

Believer's Baptism

"And now, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised, and wash your sins away, calling on his name." – Acts 22

Before Jesus came preaching 'the good news' and proclaiming that the kingdom was near, the gospels [of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John] record that his coming was announced by a messenger, one John the Baptist. *"Prepare the way of the Lord"*, he proclaimed, *"Clear the road for him."* (Matthew 3:3)

John was a rustic wilderness figure, a wild man clothed in garments made from camel's hair who ate locusts and wild honey. His message was singular and direct: *repent and be baptised; for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*

People flocked from all over to see this enigmatic figure and to hear what he had to say. Those who were stirred in their hearts by his message confessed their sins and were baptised. Their baptism signified the rejection of their former way of living and repentance of their sinfulness.

Many Pharisees and Sadducees* also joined the procession of people coming from Jerusalem, Judea, and all over the Jordan Valley, keen to participate in "the baptism of John the Baptist". Yet they viewed baptism as merely a hip life experience rather than a complete lifestyle change.

John castigated these leaders of the people for their lack of true repentance. *"Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins."*, he proclaimed, without apology.

John the Baptist made it clear when addressing the crowds that a little water meant nothing if they weren't prepared to change their lives. Baptism needed to ignite the kingdom life within a believer, changing a person from the inside out. If anyone wanted to be part of the Kingdom of God that was soon to arrive—that was indeed at their very doorstep—they would

need to be truly born again, dying to their old life and being reborn as a new kind of human.

His words would be echoed years later by James, the brother of Jesus (also called James the Just). He was a leader in the early Christian church in Jerusalem and he would write specifically to Jewish believers on the topic of true, saving faith (of which repentance is a key ingredient). Faith without deeds, James would comment, is dead, and nothing more than a corpse.

Deeds do not save you: the work of salvation was accomplished fully and completely by Jesus on the cross and ratified by his resurrection from the dead. But your trust (faith) in that work is proven by your life of action.

We are made right with God by believing and professing our faith in His promises. Yet, it cannot be real faith, the faith that counts with God, unless it's demonstrated by an active, loving response to God's grace (James 2:17-24).

Repentance—true repentance—involves both a state of the heart and the action of the individual: faith, that is, *trust in God*, worked out in real and tangible ways in every detail of our lives.

Get Up, Be Baptised, And Wash Away Your Sins...

The Book of Acts, which recounts the early days of the first-century church, tells the story of how the great commission of Matthew 28 was outworked, first in Jerusalem, then throughout Judea, in Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth. Jesus had told his disciples, "*Go and make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*"

The same good news that Jesus preached—that through him, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and

reconciling people for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose—was taken and preached by Jesus' disciples to all who would listen. This message was then followed by the directive: "*Repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins.*"

A 'baptism' without the repentance that precedes such an act would be a contradiction—in the words of John the Baptist, a little water means nothing if you aren't prepared to change your life. But 'repentance'—turning to God in faith—without the action that demonstrates that faith is, in the word of James, counterfeit faith, in reality dead and completely useless.

The full meaning of '*believe*' in scripture includes action. The first *act of faith* by a person believing the good news about Jesus is to *be baptised*—a public declaration of a personal conviction.

The Bible knows nothing of baptism without repentance and it also knows nothing of repentance without baptism. They go together and are intrinsically linked. To separate them from each other is to destroy the power and significance of either.

Baptism: Faith Expressed in action

Obedience to Jesus' commands—not just in verbal assent but in practical application—is proof your reorientation is genuine. The first step of obedience, the first *action of faith*, is the decision to be baptised. While the act of baptism doesn't contribute to God's saving work in Jesus, it does prove that your faith in that work is real. The kind of faith that makes us right with God does not remain alone but bears fruit.

Countless references are given throughout Acts and in the pastoral letters and epistles of the New Testament to this life-changing Christian ordinance which became one of the key practices of the early church.

