

Responding to Christ: Choose Baptism

April 26, 2009

I'm so glad you are here today. God loves you with an undying love, and He wants you to draw near to Him. May you sense Him speaking to you today through His Word. Because today we are going to consider our response to one of Christ's most powerful commands...

Jesus Christ has given us the greatest gift of all – new life, forgiveness and freedom from sin's consequence and sin's control, and adoption into His forever family! When you realize all that this means for you, your heart is filled with an overwhelming desire to celebrate! And you want to live your life for Him! What does the Lord want you to do? One of the first thing He wants you to do is be baptized. Let me show my hand here at the outset: I'm convinced that the choice to be baptized is so important to your development as a follower of Christ, that I'm going to do everything I can to convince you to choose baptism. Then next week we are going to have a large baptism service filled with folks following Christ in obedience. If you've been thinking, "*I know I should get baptized, but I've waited so long*" or "*I just haven't been able to get up the courage to take that step,*" I want next Sunday to be your day! A great big baptism service – you and lots of others who need to take this step.

If you're a follower of Jesus and you have already been baptized, I hope to encourage you today to continue being a bold witness for Him with your life and voice.

If you are seeking, checking things out, and you haven't yet put your trust in Jesus Christ, invited Him into your life to forgive you and set you free, I would love to have you make that choice today. Let me talk to you first...

There is no more important decision in your life than inviting Jesus Christ to become your Savior and the Lord of your life. Making the choice to accept the gift of new life He offers. God's Word says, "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*" Eph.2:8-9 It's such a simple act of trust even a child can do it, and at the same time, it changes your life. Believing that He's alive, that He hears your prayer, and only He can make you right with Father God, you pray like this, "*Lord, I realize how much I need you so I can be free from the guilt and penalty of my sin. On my own, I cannot get to heaven. Thank You for dying in my place, taking all my sin on Your shoulders, and giving me Your perfect record in my place. I believe you came back to life from the dead after 3 days and that You fully deserve my trust. I surrender my life to You and ask You to lead my life. Thank You for forgiving me and making me part of Your family. Help me to follow You with all my heart, and become the person You want me to be. Amen.*"

When you surrender your life to Christ like that, you begin the most important relationship of your life, with the only Person who is perfect and powerful enough to not only give your life real purpose and significance today, but also then someday to take you to heaven. God's Word says it plainly, "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*" Acts. 4:12. When you decide to give your life to Christ, He wants you to go public. There's a way that He's given every one of us to identify our lives with Him. To let others know that He is the leader of my life. We identify with Him, we go public, when we are baptized. Let's draw a comparison to help make it clearer. The decision to invite Jesus into your life is like the decision to say your wedding vows to your mate. And if that's true, the decision to be baptized is like putting on your wedding ring. Your ring is a symbol of your vows, just like baptism is a symbol of your faith in Jesus Christ. Tuck that away....

So let's begin by answering the question, "**Why should I be baptized?**" On the back of your bulletin are 5 reasons I want to review with you today. **1) To follow the example of Jesus.** Probably the most convincing reason to get baptized is this – Jesus Himself was baptized. Right in the beginning of Mark's gospel we read, "*At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.*" He walked 60 miles to get here! Baptism was so significant to Jesus, that the very first thing He does in His public ministry is to be baptized. Before He turns the water into wine, before He gives the sermon on the mount, before He heals the sick, he is baptized. So when you are baptized, you're following His example. Even if it's been 2 years, 20 years, or 40 years ago since you gave your life to Christ. Why not take the step of baptism next Sunday and follow His example?

2) To have joy knowing you obeyed His command. Baptism is not the invention of any church or denomination; instead, it is a command of Jesus for each of us. In Matthew's gospel, chapter 28, we find Jesus' final instructions to His followers, just before He returns to heaven, He says, "*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...*" And they did just that. Just weeks after the resurrection of Jesus and his ascension to heaven, Peter is preaching to thousands of people about Jesus. And his listeners are overwhelmed. They ask, "What should we do in response to the truth about Christ?" Peter says in Acts 2:38, "*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.*" Baptism followed repentance. When they believed in Jesus Christ and were forgiven, they got baptized. And 3,000 people believe that day and are baptized! That's the pattern throughout the book

of Acts. In Acts 8, it says that as a result of Philip's outreach, "...when they believed...the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." (12)

In fact, a sorcerer, "*Simon himself believed and was baptized.*" (13)

A little later, Philip is led by God to talk with a highly placed government official from Ethiopia. They are traveling as they talk. The official believes the message about Jesus, and right then they were near a body of water, and the official says, "*Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?*" (36). They pull off to the side of the road and he's baptized right there, with his entourage watching.

