

## Baptism

There are seven sections in this lesson plan

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### 1. BAPTISM AS A RITE OF PASSAGE

A rite of passage is a ceremony and it marks the transition from one phase of life to another. Examples of rites of passages in human culture are for example the Masai Lion Hunt, where the Masai people of Tanzania and Kenya have a rite of passage in which their adolescents move into adulthood and prove themselves worthy of being warriors by killing a lion. This is an ancient rite of passage. Similarly, the Hamar Tribe of Ethiopia have a rite of passage in which their men are whipped on their backs and then made to run over the backs of 4 castrated bulls before they are declared to be man eligible to be married. In the same way, Baptism is the Christian rite of passage that symbolises the passing of the old life replaced by a new spiritual life in Christ.

Let's understand some of the terminology before we proceed. There are two commonly used terms for the rite of baptism

- Sacraments
- Ordinances

**SACRAMENT:** Firstly, the word 'sacrament'. This is used by Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and a few of the Protestant denominations. It is a sign which results in grace being conferred by God to a person. These sacraments are necessary for salvation. These sacraments are the vehicles of grace which they convey. As a Baptist church we do not believe in that because grace by definition is given freely by God and not conveyed by any ritual. The ritual of foot washing which is practiced in Catholic churches, arose from what John 13 records of what Jesus did, that he washed the feet of his disciples to symbolize their cleansing of sin from His anticipated death on the cross. Jesus washed the feet of Judas, his impending betrayer. If washing of the feet of the disciples was natural ritual or sacrament that conveyed grace, was Judas saved. The answer was 'no'. Judas went ahead and betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver and killed himself. This ritual did not convey grace nor salvation to Judas, even though it was Jesus himself who had been the one washing his feet.

The proper approach to baptism is that it is not a sacrament, it doesn't convey grace to provide salvation but it is an ordinance.

**ORDINANCE:** It is used by Protestant denominations. It is a symbolic re-enactment of the gospel message that Christ lived, died, was raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, and will someday return. The ordinance are visual aids to help us better understand and appreciate what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross. There are two ordinances clearly prescribed in the Bible and they are the Lord's Supper and Baptism

## 2. CONFIRMATION OF SALVATION

How do we believe in Jesus? What are the steps that we should take?

We have to receive Jesus by faith.

STEP 1: We let go of our old life of sin, we repent. We make Jesus as our Lord.

So we ask God to forgive us of our sins, we repent. Repentance is a decision, changing your mind and direction of your life. Instead of living to please ourselves with the sin, we now believe and make Jesus Christ our Lord that we live to please God. Hence in baptism, when we immerse into the waters of baptism, this process is visual enactment of our internal decision of repentance. When we enter the waters we symbolically die ...to our old life.

STEP 2: Believing in Jesus

This is trusting in who He is and what he has done for us. It involves three things:

1. We believe that Jesus is son of God.
2. We believe that he is our substitute for our sins.
3. We believe that he rose from the dead.

STEP 3: Lifelong process of following Jesus. Living like him and for him.

Which means Jesus becomes our Lord and purpose of our lives. We live to please and love Him. Our lives are liberated from self and we live to serve others in the power of His love and Holy Spirit. When we rise out of the waters, this process symbolises our rising to live a new life. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, this act anticipates our own resurrection.

There is no difference between Christians and disciples, all Christians are disciples.

### How do we continue as disciples?

It is the second letter of Paul to the Corinthian church,

*(2 Cor 3: 18) And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another*

Paul says, that as we look or behold and appreciate God's glory, we will then be transformed gradually into his likeness from one degree of glory to another. A simple analogy is like insects being drawn by the light. We are instead drawn by the light of Jesus Christ to be transformed.

Before we were Christians we were drawn to so many things in our old life. They are like stars, that sparkle at the night, we continually look at them and we are mesmerized. But when the Sun comes up we do not see the stars anymore because we are overwhelmed by the light of the Sun. Knowing and worshipping and loving Him by the Word and living by faith will transform us.

