

# Baptism

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 09 August 2020

Preacher: Anthony Parrott

[ 0 : 00 ] Hi, Table Church. My name is Anthony Parrott. I'm the lead pastor here, and we're starting a new series today called Rebuilding a Broken Faith. And we'll be spending the next few weeks talking about all the things that are broken about our faith and how we can move forward. Because listen, we all come from some form of brokenness. I know many of us come from some form of a broken family.

I know I do. I was through the foster system. I've been adopted. I know many of us, we've been children of divorce, or we've been through divorce ourselves, or we've lost relationship with parents and siblings and cousins and loved ones. We know what it is to be broken in our families. We know what it is to be broken in our churches. I've been part of churches that have been broken. We've experienced pastors and people like me who do really cringy, awful, just terrible things. And that breaks the churches. And I know that we are people that often experience a broken faith, where we have experienced pain and heartache. And we wonder where God is and why God didn't show up and why God didn't answer our prayers. We've experienced the hurt and the heartache when we've been rejected from the church and rejected from the places where we felt we were going to get belonging and safety and love because we didn't fit in, because we were in some way not part of the norm. And so our faith was broken. And of course it is, because we're people. And when people start trying to do things together, there can be excitement and there can be joy and there can be hope. And there can also be just all of the stupid stuff that happens when people start getting together.

A broken faith can look like a lot of things. It can look like becoming really exclusive. It becomes all about who's in and who's out, who belongs and who doesn't belong anymore. It can be all about a club, a holy huddle, where we come and we enjoy our time and it's great that anybody who's out there, well, they can just go rot in hell. Our faith can become broken when it becomes just about a set of rules, where we take a book like the Bible and instead of looking at its story and its narrative, we make it a list of rules and moralism. And it's like we take steel wool to Teflon, we just start trying to scrub all of the gunk out of our lives. And of course, it's self-defeating.

Our faith can become broken when we become like super spiritual, you know, spiritual Joe, spiritual Jane, spiritual whoever, where, you know, you become more and more about those rules. Do not taste and do not touch and, you know, don't drink and don't chew and don't go with girls who do, that kind of thing. Our faith can be broken when we become super hierarchical. There are the professionals, people like me on a stage with light shining out on me. And then there's you, and I will tell you what you're supposed to do. And if you don't do it, then you're out.

So many ways that our faith can become broken. And so I've talked to many of you, I've talked to many Christians. I've been one of those Jesus followers who eventually just gives up because it's too hard and it's too painful. And what is it worth? How are we supposed to go on? So that's what we're talking about over these next few weeks of how do we, how do we rebuild something like that?

[ 3 : 33 ] Because listen, you're here today, you're watching right now. Clearly there are millions and, you know, up to a billion Christians around the world who find some sort of worth and value in what we're doing.

Why? Why do we go on and what are we supposed to do? And so we're talking about some of the practices that make us Jesus followers. At some other sermon series in the future, we can talk about beliefs and the spectrum of beliefs and creeds and all of that that also make us Christian. But I think in the end, what like easily identifies us isn't what's in our brains, isn't even what's in our hearts.

It's the actions, the practices that identify us as Jesus followers. So we're going to talk about four over the next few weeks. Tonight, we're talking about baptism. Next week, we'll talk about scripture and the role it plays in our practices. We'll also talk about communion and Eucharist. And we'll also talk about one more thing that is escaping my brain right now. It's we'll keep it in suspense. So what are these essentials? What C.S. Lewis called mere Christianity? What are these things that we are supposed to identify us as Jesus followers? So if you have a Bible, I invite you to turn it on, flip it open, look at the words on the screen, whatever is available to you. We're going to the book of John chapter 3. John chapter 3, we get the story of a person who wants to follow Jesus, but doesn't know how, and he knows he's going to be ridiculed by his society. So he goes to Jesus and in the dark of night to ask Jesus some questions. So this is John chapter 3, verse 1. It says, now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. And he came to Jesus at night and said, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God.

No one could perform the signs that you were doing if God were not with them. And Jesus replied, very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.