Then there is the Apostle Paul, formerly known as Saul, at the point of his conversion. One day he's persecuting people who know Christ; the next day, he is confronted and blinded by the risen Christ, and he surrenders his life to Christ. Acts 9 tells us, "*Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized...*" (18)

One chapter later, we read of the Roman military officer, Cornelius. His family and friends all accept the good news of Jesus, and are "...baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." (10:48)

A few chapters later, a wealthy lady named Lydia and her family hear the good news about Jesus, they believe and "...she and the members of her household were baptized..." (16:15)

In that same chapter, we read of the jailer guarding Paul and Silas who are locked up for declaring the good news. He is struck by the example of these two men, believes their message, and gives his life to Christ along with his family, "...then immediately he and all his family were baptized." (33)

Do you see the pattern? After they believed, they were baptized. People from every level of society. White collar and blue collar, religious and non-religious, young and old. It is good news for everyone, and all who believe should be baptized. When you really understand what the good news means for your life, it's like, "OK, so tell me what to do now? Be baptized! I'm on it!" When you realize the amazing gift of forgiveness that's been handed to you, when you realize you can enjoy a meaningful relationship with God your creator, then no step of obedience is too big. Look again at the response of the jailer in Acts 16, "...he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family." (34) It is great to see the responses of people after they have given their lives to Christ and get baptized. They come up out of that water smiling, excited and thanking God. Have you experienced that joy? Many of you are thinking about being baptized. If Jesus was, and he asks every follower to be baptized, then why hold back?

3) To highlight the best decision you ever made. Baptism is the best way to show on the outside what has happened on the inside. Theologians say it this way, *Baptism is an external symbol of an internal reality*. Going under the water identifies me with Christ's death. I bury my old way of living, I've died to it. I'm no longer my own boss. Coming up out of the water identifies with Christ's resurrection. I have new life in Him. He has forgiven me and He's leading my life. He is now my Master, my Leader. As Paul says in Col. 2:12, "...*having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead.*"

4) To make a public commitment of your devotion to the Lord. Once a person admits that he or she is a sinner in need of forgiveness and turns to Christ for salvation, they proclaim the life change that has occurred. Baptism has always been a public statement for people who have made that decision to turn from sin and turn to Christ. We do lot's of weddings here at NMC, and at each ceremony, the couples stare lovingly into each others eyes and boldly make their vows public. We all smile and affirm it and God does to. The same is true of baptism. Remember what happens when Jesus is baptized? Matthew 3:16-17 describes it, "*At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*" Certainly God the Father was pleased with the public commitment of Jesus, God the Son. When a believer gets baptized, we make a public commitment before God and others, that we are devoted to Jesus. We're saying Jesus Christ comes first in my life now! It's huge, and it's a decision only you can make.

5) To demonstrate your humility and desire to be like Jesus. I'm not sure why the Lord ordained baptism as the symbol of our identification with Him, but it does take humility to follow through and actually do it. We get in the water, get dunked by someone else, all the while acknowledging our need for grace and mercy from Father God. It is an act of humility. What's keeping you back from getting baptized? Fear, insecurity, rebellion? Are you hesitating simply because of pride? Because you don't want to get wet, you're self-conscious, afraid of how you might look, afraid of messing up your hair. Or you just can't imagine getting up in front of others... when it's the one thing you need to do! The one thing Jesus is calling you to do! Brother or sister, follow Him! Here is what God promises you:

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." I Peter 5:5

Let me wrap up by addressing some the most frequently asked questions about baptism. I want to remove every excuse I can for those of you on the edge, wondering if you should do this or not.

First FAQ, **When should I be baptized?** How long should you be a believer in Christ before being baptized? Some folks think that you've got to get your entire act together before you can be baptized. They think I've got to be at a certain level before I can take that step. Realize this, baptism is not a sign of having it all together, baptism is a sign of belonging, belonging to God's forever family. Again, consider the progression in the NT. It's the same every time.

"...when they believed...the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." (12)

That's the pattern. They believed and immediately were baptized. It points back to the purpose of baptism, what it signifies. It's all about grace. The only requirement is that we have sincerely repented of our sin and genuinely put our trust in Jesus to make us right with Father God. Let's say you put your trust in Jesus a long time ago, but you were never baptized, either because you didn't know you were supposed to, or you simply put it off. What should you do now? You should go for it! Don't delay again, do it next week!

FAQ 2, **Why be fully immersed?** Simply put, immersion paints the truest picture of dying to sin and being raised to new life with Jesus. Baptism by immersion is a picture of the death and resurrection of Christ, and a picture of what happens to us when we believe. Immersion is also the form described in the NT. Remember how Jesus was baptized, *"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water."* 3:16. Same thing occurred in the book of Acts, *"Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water..."*

Acts 8:38-39 Seems clear that they practiced immersion.

