicly affirm what God has done in our lives while at the same time affirming the church's role as an alternative reality to the reality that's right outside that door.

Baptism also proves that there's no such thing as a lone ranger Christian, and it proves that because nobody can baptize themselves. God designed baptism to be a physical declaration that you are lining yourself up with God's people in his body, so it's

never a private affair. Baptism represents our entry into the kingdom of God while we're here on earth, and as such it's always a public declaration. I mean, even if it's done surreptitiously in persecuting countries it always takes place before witnesses and it tells the world I am publicly declaring my allegiance to Jesus Christ and his church.

Jonathan Leeman sees baptism in athletic terms. And as you are probably familiar with this by now, I always end this message with this analogy and it really has to do with publicly acknowledging what team you are on. As you know, lots of times folks that are coming up for baptism are young men and women, boys and girls, many of whom see it far more plainly in terms of athletics, as Leeman points out.

But the important point that he's trying to say is you have to understand that baptism and conversion are two very different things. At conversion by God's grace, personally and privately we change teams. We leave the kingdom of darkness; we enter the kingdom of light. All things become new. God says: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

So baptism takes place after conversion. Sometimes it's just a



matter of hours, I mean, the Ethiopian eunuch was one, the three thousand that got baptized at Peter's first sermon, sometimes it's a matter of years but the act of getting baptized always takes place after we've switched teams. And athletically speaking baptism says now that we've switched teams, we're going to publicly switch jerseys. Baptism represents a new start with a new team that will go on forever with a new king, King Jesus who gives us life eternal. It is the publicly putting on of a new jersey declaring our loyalty to this team for all time.

This is how Mr. Leeman puts it, he says, when it comes to what baptism represents. He says: "Whether people's decision to swap allegiances comes gradually or quickly, a point comes when they must decide to change their team: 'You've been playing for the red team. You've been thinking about switching to the blue team. What's it going to be, red or blue?'" He says, "Conversion occurs at the moment the decision is made. You leave one team to play with other."

Leeman goes on to say: "Baptism, then is putting on the new jersey." He says, "It's when we publicly identify ourselves, by the church's representative authority, with his death and resurrection. All the thinking and journeying come to a head right there. Through the church, Jesus asks whether we will die to

ourselves and our own rule, be buried with Him, and trust that he will raise us up with Him according to a new power and rule."

Today some of our people are going to publicly enter the water, go under that water and rise up out of it, having obeyed their Lord. And by God's grace and by his mercy they've been led from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. They have already switched teams. And by God's grace through baptism we're going to have the pleasure of watching them this afternoon switch jerseys. Let's pray.

*Father, I just thank you for the whole idea of baptism, what a wonderful, beautiful ceremony it is. What an affirmation of your presence and your power. And Lord for 2,000 years the church has been baptizing as you have commanded. I pray that even now, Lord, if there are those who are sitting there and your spirit is tugging on their hearts saying now is the time, whether it's like the Ethiopian eunuch who wanted instantly to be baptized or whether it's been years, I pray you would touch hearts, I pray that you would bless us, that you would give us the opportunity, that you would hold off the rain so that we can conduct this baptism ceremony this afternoon. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*