Nicodemus says, how can someone be born when they are old? The metaphor just kind of goes right over his head. Nicodemus continues, surely they can't enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born. Jesus answers, very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirits. So we get this story about Nicodemus who recognizes there's something special about Jesus. There's something special about this man who comes and performs miracles and teaches and draws crowds. And Nicodemus says, clearly there is something unique about you, Jesus.

[ 6 : 16 ] Clearly you're from God. And Jesus says, look, if you want to know what I'm about, you have to be born again. Now, if you've been part of the church for a while, you recognize this as super churchy language.

Maybe if you're new to the faith or new to this whole like Christianity thing, you know the phrase born again from like television, born again Christians, holy rollers, all of that. So this is where that phrase comes from, from John chapter three, Jesus explaining to Nicodemus what it is to get into the kingdom of God. Now let's pause for a second. What is the kingdom of God? Why does Jesus bring it up?

The kingdom of God was the hope and expectation of any and every Israelite back in the first century AD. The kingdom of God was the hope and expectation that God would come back to the throne, would once again rule and reign over Israel and the world and set everything right. And so for the Jewish nation, they had spent the past hundreds of years, four or five, six hundred years being conquered, exiled, conquered again, conquered again, conquered again with no king of their own on the throne. And so the prophets began to tell of this expectation that God would come again. He would serve as king and ruler, that God would come to his people in the flesh and that the kingdom would be restored. So this was the hope and the expectation of anybody who was a Jew in the first century. So Nicodemus goes to Jesus, he says, I know that you are of God.

Jesus says, if you want to be, if you want to see, if you want to enter the kingdom of God, this hope, this expectation that any Jew is going to have, this is what you're going to need to do. You're going to be, need to be born again. The kingdom of God, quite simply, is wherever God's will is done. It's the place, the locale, where God's will, where the things that God wants to be true on earth as it is in heaven, it's the place where God's will is done. So if you want to be part of this kingdom, Jesus then flips the metaphor. You have to be born again. He switches it to a family metaphor.

Jesus wants to set up a kingdom, but it's a new family. It's the ruling of a king, and you're going to sit on the throne with the king, and by the way, you're like the king's like sibling or brother or sister. Now there are some who actually go so far to kind of take the G out of kingdom and call it the kingdom of God. There is a Cuban liberation theologian named Ada Maria Isisi Diaz, and she popularized this term because she heard kingdom, and she thought about all the baggage that term had.

[ 8 : 57 ] Patriarchal because it's kings, and kings are known for their armies, and they're conquering, and the bloodshed. And this theologian, she recognized that like, yeah, we need a new kind of society here on earth as it is in heaven, but the thing that Jesus describes throughout the gospels, well, it doesn't have borders. It doesn't have an army. It's about la familia in this theologian's terms. It's about families who are making God's will happen on earth as it is in heaven, and so she called it the kingdom of heaven, this idea that we are kin with all of those who would claim Jesus, and that we are the ones who are going to help God's will happen here. So Nicodemus comes. So there's something special about you. Jesus says, if you want to see, if you want to enter this kingdom, this kingdom, this place where God's will is done, then you're going to have to be part of a new kind of family. You're going to have to be born again. Now, Jesus continues, how do you do, how are you born again? In verse 5, Jesus says, it says that you have to be born of water and of the spirit. Now, those two words, those would resonate with somebody like a Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a teacher of the law. He would have had at least the first five books of the Old Testament, the Hebrew scriptures memorized, probably the whole of the Old Testament, because that was his job as a Pharisee, as a teacher of the law, to know all these things. And so he hears water and spirit, and bells start going off in his head. So if we go to the book of Genesis, chapter 1, the very, very first page of scripture, we read this. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. We're getting the creation story. Now, the earth was formless. The Hebrew word is chaotic. It's the chaos and the empty, the void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. And listen, the spirit of God was hovering over the waters. So Jesus says, if you want to enter the kingdom, this new family, the kingdom, this is what you need to do. You need to be born of water and spirit. Bells start going off in Nicodemus' mind.