FAQ 3 **If I was baptized as a baby, why be baptized again?** Some parents have their babies baptized as a sign that they want them to be part of God's family, to be in Christ. These parents make that choice because they've been taught that baptism secures a place in heaven for their babies. They have been taught that baptism places the child in God's family. Having been told this, the decision by parents to baptize their infants is certainly coming from a pure motive. But as good as that motive is, infant baptism does nothing to make a child right with Father God, for infant baptism is never taught in the Scriptures. It was merely a tradition designed by men. Now being baptized as an infant doesn't harm you, but neither does it accomplish anything for you in God's eyes. Again, consider the progression given to us in God's Word. Acts 8:13 makes it clear, *"Simon himself believed and was baptized."* See the pattern? First they believed, then they were baptized. And you simply can't believe for someone else, including your kids. It is a personal decision.

Again, think of it like a wedding. A couple looks into each other's eyes, say their vows and then they exchange rings. First comes the commitment, then the symbol of the commitment.

In this sense, your baptism is like an affirmation of your parent's desire when they had you baptized. You are now choosing personally to follow Christ and obey Him by getting baptized by your choice. It's not a repudiation of what happened to you as an infant, it's a confirmation. It's a fulfillment of your parent's desire that you follow Jesus Christ as Lord over your life. Even if your parents don't fully understand the need for another baptism, if you want to follow Christ, then you need to be baptized as a believer, one who has trusted Christ.

FAQ 4 What age should believing kids be baptized? God's Word doesn't address the issue of age. The main thing is the child needs to really comprehend their need for Jesus and they have to understand what it means to commit their life to Him. Do they really know what they are doing? Some children trust Christ at a young age, even 3-4 years old. But having them wait until they have a greater sense of understanding only helps the baptism experience to be all the more memorable and meaningful. Our boys each trusted Christ in early childhood, but we had them wait until they were at least 10, to provide opportunity for their life experience to help them value the baptism experience. We wanted them to understand the nature of public commitment and the cost that comes with following Christ. I heard of a little boy that came up to his Dad after a baptism service and said, "Dad, I want to be hypnotized too!" That young boy needs to wait a little longer to make sure he really gets it. So parents, the older your believing child is, the more meaningful their baptism experience will be for them. Now kids, if you are following Jesus Christ, I want you to talk with your parents about when is the right time for you to be baptized, and if you are 8-12 years old or a teenager, then I would strongly encourage you to stand up for Christ and be baptized next week.

FAQ 5 What are the logistics of my baptism? Do I have to say anything? No, you don't have to share your testimony with us next Sunday, as your baptism itself is a testimony. Many do find it enjoyable to tell their story of faith in Jesus and encourage others with it, so if you want to, you can next Sunday, but if you don't want to, you don't have to. So some will and some won't, it's your preference. I just want you to follow Christ in baptism. In the bulletin you'll find a card, I hope all of you who have not yet followed Christ in baptism will decide today to fill that out, and go back to the table in the lobby in just a few moments to sign up for a brief class this week to prepare you to get baptized. You'll get to see the tank of water, understand what to wear and bring, ask any

questions and be given opportunity to explain how you met Jesus and decided to trust Him with your life. Then next week we can celebrate with you in your baptism.

FAQ 6 Can I follow Jesus without being baptized? I've got to be honest – that question has always puzzled me. Baptism is the first thing He asks me to do. It's the first thing He did... He just asks us to follow Him. And so it mystifies me that we would ask a question like this of the One who died on the cross for us. If you are physically able, why wouldn't we follow Jesus? And if you are in a wheelchair, let's talk about how we can baptize you. If you are genuinely asking this question, then let I John 5:3 push you forward, *"This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome."* If you love Him – what will you do? And if you refuse, what does that say about the condition of your heart? Why are you holding back from your Savior? Imagine a groom telling his bride, *"Honey, I'm willing to say our vows at the wedding, but I really don't want to put that ring on. It's a little embarrassing to have to wear it all the time... what do you say we get married, but I skip the wedding ring?"* What would you tell that guy? What does this say about his commitment to his bride?

You know, I wonder if that's the way Jesus feels when we say, *"Lord, I want to follow You, but can we leave the baptism thing alone? I mean, it's a little embarrassing to stand in front of all those people, get wet and everything. I've made my commitment to You. I said "I do." Isn't that enough? Can't we skip the baptism? Can't I skip wearing the ring?"*

Are you ready to say Yes to Jesus and be baptized? He's waiting for you! Your next step is to fill out that card, and stop by the table in the lobby to sign up for a brief preparation class this week. I would love for God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit to be honored next Sunday by you getting baptized. How this will thrill the heart of God when you respond in obedience! And when you do get baptized, it will encourage your faith like nothing else can – just ask someone who has done it!

Respond today and join the many others who are making that same decision to publicly demonstrate their faith in Jesus Christ. You'll be glad you did! Let's talk to God together.....