

“Mode of Baptism (Part 2)”

Acts 8:35-39

Baxter Exum (#921)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
May 6, 2007



INTRODUCTION:

If you were here with us last week, you might remember that we started looking at the subject of baptism, and we noticed that those of us in the Lord's church are basically alone when it comes to God's plan of salvation. We found that there are many diverse opinions on the subject of baptism in the religious world. We found that there are many denominations that sprinkle water on the heads of little babies. Others baptize adults, but do it for the wrong reason. Others do it for the right reason but in the wrong way. And right there, we have summarized almost 95% of the religious world. And when we think about it, and when we start checking around and asking some questions, we find that the Lord's church is one of only a tiny fraction of the religious world who baptize for the right reason, at the right time, and in the right way.

Last week, we focused in on what is commonly referred to as the "mode" of baptism. We looked at the action itself, and whether it should be done either by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. We started last week by looking at the first two in a series of four lines of evidence that give us some clues concerning the way that God wants baptism to be done.

First of all ****PPT****, we started by looking at the word baptism itself, and we found that baptism is basically a Greek word that has been left untranslated and has been transformed into the English language. We found, though, that the word itself is literally translated as "immersion." When we look in any standard English dictionary, we are given the modern definition of the word, which basically says that baptism is any kind of religious initiation—normally done by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. However, when we look at the history of the word, even most modern dictionaries will trace the background of baptism back to a Greek root word meaning "to dip." In fact, in the ancient world, the word was used in secular literature to refer to ships sinking or people drowning or even to dipping a garment in dye to change its color. It referred to an immersion in water.

Secondly, last Sunday morning ****PPT****, we also looked last week at the definition of the gospel itself. In **1 Corinthians 15**, the apostle Paul defined the gospel as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then, in **Romans 6**, Paul compared baptism to the death, burial, and resurrection as well. And so when we compare these two mental pictures, we find that baptism is a burial in water, and that our sins are forgiven in the tomb of baptism. Our sins are forgiven under the water, just as Jesus came back to life in the tomb! And so we found that there is no other mode of

baptism (other than immersion) that even remotely compares to the burial of Christ, and to be sprinkled is actually a mockery of the purpose of baptism.

With these two things in mind, I'd like for us to go back and consider two more lines of evidence concerning the mode of baptism. How do we know whether baptism is sprinkling, pouring, or immersion? And as we answer that question from the Scriptures, I'd like to briefly look at two more areas.

I. First of all, WE SHOULD LOOK AT THE CONTEXT OF SOME OF THOSE PASSAGES THAT MENTION BAPTISM, and just by reading the surrounding verses, we get the very clear idea that baptism is an immersion in water.

And again, we find that we do not need to know Greek in order to go to heaven. If you will, please look with me again at **Romans 6**. And as we look at **Romans 6:4**, let's especially notice the "action" of baptism. In **Romans 6:4**, Paul says, ***"Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."*** And not even considering the theological background (as we did last week), all of us know what it means to be buried. If your idea of a burial is being laid out in a field with some dirt sprinkled on your casket, then maybe baptism by sprinkling is for you. But most of us, when we think of being buried, we think of being completely covered over. We think of being in a hole, covered with dirt. And in the same way, baptism by burial is an immersion in water.

Several years ago, I heard a story about a cat belonging to the son of a denominational minister. The cat died, and so the father told his son to bury the cat in the backyard. When the father went into the backyard some time later, he found the cat with just a little bit of dirt on it. He called his son and said, "I told you to bury the cat." The son replied by saying, "Well, don't you sprinkle a little water on a person and call it a burial?" A very wise son!

Not only is the action of baptism described as a burial, but in **Colossians 2**, **Colossians 3**, and **Romans 6**, Paul also talks about being **"raised"** with Christ, and to be raised certainly implies coming up from something. A person would hardly need to be "raised up" from a sprinkling. And so, not even looking at the meaning of the Greek word, not even looking at the theological background, we can see from the context that baptism is an immersion.