Water, spirit, that's Genesis 1 stuff. That's what happened when God made creation in the first place. If you want to enter this kingdom, the kingdom, the new family, then it's going to have to be a new creation. Jesus says that that's what it's time to happen again, that Jesus is on a mission to not just like start a new nation, to not just mark off a geographical territory. Rather, Jesus's mission is the big bang of a new creation. And we see this work throughout Jesus's ministry. Just in the book of John, we see this. John chapter 1, Jesus shows up and John the Baptist is going to baptize him. And John sees Jesus and sees Jesus in the water. And what comes down? But like a bird, like a dove that represents the Holy Spirit, spirit and water, new creation. John chapter 2, there's this amazing story of Jesus taking some disciples, goes to a wedding. The wedding is not like our modern day weddings. Weddings last like four or five, six, seven days. There's eating and there's drinking and there's frivolity of all sorts to the point that they run out of alcohol, which is a huge, horrible, cultural taboo to run out of the, you know, the lifeblood of the party. Jesus says, here, take these jars, these gallons and gallons of jars, fill them with water. And then Jesus takes the water and turns them into wine.

And again, we get this picture of new creation that what seems ordinary and normal and regular, Jesus turns into something extraordinary and new, changes its very being from water to a new thing.

And so John chapter 3, how do we enter the kingdom of God, the new family that God is making? Jesus says, you have to be born again, born of water and spirit. The very stuff that makes creation possible now is what we need to have happen to us so that we can be part of this new reality that Jesus is making on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus takes the water of our lives and turns it into a new wine.

He takes the regular and the mundane and he turns it into something holy and sacred and new. Jesus takes us, changes us, restores us to our original humanity so that we can be born again into God's family. So it can prepare us for God's new creation. So that Jesus, the book of Hebrews, it says that Jesus can call us brothers and sisters. In Ephesians, Paul writes that all of us can claim the family name of God. It's the reconciliation of all things. And in 2 Corinthians, Paul writes that we are the agents of that reconciliation. God's kingdom is like a colony or an embassy of heaven in a culture of death.

[ 14 : 10 ] And that embassy of heaven is bursting onto the scene to make all things new again. And so the image that someone reading this would have had, how are you born of water and of the spirit? It's a baptism. If you were to go throughout the New Testament, which we don't have time for tonight, but if you were to go throughout the New Testament, you would see again and again, these images of recreation and baptism. That when we are baptized, we are dead to our sins, but made alive to Christ. That we are buried in our old bodies, but we are resurrected in new bodies. When we are baptized, we are put down as one old family and we are brought into one new family.

And so all of the brokenness, all of the things that cause us shame, all of the relationships that have hurt us, when we're brought into baptism, put into the water and brought back up again, they are made whole and restored and made new. And so baptism is this mixture of metaphors and in the followers of Jesus and their faith, because baptism says, I belong to a new family.

It's as if I were being born again. Baptism says, I'm going to inherit the kingdom of God, this new kinship of relationships, that kingdom. I'm going to be the inheritor of it. I'm going to be on the throne alongside Jesus. And it's this metaphor of new creation. It's a new big bang of all things being made new. And what I love about baptism is that it is inherently others oriented. It's about making sure that the Christian faith does not become an exclusive club. Yes, it's a marker, a symbol, a sign, a seal. Those are all the kinds of words that have been used at baptism, that we are claiming our allegiance in Jesus, that we are not about this, the kingdom of this world, but the kingdom of God.

It is a marker and a sign, a seal of that, but it doesn't stay there because it becomes an invitation for all and any to join because the new creation is open for all. And so rather about getting involved in a world that we have to fight and shed blood and argue to death, God's kingdom is not geographical.

It doesn't have borders. It doesn't have a standing army. Rather, it's about transforming the world. In Washington, D.C. as it is in heaven. In Virginia, as it is in heaven. In Maryland, as it is in heaven.

[ 16 : 48 ] It's life as if Jesus were actually in charge. Therefore, I'm going to give you a couple quotes about how baptism is others oriented. This first one's from Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams.

He writes, to be able to say I'm baptized is not to claim an extra dignity, let alone a sort of privilege that keeps you separate from and superior to the rest of the human race, but rather it's to claim a new level of solidarity with other people. The gathering of baptized people, what we're doing right now is not a convocation of those who are privileged and elite and separate, but of those who have accepted what it means to be in the heart of a needy, contaminated, messy world. Baptism affirms our bodies, the fact that we are embodied people and that we share relationships and experiences with other embodied people. It doesn't say that your body is evil and wrong and needs to be thrown away.

