

Introduction

As you know, we are having a baptism today. Kaoru Fukumoto is going to receive Christian baptism; she is going to “be baptized.” Therefore, I would like to speak on the NT doctrine of baptism by directing your attention to Acts 2:38-39.

Our passage is part of Peter's first sermon of the Christian era that he preached on the day of Pentecost after the crucifixion of Jesus, His resurrection, and His ascension. The disciples waited in Jerusalem according to the command of Christ and His promise of the baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). When the day of Pentecost came, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to declare "the wonders of God" (2:11) to the people gathered for the feast from many countries (2.5, “from every nation under heaven”). Then Peter stood up and addressed the crowd and preached the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (2:22-24):

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

He concluded with a contrast between their sin and the exaltation of Christ, **Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified** (2:36). The people were devastated (2:37, cut to the heart they asked, "**What shall we do?**"). That was when Peter gave them the imperative of baptism:

And Peter said to them, "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.³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2.38-39).

This text gives us an initial and basic understanding of Christian baptism at the very beginning of the NT church. My title for this sermon is "God's Voice and Ours in Baptism." Accordingly, I have two main points: God's voice in baptism and our voice in baptism.

1A. God's voice in baptism (in two parts in verses 38 & 39)

In these verses, Peter proclaims and explains God's voice in baptism as a promise.

1B. Peter proclaims God's promise (v.38)

Through the sign of baptism, God promises the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is striking language; it makes you wonder about the relationship of baptism, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit (baptized...for the forgiveness of sins...and the gift of the Holy Spirit). Thus, we need to clearly state that baptism does not save us. The water of baptism does not wash away our sins. Then what is baptism?

1) Baptism *is an expression and symbol of the means through which God saves us: salvation is by repentance* by turning away from ourselves (and our own will) to Christ to do His will. Thus, a parallel is “believe and be saved” (Acts 16.31). God saves through repentance and faith like two sides of the same coin. Receiving baptism is an act of obedience, it is the obedience of faith (cf. Rom. 1.5; 16.26), and it is a turning to do the will of God in a simple command: “be baptized.” Therefore, baptism does not save us but it is an expression and symbol of repentance, which is the means by which God grants forgiveness and gives the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Before we leave this point, we should make note of the relationship between forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness is one slice of a whole pie of blessings. The Spirit applies all the blessings secured by Christ in His death and resurrection. To speak of the gift of the Spirit is to speak of all the blessings of salvation and forgiveness is one of those blessings.

It may be simple but it is very important because of God's command that lies behind Peter's imperative (cf. the Great Commission, Mat. 28.19-20).

2) Baptism is an indirect form of speech. It is God's word in an illustration. Think about a speed limit sign on the highway. Who is speaking through this sign? Is the worker who put the sign in place speaking? Is he telling us how fast we can drive? No, the state is speaking. Likewise, the speaking in baptism is not that of the worker, the church, or minister, not ultimately.

Indeed, God is speaking and He is saying something to this effect, "I cleanse sinners, I put their sins as far away as the east is from the west, I pardon the sin debt they could never pay, and I cancel the punishment because of the sacrifice of Christ. I give sinners the gift of the Holy Spirit *who applies all of the saving mercies secured by Christ* in His death and resurrection."

3) Baptism is an oath added to a promise. We already have the promise of the gospel in the Bible. Then God adds this additional word in symbol. It is not because His word in Scripture is weak but it is because our faith is weak and needs this encouragement and reassurance. Hebrews 6 gives us a helpful parallel, **"because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged"** (Heb. 6.17-18).

It is like saying that God adds His oath of baptism to His promise of the gospel to make the point plain and emphatic so that we may firmly believe that we belong to that covenant that stands as a rock. Thus, it is not only a sign, but also a seal that sustains and confirms our faith.

2B. Peter explains God's promise (v. 39)

a) The promise is universal

"The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off." Even though these Jews had crucified Christ the Lord of glory, they still have the gospel-promise to repentance and faith. Even though they called out for the crucifixion of Jesus saying, **"His blood be on us and on our children"** (Mat. 27.25), their children have the gospel-promise to repentance and faith. Even though the Gentiles participated in the crucifixion of Christ (Acts 2.23), the nations have the gospel-promise to repentance and faith. Now the gospel goes out to the nations, to those afar off. To be baptizing a Japanese person this morning is, therefore, a work of Christ as Savior of the nations (remember, He baptizes through His ministers; He is building His church over the centuries and across the world).

b) The promise is effectual

As the gospel goes out to the house of Israel and to those afar off, it takes hold of sinners by the special call of God. There is a general call that goes to everyone everywhere through preaching and witnessing. In the context of the general call of the church, God calls people of every nation to Himself (cf. 2 Thess. 2.14). *All who hear this special call obey it*; this is the call mentioned in Romans 8: God calls, justifies, and glorifies those He loved with electing love (vs. 29-30).

Therefore, the Lord is saying, "I give the forgiveness of sins and all the blessings of salvation by the Holy Spirit through the gift of repentance and faith that I give by calling them to myself."