There are several other passages that also give us some clues about the action of baptism. For example, we could look at the example of the Ethiopian Officer in **Acts 8**. In **Acts 8**, the Bible tells us that the treasurer of Ethiopia was heading back home after having been to Jerusalem to worship. On his way home, he is reading from the book of Isaiah when the preacher Phillip runs up and joins him in the chariot. At that point, we get to **Acts 8:35-39**, and the Bible says...

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being 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. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.

We find here that for the Ethiopian Officer to be baptized in this particular body of water, he actually had to go (according to **verse 38**), **"...down into the water."** At the end of **verse 38**, we find that Phillip **"baptized him."** And then, at the beginning of **verse 39**, we find that they then, **"...came up out of the water."** And so we find again that even without knowing anything about the Greek language, we discover based on the context alone, that whatever the action of baptism was, it required going down into the water and coming up out of the water. Very interesting! We need to ask ourselves: If baptism could be done by sprinkling, why didn't Phillip just baptize the man from Ethiopia right there in the chariot? Certainly a man smart enough to be the treasurer of Ethiopia was also smart enough to carry some kind of water with him in the chariot. He was on an 800 mile trip and was traveling on what the Bible describes in **Acts 8:26** as a **"desert road."** If he could have been sprinkled in the chariot, why did he notice a body of water, why did he pull over to the side of the road, and why did both men go down into the water? They did these things because baptism is an immersion.

At this point, some people make the objection that since they were traveling through the desert, there would not have been enough water for an immersion. And normally, when we hear the word "desert" today, we think of miles and miles of nothing but sand and sun and camels. We think of the Sahara. And yet the word itself simply refers to an area that is deserted. It refers to the wilderness or to a desolate place. There is nothing about the word "desert" that would prohibit the Officer from finding some kind of water deep enough to go down into and come up out of by the side of the road.

Not only that, but even in what we normally think of as a desert, it is still possible to be immersed. ****PPT**** Over the past few years, all of us have probably seen the pictures coming back from the Middle East ****PPT****—pictures of soldiers being immersed in the desert. ****PPT**** Sometimes they dig a hole in the ground, sometimes they build a pool out of boxes, ****PPT**** and at least one other time, one man was actually baptized aboard an aircraft carrier by using the leftover crate from one of the weapons. I am not saying that this is how the Ethiopian Officer was baptized, but I'm saying that the process of baptism is not as impossible as some people would like for us to believe.

We can make another observation on the mode of baptism from the baptizing that John the Baptist was doing right around the time that Jesus started His ministry. The passage is found in **John 3:23**. ****PPT**** The Bible says that, "**John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized.**" Some people would like for us to believe that the Jordan River is so small that it is impossible for anyone to ever be immersed in it, but as you can see from this picture (and the next one) that is not the case. I have never seen it in person, but I have seen the pictures. And when we go back to what the Bible actually says, we find something very interesting. ****PPT**** Apparently there were parts of the Jordan River that were not deep enough for full immersion, but notice what the Bible says. John went to a certain spot, "**...because there was much water there.**" John couldn't do his baptizing just anywhere, but he had to go to the spots in the river that had "**much water.**" If baptism was sprinkling, John could have gone to any spot in the river, but as it was, he had to go to those places where there was "**much water.**"

One good test of a word's definition is to try swapping out the word with the definition. For just a moment, then, let's take the false assumption that baptism means sprinkling, and let's substitute "sprinkling" for baptism in **John 3:23**. If we do that, the verse then reads like this, "*John was sprinkling in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being sprinkled.*" It is almost ridiculous to think that John would go to some special spot in the river where he would have enough water to sprinkle it on people! It just does not make sense, based on the context, to define baptism as sprinkling.

II. Secondly, this morning, we should take just a few moments to consider SOME EVIDENCE FROM HISTORY.

How do we know what kind of baptism the early church practiced? One of the interesting resources out there on the Internet is the Catholic Encyclopedia. It is an official document put out there by the Catholic Church and contains thousands of articles on subjects related to the Catholic Church and church history. The original was first published in 1907 and was placed online in 1997.

In their article on baptism, please notice their own words concerning the "mode" of baptism ****PPT****—this is the official position of the Catholic Church...

