

Acts 22:16: Rise and be baptized

## OUTLINE

The necessity of baptism  
The promptness of baptism  
The significance of baptism

## INTRODUCTION

Isaac Backus was a faithful American pastor who walked a long road to obeying Christ's command to believe and be baptised. Isaac Backus was converted during the First Great Awakening in America, this awakening was full of the preaching of men like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, and the Tennant brothers. Backus sat in the midst of these revivals and found his own heart hard and unaffected by the many that were being saved around him. The Lord used this hardness of heart to awaken Isaac to His sinfulness and need for Christ. <sup>1</sup>He writes:

'People were greatly affected and many hopefully converted, while I grew worse and worse in my own view. Powerful preaching, and the sight of many in distress or joy, while I remained a hardened sinner, caused such anguish as words cannot express. Yet hereby God laid open to me the plague of my own heart and the folly of seeking life by my own doings. My tears were dried up and I could find no good in me.

Instead of this I felt inclined to quarrel with the sovereignty and justice of God, and the freeness of His grace, a grace so free that He was not obliged to have mercy upon me after all my doings. A sight of these corruptions increased my distress and filled me with confusion before God.'

A waning in his experience of conviction of sin distressed him even further.

However, one day God seized him in the field and gave him a sight of the total sinfulness of his life, he writes:

'Divine justice appeared clear in my condemnation, and I saw that God had a right to do with me as He would. My soul yielded all into His hands, fell at His feet, and was silent and calm before Him. And while I sat there, I was enabled to by divine light to see the perfect righteousness of Christ and the freeness and riches of His grace, with such clearness, that my soul was drawn forth to trust in Him for salvation. And I wondered that others did not also come to Him who had enough for all. The Word of God and the promises of His grace appeared firmer than a rock, and I was astonished at my previous unbelief. My heavy burden was gone, tormenting fears were fled, and my joy was unspeakable.'

Backus ended up leaving his church because it taught that the Lord's Supper was a converting ordinance. He then became a minister of a separatist church. Soon however, the church got caught up in the baptism debate. There were people in his church saying only believer's should be baptised, and others saying that believer's children were entitled to baptism as well. At this point Backus was not baptised as a believer and still held to infant

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<sup>1</sup> From the book, Why I am a Baptist, p21-32.

baptism and sprinkling. He studied the issue and hearing a minister and witnessing believer's baptism by immersion he recognised that he had been in error and was himself baptised biblically. On account of the new conviction that baptism should precede partaking of the Lord's Supper, there was animosity in his church and so he went on to plant a Baptist church.

This is one example of thousands of someone who is converted and saved, but there is a delay in baptism as confusing issues are sorted out and the different views overcome by the teaching of Scripture. Today we have a baptismal service and I would like us to consider Paul's baptism and the words spoken to him in Acts 22:16 when the Lord sent Ananias to speak to and baptise him. 'And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.' From this verse we will look at three things, the necessity of baptism, the promptness of baptism and the significance of baptism.

### The necessity of baptism

The conversion of Paul is told three times in the book of Acts, this amount of repetition highlights the significance of Paul and his apostolic ministry. We see it told as for the first time after the stoning of Stephen in Acts 9, we find it again when he is testifying before King Agrippa in 26, and here in Acts 22. We see that Paul has made his planned visit to Rome to bring the gifts of the Gentile churches to the Jewish believers. He made some visits to the temple in a bid to show those still very zealous for the law of Moses that the gossip was wrong. While there some who knew him from his missionary labours spotted him, and since he was also walking around Jerusalem with a Gentile convert to Christianity (Trochimus 21:29), they assumed he had brought a Gentile into the temple and they started a riot to bring him to justice. The Tribune intervened or Paul would have been killed. Paul requested that he address the crowd and he was given permission. So Paul speaking to a Jewish audience tailored his own conversion story for Jewish ears. He spoke about his own religious zeal for Judaism, how he used to persecute the church, and how Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus. He spoke about Ananias, a law abiding Jew who God sent to baptise him and confirm his commission to be a missionary to the Gentiles. It is in the midst of this story that we have the call to be baptised.

The first thing worth highlighting is the assumption that Paul should be baptised in water. Just as Cornelius's household received the Spirit first and were then baptised, we see that Paul receives the Spirit, and is expected to be baptised. His receiving of the Spirit prior to his baptism is shown in Acts 9:17-18 when Ananias laid hands on him and the scales fell from his eyes. The Salvation Army wrongly teach that Christian baptism is only a baptism in the Spirit and not with water, Paul was baptised in water after receiving the Spirit. Baptism in water is of course not an optional aspect to our faith, but something commanded by Christ, Matt. 28:19-20, '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. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" Jesus trained His disciples to baptise, so that they ended up water baptising more people than even John did, (John 4:1-2). Like a marriage without a wedding or a death without a

funeral is a Christian who has not been baptised. They are in disobedience to the teaching of Scripture. Apart from the thief on the cross who did not have the opportunity to be baptised, you cannot see such a thing as an unbaptised believer. It is technically possible for someone to be saved and not be baptised but the word calls upon us to be more than saved, we must be obedient to Christ. Some refuse baptism because it might offend their families, do you fear to displease God or your families more? Some refuse for health reasons, I would encourage you to count this part of your suffering in obedience. Some are mistakenly waiting for a feeling which compels them to feel the need above the clear command that is written in Scripture. If you have trusted in Christ I ask you as Ananias asked Paul, 'And why do you wait? Rise and be baptised.'