Water baptism, then and now, represents significant truths of the Christian faith, the first of which is the identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus:

1. Paul the Apostle talks about this in his letter to the Romans, where he says that being baptised joins us to Christ and, in doing so, also joins us to his death. We die and are buried, with our old sinful life 'crucified with Christ'. In doing so, we are no longer 'slaves to sin', set free from its power in our lives. And just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too rise from the waters as a 'new creation', made alive in Jesus by the glorious power of the Father. Someone who has been baptised, Paul says, should consider themselves dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. This, alone, is one of the most transformative, joyful, and incredible aspects that water baptism symbolises – the reality that sin no longer has power over us and that we have been set free!
2. While baptism itself doesn't contribute to the saving work accomplished by Jesus, it is God's arrangement for a person to gain a clean conscience based on their faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—an outward demonstration of an inward conversion. It represents a moment of crossing over, of rescue and redemption from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love (Colossians 1:13). Just as the people of Israel were rescued from the darkness of slavery and bondage in Egypt, the finality of which was marked by 'baptism in the Red Sea' (1 Corinthians 10:2), so too a person's rescue by Jesus from the power of sin is marked by baptism in water.
3. Baptism demonstrates the reality of our great

adoption as true sons and daughters of God. And when we are saved by faith, we are also brought into family. Baptism is a sign of joining the family of God, the community of Christ's body. Other metaphors are given throughout scripture to describe the reality of this *belonging*, of the new identity which each person bears; we become citizens of heaven (Ephesians 2:19), we are a stone built into the holy temple of God (1 Peter 2:5), we are a branch, grafted into the great vine that is Jesus (John 15:1-7) and, collectively, we are part of what the Bible calls 'the bride of Christ', [a living, breathing woman of valour.](#)

Believer's Baptism

If repentance forms part of the equation [of baptism] and if belief must be personally affirmed (Romans 10:9), then it would seem that the practice of infant 'baptism' finds no place in the biblical narrative. While I don't personally believe it's 'wrong' or 'unbiblical' to dedicate a child, as part of a family's commitment to Jesus in some kind of ceremonial way, this is not the baptism described by the Bible and we therefore ought not to confuse the two.

Baptism also requires full immersion in water, not merely a sprinkling. The symbolism commented on in Scripture in relation to water baptism, some of which I've touched on above, is compelling. Infant sprinkling is simply not 'baptism', in biblical terms.

The argument is sometimes made that baptism replaces the ancient Jewish custom of circumcision and therefore, just as infants were circumcised, so, too, Christian families can 'baptise' their children as a sign of their covenant with God.

While there are some similarities between circumcision and the ordinance of baptism—and baptism can be seen as ‘the new circumcision’ (as referenced in Colossians 2)—there are also key differences:

Firstly, circumcision required no faith, personal conviction, or agreement by the child. Circumcision was a rite undertaken without a child’s knowledge and without their understanding. Their *belonging* to God’s covenant people was therefore understood within a completely different framework. And while only males were circumcised, both male and female Israelites (and even Gentiles who had undertaken the rite) were taken to be fully included as God’s covenant people (Exodus 12:48-49).

Secondly, baptism forms part of the new covenant, sealed in Jesus’ blood. This new covenant, unlike circumcision, is not exclusive to Jews but, as Peter the Apostle came to learn, is offered to all people. “*In every nation, God accepts those who fear him and do what is right.*” (Acts 10:41). The great commission, which included the directive to baptise those who believed, was intended to encompass “*all the nations*”. *Belonging*, as one of God’s people, would no longer be defined by the rite of circumcision but rather by faith in the saving work of Jesus, demonstrated to be genuine through baptism.

This particular issue caused some angst in the early church, with Jewish believers finding it difficult to accept circumcision was no longer required. This belief—that circumcision was still necessary—formed part of the ‘false gospel’ that Paul the Apostle tackles in Galatians 3 .

Thirdly, baptism is always linked with personal faith. The Book of Acts bears record to the necessary requirement for personal repentance, belief, and confession. There is no single occasion of someone ever undertaking baptism ‘on behalf of someone else’. When we read of ‘whole households and families’ being baptised (Acts 16:15, Acts 16:33), we should therefore infer, from what scripture teaches about baptism,

that this generalisation necessarily excludes infants or very young children. They are not able to repent or believe, a key ingredient in the ordinance of baptism.

A word of caution, though—the gospel is profound and weighty, with far-reaching and transformative implications. As we journey through the Christian life, we uncover deep theological truths worth exploring.

Yet at its heart, the good news is simple—clear enough for a child to grasp. We shouldn't assume that biblical baptism is 'only for adults'. It is for believers, and often, children with their simple, trusting faith are the clearest examples of what a genuine relationship with God looks like.

