

1 Peter 3:8-22

“The Baptism that Saves” (verses 21-22)

Genesis 6

What I would like to do today is focus on this image of salvation that Peter uses.

Peter says that eight persons—Noah and his family--
were saved through water in the Flood.

And then he says that baptism corresponds to the flood!

Have you ever thought about this?

In Reformed circles

we tend to focus on the relationship between baptism and circumcision--
to the exclusion of other images of baptism.

Baptists tend to focus on the image of being buried with Christ.

But who focuses on the Flood?

Actually, this was a common theme in the early church,
and it was incorporated into the early Lutheran and Reformed baptismal services,
but it has tended to drop out.

In recent years, Meredith Kline and others have resurrected the image.

What are the images of baptism used in the NT?

1) In the gospels, we see John preaching a baptism of repentance.

He proclaims that the day of God’s salvation is at hand,
and that his baptism with water is pointing to the baptism with the Spirit and fire
that the Messiah is about to bring.

This echoes the language of Ezekiel 36 where God promised
that when he restored his people,

he would sprinkle them with clean water,
give them new hearts,
and place his Spirit upon them.

Jesus own baptism is a baptism with water and the Spirit, as the Spirit comes upon him.

This theme is continued in the book of Acts, where in 2:28

Peter declares that those who desire salvation
must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ
for the forgiveness of sins,
and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Again, the theme of spiritual cleansing is central.

This is the dominant theme in the several baptisms reported in Acts,

coming to its climax in 22:16 where Ananias says to Saul of Tarsus,
“Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

2) A second, related image of baptism is found in Hebrews 9-10.

As Christ is set forth as the great high priest who has removed our sin,
the author then says that we are priests with him.

We may enter the Holy of Holies in Christ.

And therefore he uses the language of the priestly washings to describe us:

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,
with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience
and our bodies washed with clean water.” (10:22)

The high priest in the OT had to wash with water,
and be sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice
in order to enter the Holy of Holies.

Hebrews is saying that this is what we have received.

We have been consecrated as priests through our baptism,
so that we might approach the Holy of Holies in Christ.

3) A third image of baptism is found in Romans 6.

Here Paul uses the language of union with Christ—of burial with him,
as the key to understanding baptism.

“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death”

Baptism, here, is portrayed not as cleansing,
but as entrance into death.

Baptism is an outward picture of an inward reality.

(Incidentally, the insistence upon immersion misses the image of Jewish burial—they did not bury in the ground, but in caves. The image of burial is the image of insertion into the earth, not going down under the earth)

Baptism, therefore, is a sharing in the judgment of Christ.

It is a union with him in his death.

Through baptism we partake of his death so that we might also partake of his life.

It is this image which then draws on several OT examples:

1) Colossians 2:11-12 uses the example of circumcision.

Circumcision, after all, was the cutting off of the flesh,
an image of the snipping away of the old man.

And so Paul says that just as Christ was circumcised on the cross,
so now you have been circumcised through baptism.

2) 1 Cor 10:1-2 uses the example of the Red Sea

as Paul speaks of Israel being baptized into Moses, in the cloud and the sea.

3) and here in 1 Peter 3, Peter speaks of the Flood as a type of baptism,
in the context of sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

These three OT images combine the aspect of cleansing—purification,
with the image of sharing in judgment.

So let's look at how Peter understands baptism.

There is some language here that may take some explanation.

Peter says that baptism now saves you.

Are you willing to say that you are saved by your baptism?

Notice the qualification that Peter makes:

“Not as a removal of dirt from the body
but as an appeal to God for a good conscience,
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”

So it should be clear that Peter is NOT saying that just getting wet saves you.

Simply getting water splashed on you doesn't save you.

If that's all it takes, I'd go driving through Hillsdale,

yelling, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”
as I heaved water balloons at everyone!

No, for Peter, baptism is more than just getting wet.

Baptism includes water—but it is more than water.

And for baptism to save you, there must be something more!

What is that?

The ESV and NAS translate this “an appeal to God for a good conscience”

The NIV says “the pledge of a good conscience to God”

And the NKJV says “the answer of a good conscience toward God”

I said at the beginning of this series that the ESV

was the only translation that got the first verse right.

Well, here, the ESV doesn't do so well.

Pledge? answer? appeal?

The greek word ἐπερωτημα,

could be properly translated by any of these.

Appeal, pledge, answer—that is the range of meaning here.

The problem with the ESV and the NAS

is that they make it sound like you are asking God for a good conscience.