### The promptness of baptism

This brings us to our next point which is the promptness of baptism. We no longer baptise promptly in the Christian life but delay baptism. This is for several reasons, we live in a day where we emphasize personal salvation but not attachment to the church, and baptism which marks our belonging to the church is therefore downplayed. Also since we live after many years of doctrinal difference there are many that avoid baptism because of the fact that Christians differ. In the early church, due to a wrong understanding of baptism washing away sin many delayed it till their death beds. A legitimate reason for delay would include making sure someone fully understands baptism, that they are not pursuing baptism for salvation but are trusting in Christ. However a prolonged delay, a delay that wants people to first master all the teachings of Christianity as the early church began to do with its catechism classes before baptism, doing years of teaching before baptizing, is wrong. Paul did not have a perfect knowledge of all of theology, but had a sincere faith in Christ. I can tell you that I got baptised and have learned more and more what my baptism means over the years, I did not have a full understanding then, and that should not delay obedience.

On the day of Pentecost the people who repented were baptised on the same day. In Cornelius's household, on the day they received the Spirit they were baptised. The jailor and his believing household were taken late at night out of the house to a suitable place for baptism when they believed. The Ethiopian Eunuch upon believing was baptised. Baptism is to be joined as closely as possible to the beginning of the Christian life. One does not celebrate the birth, give a name, and acknowledge a new family member 14 years after a baby is born likewise baptism should follow close on the heels of faith in Christ. Baptism marks the occasion of a new birth, of a new name, not a Christening but being put into the new name of Christ, and it marks the joining of a new family, the church. It symbolizes the washing that happens at our conversions, the death to sin that happens when we are born again, the receiving of the Spirit, the joining of the church and our commitment to being His disciples. That is why it happened at the beginning of someone's spiritual life and should not be delayed. And because it speaks of such spiritual realities it should not be applied to babies who have not experienced these things. Paul did not have to wait long for his baptism. He may have been saved anywhere in the three days before his baptism, and like the Samaritans his receiving of the Spirit was delayed in order to bring Ananias a

representative of the church into contact with him, that Paul and the church might know that this persecutor has been put into the church by God.

### The significance of baptism

Now one of the main reasons why there are so many differing views on baptism is because of the lack of uniformity in practice and what is said to happen at baptism in the book of Acts. The book of Acts is a narrative that Luke records, where he does not list every detail but those details that are relevant to his purpose of showing the spread of the church from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The sermons are summarised and not complete so we need the letters to illuminate them. There are various practices recorded that have no evaluation and we need to read them in light of what the rest of the NT teaches, e.g. Paul participating in Temple rites. The books of Acts is unique in that it records the events between the birth of the church and the fall of Jerusalem and the abolishing of Judaism, a time when the church was learning a lot and trying to leave behind, often through trial and error the unnecessary relics of the Mosaic Law, .e.g., circumcision and the OT dietary laws. And so we need to approach the book realising that there are things that are unique and not repeatable; anomalies that served a purpose limited to that time, etc.

I would like to muddy the water to show you why people come up with the differing teachings and then offer a way to understand what is going on.

Firstly, notice in the book of Acts the various experiences of salvation and their relation to Baptism. Firstly, we would have what we would call a typical situation where one is saved and then very shortly after baptised. We see this with the crowd on the day of Pentecost who repent and are baptised, the Ethiopian Eunuch who believes and is baptised, the jailor's household who believe and are baptised. Secondly we have examples of those who receive the Spirit first and are then baptised, like Cornelius's household, John the Baptist's disciples in 19:1-6, and even Paul. Thirdly, however we have those who believe and are baptised but the Spirit is delayed in the case of the Samaritans. So this raises the question, is the Holy Spirit given before, after, or at baptism? We will not find a single pattern in Acts and must look to the letters to clarify this issue. Those who have failed to recognise this reality and have tried to isolate a single pattern have resulted in error. The Salvation Army will emphasize receiving the Spirit before baptism and make water baptism irrelevant. The Church of Christ will emphasize those texts which speak of receiving the Spirit at baptism teaching and form of baptismal regeneration. And our Pentecostal and Charismatic friends will teach a second baptism in the Spirit from those texts that have a receiving of the Spirit through the laying on of hands. All of these errors are avoided if we allow the letters which are intended for in depth discussions on these issues to lead the way. To read the book of Acts in isolation is the mistake of the cults.