Salvation is about faith, not intellectual ability. The 'whole households' could certainly have included children, whose faith, repentance, and baptism were equally as valid as their adult counterparts.

Inward Conviction = Outward Change

The baptism that the Bible speaks about involves personal faith and conviction, a reorientation of one's life (repentance), and full immersion in water.

The word *baptism* comes from the original Greek word "**baptizō**" (βαπτίζω), which means "to dip, immerse, or wash." It was used in ancient times to describe submerging something in water, often a cloth being dipped in dye or ceremonial, full body washing.

As with dying cloth or washing the body, some *change* is to be expected by the act of Christian baptism. While it is deeply symbolic, it is also physically and spiritually real. The person who rises from the water isn't just *metaphorically* made new, but is *actually* changed. They are a *new person* in Christ, joined to God's family, a precious stone added to the house that God is building.

Faith that convicts and faith that commits is like the meeting of two atoms. It is the spark that ignites the kingdom fire inside a person, but not to be merely contained within but radiating outwards, shining like the brightness of heaven, leading many to righteousness (Daniel 12:3).

“And now, What Are You Waiting For?”

Are you someone who is convicted in your heart about the message of Jesus Christ? Have you decided to follow him, put your trust in God’s saving work, and reorient your life in his direction? If the answer is yes, *you should be baptised* (Acts 22:16).

Are you someone who was ‘baptised’ as an infant but now understands that faith must be personal, convicting, and demonstrated in action? If the answer is yes, *you should be baptised* (Mark 16:16, Hebrews 11:6).

Are you someone who would define yourself as ‘a Jesus follower’, whether for a little time or a long time, and yet have never been baptised? If the answer is yes, *you should be baptised* (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Call To Obedience: A Faith That Acts

Baptism is not just a symbolic ritual—it is a declaration of faith, a step of obedience, and a testimony to the transforming power of Jesus Christ. Throughout Scripture, we see that true faith is not merely intellectual agreement but a conviction that moves a person to action. Repentance and baptism are inseparable in the biblical narrative, each reinforcing the reality of the other.

The act of baptism does not save, but it reflects the **faith that does**—a faith that turns from sin, trusts in Christ, and commits to walking in His ways. Just as John the Baptist warned against empty religious acts, so too must we ensure

that baptism is not simply a tradition, but an outward expression of an inward reality: a life truly surrendered to Jesus.

So, what are you waiting for? If you have placed your trust in Christ, baptism is the next step—a public witness of your decision to follow Him. Whether you have recently come to faith, were baptised as an infant without personal belief, or have been following Jesus for years but never taken this step, the command remains the same: **“Get up, be baptised, and wash your sins away, calling on His name.”** (Acts 22:16)

***The Pharisees and Sadducees were two influential religious groups in first-century Judaism, often seen in the Gospels opposing Jesus. The Pharisees were a strict, law-keeping sect that emphasised obedience to the Torah (Jewish Law) and the oral traditions of their ancestors. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, angels, and the afterlife (Acts 23:8), making them more aligned with popular Jewish beliefs. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were an elite, priestly group who controlled the Temple in Jerusalem and rejected many of the Pharisaic traditions. They denied the resurrection, angels, and the afterlife, focusing only on the written Law of Moses. Though they were often at odds with each other, both groups resisted Jesus because His teachings challenged their authority, exposed their hypocrisy, and redefined what it meant to truly follow God.**

Before + After

Truth #1: ‘before’

“In the beginning, the earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters.”

In the beginning, there was nothing. A vast, endless emptiness. Deep, restless waters, devoid of life, and overshadowed by a darkness as complete and as final as death itself.

It is over this dim, watery world that the Spirit of God hovered, waiting, moving; poised to begin the work of creation. And it is into this dark world that God said. "let there be light".

This is, of course, how Genesis begins its narrative concerning the creation of the natural world (Genesis 1:1-2). But it's also an apt description of the spiritual reality into which we are all born.

Whether we know it or not, whether we are aware or not, each one of us is part of a creation that was made for a purpose – to walk with and be in relationship with God. Humans were made to be with God, to reflect His character, to glorify him and steward His good creation. And for a time, we did [walk in close companionship with God](#), delighting in His presence.

But that relationship was severed by disobedience and our spiritual connection was lost.

