

Baptism and Membership Service of Greg and Kate Denham, Andrew Rhode, Caleb Beery

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: 29 March 2009

Preacher: Aaron Hoak

[0:00] We want to give each one an opportunity tonight to tell us what the Lord has done for their soul. So we're going to begin with Greg Denham. Come Greg. I was raised in a Christian home.

For the most part, I had no interest in Christianity or any of that. I was embarrassed, uncomfortable with it, resistant to the faith.

I learned a lot about the Bible and about God, but I didn't have a relationship with God. My resistance to the church was reinforced by popular culture as I passed into junior high school and college.

And just the popular opinion was that the smart people didn't believe in that sort of thing. But God's merciful, and He continued to work in me.

In college, I'd met Kate, and she, through her faith and her influence, softened my heart towards the gospel. I continued to have a lot of questions, but we started going to a Baptist church in Lafayette.

[1:10] And through that, I was still trying to understand Christianity, struggling with it for a long time, with faith, and then just, as I began to grow in faith, started to struggle with just understanding salvation, was introduced the doctrines of grace and sovereignty of God versus human responsibility.

And through some of that, there were times when I would just reject the truth. But through the sermons of Pastor Chansky up in Holland, and Pastor Batchelder in Warsaw, and a faithful co-worker who gave me some resources to understand the doctrines of grace, I started to understand their value, and it increased my faith and trust in the Lord.

That began to grow. So this church was recommended to us by Pastor Chansky. It was a very good and healthy church. So we've been attending Grace Fellowship for over a year now. I've learned so much under the teachings of Pastor Poke and Pastor Heaney.

I realize I'm a sinner. I'm no less of a sinner than the worst criminal in prison. There's no righteousness in me except that which the Lord grants me. When I die, I'll look to Christ's perfect life rather than mine, and His death to cover my sins.

I'm trusting in the Lord to refine me, to grant me further righteousness, to guide my steps and lead me away from sin. I need Him every day just to grant me the grace of desiring to please Him.

[2:42] To lead my family in a godly way, I need God's grace and the wisdom that only comes from Him, and a church family that can give me help and instruction. Thank you, Greg.

And then his wife, Kate. My family and I attended a Quaker or Friends church during my growing up years.

This was a church that does not practice any form of baptism or communion. At a young age, though I cannot remember exactly when, I prayed for Jesus to come into my heart. I prayed this prayer many times over many years, never feeling quite sure if I had meant it enough the time before.

I believed that Jesus was God's one and only Son and that He died on the cross for our sins.

However, I don't think I had much understanding of the extent of my own sinful nature.

During high school and much of college, if someone would have asked, I definitely would have said that I was a Christian, though my life didn't resemble much of one who feared God and wanted to obey His commandments.

[3:46] As a whole, I lived my life much as an unbeliever would. Sometime during junior or senior year of college, my older brother Joe started talking about something he called Calvinism.

This all seemed like a crazy idea initially and totally different from the way I'd been taught. However, it really made me want to search the scriptures and read the Bible for perhaps the first time in my life.

Everything I read supported these doctrines of grace and seemed to refute the idea that we need to make a choice in the matter of our own salvation. After Greg and I were married, we moved to Holland, Michigan.

For many weeks, we visited churches but were not finding a solid Bible-believing and Bible-preaching church. One Sunday, Greg made the comment that it was like we were hungry for a steak and they were giving us cotton candy.

That evening, we visited Reformed Baptist Church of Holland. It was what we'd been looking for. Pastor Mark Chansky began a sermon series on the Ten Commandments. That was an eye-opener for me.

[4:46] I felt conviction of my sins and realized I was guilty of breaking every commandment. Over the years, my faith has grown as well as my understanding of the gospel.

I am a hell-deserving sinner saved by the grace of God. It is not my own doing but rather a gift from God. I don't know the exact date and time that I was truly saved, but I do know where I stand now with God and where I will spend eternity.

I thank the Lord that he had mercy on me, as undeserving as I am. Jesus paid the price for all of my sins, past, present, and future.

Amen. And Daniel Hopkins. I grew up in a Christian home where we attended church every Sunday.

My parents taught me about the Bible on a regular basis. But despite these blessings, I never accepted Christ. I went to church, sat, listened, and left because the things of Christ did not interest me.