Discipleship is discovering the value of Jesus and acting on it

*Matthew 13:45-46 (ESV) Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

Discipleship is discovering the beauty and value of Jesus and acting on it.

### 3. CRITERIA FOR BAPTISM

This idea is very simple. In Acts chapter 8 there is a familiar passage which tells of an Ethiopian eunuch who is travelling up to Jerusalem in his chariot. Philip evangelist encountered him, shared with him the gospel in explaining Isaiah to him. The Ethiopian eunuch came to faith and asked if he could be baptized.

*37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.*

So the only criteria is a genuine belief that Jesus is son of God, giving life to him as Lord and savior. In Acts 16:31-33, the Philippian jailor, the one who put Paul into prison wanted to believe in Jesus and be baptized

*31 They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. 33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. Acts 16:31-33*

So the baptism is actually immediate and the basis of his faith. So the criteria for baptism is faith.

### 4. REASON FOR BAPTISM

There are only three basis reasons for baptism.

1. An obedience to command of God to be baptized
2. It is an expression of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
3. It is a witness to the world.

The most important reason for undergoing baptism is basically obedience to the Lord Jesus as He gave this command to his disciples just before He left making it particularly significant. (Matthew 28:19-20 ESV)

*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, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*

This was not an optional extra for the church to consider if and when it was convenient. The making of disciples in all nations includes baptism as part and parcel of the whole process. Being a disciple is being baptised as well.

The second reason why we get baptized is because of faith. Baptism is the outward expression of our inward love and faith in Jesus Christ. When it is performed it actually really strengthens our faith.

### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND ACTION

To our outward actions, mirror our inward faith. We cannot see faith inside our hearts but we can see the outward demonstration of that faith. Baptism demonstrates that faith and in the same process acts to strengthen it.

Consider the mother who says "I kiss my daughter in order to love her as well as because I love her". Here is one outward action. On one hand, the outward action expresses her inward love for her daughter and at the same time the same action also is a manner in which she loves her daughter.

Consider a man who is walking with his daughter because he loves her. Halfway, he suddenly hugs his daughter, which is also an expression of love; both walking and hugging are different expressions of love.

The third reason for baptism is that it is a witness to the world. Baptism gives us an opportunity to demonstrate as a witness to our friends and family of what God has done for us in our lives. Baptism is also a process where we demonstrate our incorporation in to God's body, the church.

Baptism is a personal declaration of intent. It is a witness of our decision to follow Christ.

## 5. MEANING OF THE SYMBOLS OF BAPTISM

It unites us personally to Christ's death and resurrection spiritually. To understand baptism, we need to understand the concept of symbolism.

There is a definition by Paul Tillich, 'While a sign bears no necessary relation to that to which it points, the symbol participates in the reality of that for which it stands for'

A sign is made up of a whole line of letters which do not illustrate what new or old life really looks like. A symbol warns of something, the picture can be of anything, which the sign is warning of. The symbol participates in the reality for which it stands for.

So baptism utilizes water, water is a symbol of death from judgment, life and cleansing.

In Jewish culture the sea is the realm of chaos and death. Creation is a transition from chaos to order. In Genesis chapter 6, in Jewish history God sent the flood and destroyed man. God saved Noah by arranging for him an ark which saved his whole family as the ark was floated by the water. So the water does two things, it can cause judgment and death but it can also save you.

In the book of Exodus, God saved the people of Israel by parting the Red Sea. They were saved through the waters. At the same time, the waters are also symbol for judgment and death because God punished the Egyptian soldiers by the same Red sea as the waters closed over them. So on one hand, it is the symbol of life and on the other hand of judgment.

In the Old Testament water is a symbol of cleansing. In the Temple, there was a prerequisite for coming in to presence of Holy God and it was cleansing and symbolised our sinfulness and the need to be cleansed and water was the agent of cleansing.

This is the prophecy of Ezekiel talking about the New Covenant that we require cleansing prior to the Holy Spirit entering our lives.