We are *saved by repentance* but more accurately, we are *saved by grace through repentance*. More accurately still we should say, "We are *saved by Jesus Christ the risen Lord by grace through repentance that He gives by His effectual call*."

God's voice in baptism is a clear and firm word of comfort and assurance from the Father in heaven. It is a sure word of sovereign grace in the saving of undeserving sinners.

2A. Our Voice in Baptism

The subjective side of baptism relates to what we say. It is truly a response. Baptism is a new covenant sign. By it, God makes covenant with us and by it, we make covenant with God.

1) The new Christian raises his or her voice *in repentance*.

Repent and be baptized. Baptism is the first fruit of repentance in that it involves turning away from our own will to do His will, to obey His command and receive baptism. Accordingly, we come to baptism confessing our sins and saying that we need cleansing by the work of Christ (cf. Mat. 3.6). One of the questions I asked Kaoru was “Why do you want to be baptized?” She thought about it for a bit and then said, “I want to realize my sin.” It did not take long for me to get the point she was saying, “I want to acknowledge my sin.” That is part of what is happening here. God is saying that He cleanses sinners and Kaoru is saying that she acknowledges her sins and her need of God’s cleansing.” Thus, in baptism, Kaoru, you are committing yourself to Christ as your priest and intercessor in between you and the judge of heaven and earth.

2) The new Christian raises his or her voice *of discipleship*

Peter gave the imperative in the name of Jesus Christ so those who receive it receive it in His name and under His authority (Acts 2.38). Baptism is *into the name* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mat. 28.19-20). It is therefore a commitment of discipleship under the authority of the triune God. In baptism, we covenant to learn of Christ in submission to His authority. It is a commitment of yourself, Kaoru, to Christ as your prophet or teacher.

3) The new Christian raises his or her voice *for obedience*

Coming under the authority of the triune God to learn has the specific goal of learning how to live according to all that Jesus commanded (Mat. 28.20). Submission to the authority of Christ is for obedience to Christ as your king, Kaoru.

Peter tells us that it is a pledge we make of a good conscience (1 Pet. 3.21, NIV, **the pledge of a good conscience toward God**), which is a pledge of *good behavior* (3.16) or good deeds guided by His law (cf. 2.12 with Mat. 5-16-17). We come in baptism to confess our sins and to commit ourselves to the obedience of faith that we may live under the authority of Christ as our prophet, priest and king.

In baptism, we hear the voice of God expressing covenant love, and in baptism, we raise our voices in gratitude for covenant obedience.

Conclusion (two questions just before we baptize Kaoru)

1) So why do we bother with baptism?

Why do we bother with this mundane ritual since it seems so earthy, so physical, and so simple?

We bother because our King commands it.

We bother because by means of this ritual as an act of God we are comforted. Through this means, God assures us that though we deserve His wrath for our sin He abounds with forgiving love. He has said **"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" so that we may confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid"** (Heb. 13:5-6). He tells us by this visual aid of baptism that He cleanses us to such an extent that no one can lay any charge at our feet that will stick. We know that we have sinned. Nevertheless, He washes away our sin by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit who applies the saving work of Christ. "My sin O the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul."

We bother because our king commands it, we need it, by it God comforts us, and by this means God strengthens our faith.

2) Why do we practice baptism in the church gathering?

It is a word to Karou *and it is a word to the church family*.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, listen to the voice of God in baptism. It is a word from your Father condescending to make this point emphatically clear: “I love you my lambs. Therefore, by the work of Christ, I have washed you and cleansed you of your sins and I will wash and cleanse you all the way to glory!”

Hearing God's promise calls for a response, for covenant renewal. As you observe and listen to God's voice in sign and seal, look to God and say something like this, "I renew my baptismal vow and pledge; I will plunder the storehouse of the kingdom for righteousness! I look to the risen Lord Jesus Christ as my prophet, priest, and king. I cling to Him. I determine to learn from Him, and I submit myself to His law." In prayer we each say, "O Lord Jesus, I give myself away to you, I entrust myself to you, and I will serve you as my king."

Baptism calls us to live a clean, righteous, and holy life by the grace of God. It calls us to ground ourselves continually in the Word of God *for walking in newness of life*. In baptism, we have both God's voice and ours.

He by Himself hath sworn,
 this is His sacrament
 By grace set free for liberty
 by His cov'n ant
 In baptism now I turn
 my life in sovereign hands
 to serve my king forevermore
 by His commands

Baptismal questions

1. _____, do you acknowledge that you have done wrong, that you have sinned and that you need God's forgiveness?
2. Do you understand that baptism does not save you but that it is a gospel sign, a word from God testifying to you that by faith in Christ, you are cleansed of your sins?
3. Do you believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and do you commit yourself to the Risen Lord Jesus, to learn from Him as your prophet, priest, and king?
4. Do you believe that the Bible is the word of God, the word of Jesus your king?
5. Based on God's word in this sign and seal, do you pledge, *by the grace of God*, to live all your days on this earth under the authority and commandments of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

Based on the acknowledgment of your sins and your confession of faith in Christ the risen Lord, and because of the command of God, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.