But that is NOT what Peter is saying.

After all, that makes no sense.

Baptism saves you because you're asking God for a clear conscience?

This would seem to imply that baptism is where you ask God for salvation!

No, baptism saves you because in baptism you have the pledge of a good conscience toward God

OR, baptism saves you because in baptism

you have the answer of a good conscience before God.

You, like Noah and his family,

have passed through the waters of judgment,

and God has proclaimed you not guilty!

The NAS and ESV translation only works if you understand baptism as a trial by ordeal.

Do you understand the concept of trial by ordeal?

This was used in the OT at times—the accused is given a test,
 If you pass the test, then you are declared not guilty.
 If you fail the test, then you are declared guilty.
 The whole earth was given a trial by ordeal in the Flood.
 Only Noah and his family survived the ordeal—
 and that was because Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.
 God graciously gave them the means to survive the ordeal.
 Baptism is a trial by ordeal.
 Baptism, after all, is an echo of the flood.
 God destroyed the whole world by water.
 And indeed, John promised that Jesus will baptize the world with the Spirit and with fire.
 Jesus said in Luke 12:49-51—
 “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled.
 I have a baptism to be baptized with,
 and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!
 Do you think that I have come to give peace to the earth?
 No, I tell you, but rather division.”
 The Spirit and fire baptism that Christ brings is a trial by ordeal.
 Jesus received the Spirit in his baptism at the Jordan,
 And he received the fiery baptism in his death on the cross.
 At Pentecost the Spirit and fire were poured out upon his church.
 And it is this baptism which Peter promised on the day of Pentecost,
 to all who repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
 You see, we still await that fiery baptism that will consume all of God’s enemies.
 But one day God will pour out his wrath on the earth.
 He will send his Spirit in a judgment of fire that will destroy the wicked.
 How will you avoid that wrath?
 How will you survive that trial by ordeal?
 The same way Noah did.
 The same waters that destroyed the wicked saved Noah.
 The same waters that destroyed Pharaoh’s army saved the Israelites.
 Even so, the same Spirit and fire baptism that destroyed the power of sin, death and the devil,
 saved Jesus.
 Our righteous savior endured his fiery baptism on the cross,
 as the Father poured out his wrath and judgment,
 sustained and empowered by the Spirit of holiness
 who had been given to him at the Jordan River.
 This is how baptism saves you.
 It saves you because in baptism you have the pledge of a good conscience toward God.
 Notice how this pledge or appeal works.
 It is not through anything you have done.
 It is because baptism is God’s work.
 In Peter’s words, baptism saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

It is because he has passed the fiery ordeal that baptism saves us.
Your conscience has been cleansed because you have been inserted into Christ,
and therefore in your baptism
you have the pledge of a clean conscience toward God.
So when you are baptized, as the waters of judgment fall upon you,
as the Holy Spirit and fire are poured out upon you,
you endure the judgment through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
Because HE has been vindicated,
you who belong to him are vindicated as well.
Because HE has gone to the right hand of the Father,
with angels, authorities and powers having been subjected to him,
therefore you need not fear the powers that are arrayed against you!

Let me add a caveat.

What does this mean for the apostate?

What does this mean for those who are baptized,
but who reject the gospel of Christ?

Well, perhaps now the words of Hebrews 10 make more sense:

10:26-31 (in the context of baptism!)

6:4-9

Those who reject their baptism have no pledge of a good conscience before God.

They are crucifying Christ over again–

and how can they now stand in the day of judgment?

Yes, baptism is a great blessing.

It is a means of grace whereby we are united to Christ and his church,

It is the means God has promised to use to forgive our sins

and seal us with the promised Holy Spirit. (Acts 2)

But there is nothing automatic about baptism.

The Baptists are right to say that Baptism and faith are inseparable.

Without faith you will not survive the ordeal of baptism.

But that was equally true of circumcision.

Israel could not please God apart from faith any more than we can!

Peter says,

“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh,

arm yourselves with the same way of thinking,

for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh

no longer for human passions but for the will of God.” (4:1-2)

Because we have endured the ordeal of baptism into Christ’s death,

we should not be surprised when we share the fiery trial of Christ’s sufferings (v12-13)

But we may take comfort that these sufferings are given to us to purify us.

For the one who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

Suffering is to detach you from your idolatries.
It is to show you the futility of all human passions,
and the beauty of the will of God.
And Peter says that your baptism is to point you down this road.
Let us walk patiently together in this way!