*(Ezekiel 36:25-27 ESV) "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. 26 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. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules"*

This is a prophesy of Ezekiel saying that God will cleanse us before putting his spirit within us to transform our hearts. As Christians, we are now the Temple of God and for His Holy Spirit to come into our hearts we too must be cleansed of our sins and water is the symbol for that. The cross cleanses us from our sin and the water symbolises that.

Finally, we look at Romans,

*(Romans 6:3-4 ESV) "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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"*

In baptism when we are immersed we re-enact our union with Him, we die with Christ to our old life and our sins and when we rise out of the water we re-enact our future anticipated resurrection.

So baptism is a declaration of a decision. One decision but two actions.

1. Immersion into the waters. It is like dying with him. We repent, we acknowledge our sin and renouncing them. There is an identification with His Death as our substitute for our lives.
2. Faith of cleansing of our sins through his death.  
Ananias spoke to Paul  
*"And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name"* (Acts 22:16 ESV)
3. Coming out of the water symbolizes rising our with him.

*For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Romans 6:5 ESV)*

So when we rise up from the water we proclaim that just as Christ rose from the dead, we too arising from the water of death we shall rise with him.

Paul writes,

*...having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead (Colossians 2:12 ESV)*

Our emergence from the water symbolizes our faith and hope in our own resurrection. When we are baptized, the process of baptism also symbolizes our incorporation into body, the church. Just like the police uniform gives identity to police, baptism functions in providing identity for us. In the Old Testament circumcision was the identity of the Jewish people. All the chosen people of God were circumcised. It was mandatory, it symbolized their incorporation into the people of God. It symbolized their participation into a covenant or promise that they would be faithful to God as His people and He would be faithful to them as their God. So baptism in the New Testament functions like the circumcision of the Old Testament

*In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead (Colossians 2:11-12 ESV)*

In the New Testament all of the chosen people of God were also circumcised but the new symbol was not cutting off of the foreskin or the flesh, it was baptism. That's why it is said baptism without hand. Baptism incorporates the person as God's chosen people in a promise relationship with Him. Baptism incorporates us into a new people.

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:27-28 ESV)*

So all the distinctions between people whether they are Jew or Greek or slave or free or male or female, they are all rubbed out. We are all with baptism incorporated as a new people with one identity.

### **We are baptized into one community.**

*1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

Baptism symbolises the Holy Spirit coming into our lives

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13 ESV)*

So we have a unity of the Holy Spirit coming into our lives and baptism symbolizes that. The Holy Spirit makes us one body.

### **7. OTHER ISSUES**

Does baptism save me. Let's get back to the analogy of the Masai tribe. What makes a Masai man. Is the Masai a man because he killed the lion or that the killing of the lion just symbolised he is a man. If he did not kill the lion would he still not be a man?

Here is an example of Jesus hanging on the cross with two other thieves, one of them actually believed in Jesus and repented. This is Jesus promise to him in Luke

*Luke 23:43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*

So he is promised heaven without baptism. So baptism cannot save you. It is just an outward sign of an inward faith.

### **What if the person is very sick and cannot be immersed into the water?**

The best symbol of baptism is immersion. However, if a person is ill and unable to immerse sprinkling will do the job.

## THE CEREMONY

STEP 1: The first step once you are in the pool is the declaration. These are the three questions that will be posed:

- Do you ..... admit that you are a sinner and renounce your old life of sin and accept Jesus death on the cross as payment for your sins. Your answer should be 'I do'.
- Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and promise to love Him with all your heart, with your soul and all your might and promise to follow Him for the rest of your life as your Lord forsaking all other idols. Again your answer is 'I do'.
- Do you believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and lives today at the right hand of the Father and that you too will be raised to eternal life. The answer is 'I do'.

STEP 2: Once the three questions are answered for declaration, step 2 is that the leader will then immerse you into the water and say, I hereby baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

STEP 3: As the baptizer will lift you up again, rising up is a symbol of us rising up to live a new life in Christ in anticipation of our future resurrection.