The most ancient form usually employed was unquestionably immersion. This is not only evident from the writings of the Fathers and the early rituals of both the Latin and Oriental Churches, but it can also be gathered from the Epistles of St. Paul, who speaks of baptism as a bath (Ephes., v, 26; Rom., vi, 4; Tit., iii, 5). In the Latin Church, immersion seems to have prevailed until the twelfth century. After that time it is found in some places even as late as the sixteenth century. Infusion and aspersion, however, were growing common in the thirteenth century and gradually prevailed in the Western Church.

In other words, even the Catholic Church will officially admit that baptism was originally a burial in water. The official switch to pouring and sprinkling did not happen until 1200 years after the church was established, and even then it was not universally accepted. We learn from history, therefore, that baptism is an immersion, or a burial, into Jesus Christ.

Other church leaders from various denominations have also admitted the same thing.

****PPT**** According to the famous Baptist minister, Charles Spurgeon,

Baptism is rightly administered by immersion, or dipping the whole body of the person in water, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, according to Christ's instruction, and the practice of the apostles, and not by sprinkling or pouring of water or dipping some part of the body, after the tradition of men.

****PPT**** Martin Luther once said,

The term baptism is a Greek word; it may be rendered into Latin by mersio—when we immerse anything in water, that it may be entirely covered with water. And though this custom be quite abolished among the generality (for neither do they entirely dip children, but only sprinkle them with a little water), nevertheless they ought to be wholly immersed, and immediately to be drawn out again, for the etymology of the word seems to require it."

****PPT**** Martin Luther went on to say,

Baptism is a sign of both death and resurrection. Being moved by this reason, I would have those who are to be baptized to be altogether dipped into the water, as the word doth express and the mystery doth signify.

****PPT**** John Calvin once said,

The word baptize signifies to immerse, and the rite of immersion was practiced by the ancient church.

****PPT**** Adam Clarke, the famous Methodist writer, once said,

We are buried with him by baptism into death. It is probable that the apostle alluded to the mode of administering baptism by immersion, the whole body being put under water. Alluding to the immersion practiced in the case of adults, wherein the person appeared to be buried under water as Christ was buried in the heart of the earth.

****PPT**** John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, once said,

Buried with him—alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion.

From history, we know that the first documented case of sprinkling involved a man by the name of Novatian, and it happened around 250 AD. Apparently, this man was at the point of death, so he was sprinkled on his death bed. But as a general practice, as admitted by the Catholic Church itself, sprinkling was not officially allowed until the Council of Ravenna in 1311 AD.

CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

This morning, then ****PPT****, we have asked ourselves how we can know whether baptism is sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. We have looked at four basic lines of evidence.

- First of all (based on what we learned last week), we can know that baptism refers to immersion by looking at the word itself. We can look it up in any standard Greek lexicon, we can look to how the word was used in ancient writing other than the Bible, we can look at this word in the history of the English Bible, and we can look up the origin of the word in any modern dictionary, and we will find that the word itself originally referred to immersion.
- Secondly, not only did we look at the word itself, but we considered the mode of baptism based on the definition of the gospel that was given by Paul in **1 Corinthians 15**. According to Paul, the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We obey the gospel through baptism, and according to **Romans 6**, we die to sin, we are buried with Christ in baptism, and we come up out of the water as new creatures ready to start a brand new life. Anything other than immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins actually makes a mockery of the process.
- Thirdly, we looked this morning at the context of several passages, and we learned that not only is baptism a burial, but we also learned that John was baptizing at a certain part of the Jordan River, because there was "***much water***" there. We also found that the Ethiopian Officer went down into the water and came up out of the water.
- And then finally, we looked very briefly this morning at some evidence from church history, and we found that in their own material, even the Catholic Church will admit that baptism was originally an immersion in water and that it stayed that way for more than a thousand years.

For this morning, all we really need to remember is that our sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ when we are immersed in water. If you have any questions about baptism, we would love to meet with you as soon as possible. On the other hand, if

you are ready to turn away from sin and be immersed right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org