It says, no, your body belongs to God and God loves you. Therefore, that love has to extend to others as well. James Cone, theologian, writes, unlike the God of Greek philosophy, who's removed from history, the God of the Bible is involved in history and God's revelation is inseparable from social and political affairs. Yahweh, the name of God, Yahweh is known and worshiped as the Lord who brought Israel out of Egypt, raised Jesus from the dead. Yahweh is the political God, the protector of the poor and the establisher of the right for those who are oppressed. Baptism reminds us that God gets involved in the stuff of the world and that has implications for history and politics and the oppressed and the marginalized. So another theologian, Brad Braxton, continues, to baptize people in the name of this God is to immerse them in a politically turbulent waters. Baptism services should not be polite. On the contrary, they should create a guttural awareness in those about to be baptized and in those already baptized that following God will at times be costly. A major currency for payment of that cost is struggle and this struggle may exact a toll from our bodies. To be baptized is to be birthed into a new kind of family, not one based on bloodlines and genetics, but one based on allegiance to Jesus Christ. It's a new kind of kingdom. It's a new big bang of the new creation and that means that there are consequences because some people don't want a new creation.

Some people like the creation just the way it is, thank you very much. New creation means that the old ways have to go. The old divisions and oppressions have to go. That's why there is no other kind of theology but liberation theology. No other kind of theology than a theology of freedom, a theology from the margins that says the regimes of division and racism and right supremacy and oppression of the poor and the disabled and the sexually marginalized. All of those have to go. It means we have work to do.

And so baptism is an invitation to make a new kind of world, to be spirit empowered, God empowered, Jesus inhabited kind of people who are being birthed into a world that doesn't want change, doesn't want new creation. And what Jesus followers, baptized people say is new creation is on its way and I'm living proof. Watch out. So a couple implications for our message. Number one, if you've never been baptized, if baptism has been this odd, strange ritual that old fuddy-duddy religious people do, let me make an invitation to you that baptism, yes, it's a sign and it's a symbol, but it's a mark of a new reality. A new creation is coming and that we are the agents empowered by God's spirit to bring that new creation into being. And so if you've never been baptized, you are invited to join in this ruckus symbol of kinship. So we'll put a link on the screen. I don't know how we're going to do baptism this year. It's kind of a messed up year if you haven't noticed, but if you are interested in baptism, we will make it happen. Number two, if you have been baptized as a baby all the way up through just, you know, last year or whatever, if you have been baptized, your baptism isn't just like a nice polite way to get like a pretty certificate from a church.

[ 21 : 46 ] It's not a way to get a cool picture. Your baptism is a mission and a calling to live like Jesus, is king, to live as if Jesus were really making a new world, to live as if heaven were crashing down to earth and the old ways have to go. And so that marks us out as kingdom people, as people on the mission of God to make sure that there are none excluded, that there are none marginalized, that there are none who are told that they are unworthy, that they are not allowed. Our mission is to make sure that God's love is preached and told and proclaimed to everyone, no matter who would try to get in the way. And so what are the ways that you can embark on that mission today, tomorrow, and the day after as a baptized person, as somebody who is the mark of new creation, baptized in the water, and then the spirit who is the very dwelling place of God Almighty, how can you live out that mission to make sure that none are left out from God's call to reconciliation? Would you pray with me?

Gracious and Almighty God, King Jesus and Sovereign Spirit living within us, we bless you and we thank you that you are the God who leaves no one out. And that when we enter into baptism, when we enter into the water, when we enter into the spirit, we know that there is a power and an energy abiding within us that wants to break loose out into the world. And so we submit ourselves to you. We humble ourselves to that power residing within us. God, we say, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, and may it start with me. As the old spiritual says, God, you are going to trouble the waters. And so may we join you in those troubled waters as you bring more and more people into the water to be cleansed, to be washed, to be made new, to be brought into this new family, this new kingdom, where we can have trust and faith that you are good, that you love us, and that you are going to come to this broken world and make it new. We live in hope and expectation for that day. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.