Secondly, notice the various things that are associated with baptism. We will see that there are 6 things associated with baptism, faith, repentance, receiving the Spirit, confession, baptism itself and being joined to the church. In the book of Acts we will find that these things are a case of synecdoche that means part for the whole. When we see baptism we

are supposed to add all of these other things in our minds. So in Acts 2:38 we see repentance and receiving the Spirit but faith is assumed, confessing Christ as Lord implied and being added to the number later stated. But in Acts 10:43, 13:38-39, and 15:9 there is the mention of faith and nothing else. Repentance, confession, and baptism are all assumed. In the minds of the first century Christians all of these things happened on the same day. They did not separate them in their minds as controversy has forced us to do. In the text we are considering today we have 2 of the 6 things mentioned, baptism and calling on His name in confession.

I have chosen this verse because it is a confusing one, it states, 'Rise and be baptised and wash away your sins, calling on His name.' We see the result of sins being washed away but there is no mention of faith, repentance or receiving the Spirit. This verse presents us with an important knot to be untied, how are baptism and salvation related? Should we see all six things as six parts of a whole so that all have an equal part to salvation and one part missing means we cannot be saved? Or is there a defining part of which all the others are necessary and natural partners? We must turn to the letters of the NT to illuminate these issues as they give more detailed discussions on these issues.

It is clear from the NT that faith is seen as the pivotal action on our part that brings about salvation. It is those who believe who receive eternal life (Jn. 3:16); it by grace that we are saved through faith (Eph. 2:8-9); and we are justified, that is declared righteous, by faith (Rom. 3:22-28). It nowhere states that we are justified by repentance, or baptism, or by receiving the Spirit. So how then do all these things relate? Well, true faith is always accompanied by repentance, otherwise it is not true faith but a false confession. And we must be made righteous through faith and not repentance because faith is the receiving of a free gift not the performance of putting away sin or being very committed. Putting away sin and committing ourselves to God always accompanies true faith, but faith is receiving a gift of righteousness from God not giving our righteousness to God. To be justified by repentance is to be justified by works. We cannot save ourselves by how well we put away sin, we are saved by accepting what Christ has done in our place which we could not do for ourselves. The Scriptures make clear that it is by faith that we receive the Spirit, Eph. 1:13, 'In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.' Just as we receive a new legal status by faith, in that we are moved from criminal to righteous by faith, we are also adopted and sealed with the Spirit of adoption when we believe. Adoption and justification are the two main legal status's conferred upon us by faith. Certainly repentance is always there in the background and its absence marks any faith as false. But faith is presented as the instrumental means by which we are saved not repentance, and act of receiving not giving.

So as we return to our verse in Acts 22:16, faith is not mentioned but it is most certainly implied in the confession and calling upon His name. Romans 10 puts confession and faith side by side. These are connections we have to study to make but which would have been natural for the first century church. Romans 10:9-13, 'because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you

will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Paul remembering his own baptism joins faith, confession, and baptism. We must emphasize that forgiveness happens at baptism not through baptism, at our repentance not through our repentance, at our confession not through our confession. Faith is said to be that through which we are justified. Even in the Greek grammar this is evident as the dative case is used to describe faith. It is through faith not as a new law to obey so that we are saved by our obedience, faith is the empty hands we bring to God to receive the gift of Christ.

So friends let me warn you, as you read the NT there will be confusing verses that seem to imply that baptism is the means through which we are saved, for example, we see baptism and the new birth closely identified in Titus 3:5, which speaks of 'the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.' It is likely that salvation and baptism are associated in the words of Paul when he speaks about the washing of water with the word in Eph. 5:26. Romans 6:4, 1 Peter 3:21 and other texts like them can confuse, but it must be remembered that we establish doctrine from the whole counsel of God's word and we must not read the bible so as to make a liar of God so that we make Him contradict Himself. And so as we compare Scripture with Scripture we can see that in the minds of the first century believers, salvation was seen to be at baptism but not through baptism. Salvation does not happen by magic when we apply the water of baptism, salvation is not won by how well we put away sin, though putting away sin always accompanies true salvation, salvation is not a reward from part faith part obedience to commands, but faith is the receiving of a free gift of righteousness, trusting in what Christ has done not in what I do.

Those being baptised today are testifying to what Jesus has done for their salvation not to what they do. They are telling us in their baptisms that God has buried the old Adamic citizenship, that God has resurrected them to new life, that Christ is the one who has secured by His life and death all that is need for our salvation. This baptism speaks about what the Spirit does in joining us to the Church, and there is also a statement about us gladly leaving our old lives behind and living a new life of holiness to Christ. But this commitment to walk in holiness and repentance is not what saves, Jesus saves.