We were cast out of Eden, banished from proximity to the tree of life, into a land whose ground was cursed and whose wages were death. We were exiled to live under the rule of another, one to whom we had given over our allegiance – the prince of this world. His is a dominion of darkness, a realm characterised by sin, evil, and separation from God.

Every single human is born into this dominion. As one author puts it, it is *our misfortune not our crime*. It is not our fault, it is simply our reality. And God has been working hard since that first day of exile to save us, to bring us back, to rescue us from the emptiness into which we're now all born.

This is the first truth we must come to terms with. We are

born into a dying world, a temporal, fallen world that will one day pass away along with everything that's in it, ruler and subject alike. We are helpless and hopeless, separated from our true purpose and disconnected from a life-giving relationship with God.

This is our 'before'.

Truth #2: 'After'

God, who is rich in loving kindness, mercy, generosity and, above all, love, did not leave us to our fate. Hovering over the spiritual darkness of our world, He spoke words of life: 'let there be light' (John 1: 1-14).

Into the darkness, failure, chaos, and ruin of humanity, light shone, a good and healing light which the darkness of this dominion can never extinguish. This is the true light that shines ever more, even unto the perfect day, when all things will be made new (Proverbs 4:18, Revelation 21:5).

That light is Jesus, full of unfailing love and faithfulness, and to all *who* [believe him and accept him](#), he gives the right to become children of God – to be *born again*.

He has come into this dark world to rescue us, to draw us to the Father, to bring us home. He invites every person to follow Him as His disciple, living according to His teachings and sharing His love with others. This invitation is a call to transformation and purpose, and an imperative to acknowledge that he is Lord and Christ, surrendering to his rule (John 10:27, Romans 10:9-10). When we accept his invitation, this is our moment of rescue, an existential exchange of his life for ours, a purchase of our freedom by his blood.

This is our 'after', a second great truth: We are bought with a price, and our lives will never be the same again.

Born Again: Come As You Are, Don't Stay As You Are

In John 3:3 and 5, Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again of water and Spirit."

To be born again, then, is part of the great rescue God enacts on our behalf. But what does it mean, in real terms, to be [born again](#)? What does our life look like 'after'?

Paul the Apostle says that we will live 'as children of light', throwing off our old sinful nature and former way of life and, instead, let the Spirit renew our thoughts and attitudes (Ephesians 5:22-24). Like a fine garment purchased specifically for us, we are to put on our new nature, created to be like God, truly holy and righteous.

The letter to the Ephesians (Chapter 4) then continues on, listing out more 'befores' and 'afters'—a laying down of old ways and a putting on of new habits and choices.

Stop telling lies; instead, be truth-tellers. If you're a thief, quit stealing; use your hands for good, honest work. Watch what you say; use your word for life, not death. Exchange your bitterness, anger, and harsh words for kindness, forgiveness, and a posture of tenderheartedness.

Don't allow sexual immorality, impurity or greed to be present in your life. Be holy. Don't take part in obscene stories or coarse jokes. Have speech seasoned with love and grace. Don't have anything to do with the worthless deeds of evil or darkness, instead, expose them. For once you were full of darkness but now *you have light from the Lord*. (Ephesians 4: 3-14)

"Come as you are", Jesus said. "Come all you who are weary and heavy burdened. Come and lay those burdens down".

Come as you are...but don't stay as you are. "Take *my* yoke upon you, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." (Matthew 11:28-29)

The call to Christian life – the 'after' – is a call to holiness. But that holiness is a work of God's grace as the Holy Spirit empowers the believer to live a life pleasing to God. New Testament holiness is a joyous privilege, not a heavy burden and duty, and it is a burden which Christ carries alongside us. New Testament holiness is a mark of real life, the one that Jesus rose again to give us. It's Jesus living *in and through us.*" | Lance Ralston

To be born again means that everything in our life changes, although not necessarily all at once. Becoming a Christian (a Christ-follower) marks the beginning of a lifelong process of transformation, called **sanctification**, through which believers grow to reflect the character of Christ. It is the start of a journey, not the end.

But is a journey that takes place in the glorious light of the kingdom of God, which will, one day, fill all of heaven and earth. We no longer belong to the world which is passing away, the old dominion of darkness, but instead now belong to God, in restored relationship, as we were always intended.

"There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants." | John 3:18-21