[5:52] I wanted to live a life that made me happy, a life where I could satisfy myself. After my grandma passed away, I began to ask questions about Christianity and salvation. And both of my parents talked with me about those things.

But I soon neglected my questions and concerns and continued living as a sinner apart from Christ. Just before I began high school, I made a profession of faith to my parents. But in retrospect, I do not believe that I was truly saved.

I had knowledge about Christ and the Bible, but it meant nothing to me. It had no true impact on my life. During my junior year in high school, my sister passed away from cancer. And God used that trial in my life to bring me to him.

He showed me my fallen nature and exposed my sin. Christ drew me to himself, and I accepted him into my life as my Savior. His perfect sacrifice on the cross washed away my sins.

And he, who led a perfect life, free from sin, imputed his righteousness to me. At the cross, he bore my sins, receiving the penalty due to me. After Christ saved me, I could truly sing, My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

[6:57] Since my conversion, I love to hear the word of God preached, desiring to learn more about Christ. Matthew 5.48 says, Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. I know that I cannot reach that goal because I sin daily, but with God's mercy and grace, I can put to death the sin in my life and learn to serve him better.

Christ is all I have, and I take comfort in Romans 8.38-39, which says, For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Andrew Rohde. I grew up in a Christian family, and some of you know my family, and I am truly blessed with the family that God has given me.

I have two wonderful, loving parents, two older brothers, a younger brother, and a little sister, and I am so thankful that God has blessed me with them.

I can remember every morning since I can remember, we would always gather around the kitchen table and have family devotions. And we did that until I left home.

[8:22] And I am very thankful for my parents' faithfulness into devoting that time to the Lord every day. I've learned a lot throughout my life.

And I don't remember a time when I didn't believe Jesus Christ was my Lord and Savior. But I know that I have grown in the Lord.

I've become more mature in Him, and I know that I need to grow more mature in Him every day.

One of the things that I'm most thankful for lately has been my awareness and God's showing me His timing.

I know that I want things done in my timing, as we all do sometimes. But that's not what God wants. When I left for college, since I do have such a wonderful family, I wanted a family of my own. And I expected to go away to college and meet a nice young lady, get married after college and live happily ever after.

[9:34] That's what I wanted. That's not what God wanted. And that was really, really hard for me. Because I wanted that so much. I wanted a family.

Years passed. Five, six years passed. And then I was introduced to a very nice young lady. And I am very blessed to have her in my life.

And now I thank God for His timing every day. I know that if it was in my timing, I would not be where I am today.

And I am very thankful for that. Just recently, I learned something else. And I know some of you have been praying for this for me.

I really struggle with how much I love my family. And my sister is a student teaching over in China.

[10:47] And she has a decision to make on where she's going to teach next year and everything. And I just, I wish I had her heart at times.

She has such a love for the Lord and such a heart for the Lord. She emailed us last year and said, You know, there was a time when I thought, Even if the Lord wants me to go, I can't leave my family.

And I thought, I can't believe she's even saying that. Because I know that she's saying that. She's pretty much saying that I love my family that much. But then she came to the point where she said, You know, what the Lord wants.

And that's what I need to do. Even if it's being away from family. And I knew I wasn't in that place.

And that hurt. My sister was there.

My little sister was there. And I wasn't there. And that really hurt that. I wanted to be in that place.

But I just wasn't. And I'm so thankful for people who have been praying for that.

[11:53] And I am at that place now. Just recently, about two weeks ago, I got to that place where, you know, I really am at peace with whatever the Lord has her to do.

And, you know, this seems like, you know, it has something to do with my life, but it's not going to maybe affect my day-to-day. But, and even though we don't talk to each other every day, it's knowing that I might not be able to go and see her.

And, the Lord's letter, and it's not here in the United States. That's hard, but I'm so thankful for the works that He's done in her life.

And I'm so thankful that, that God has prepared my heart for, to, I guess, to be willing to let her go and let her serve the Lord in the way that He sees fit.

I am a sinner. And I sin every day. And I need God's grace, His mercy, His forgiveness. And I know I have that.

[13:06] He died for me on the cross. And I'm so thankful for that. I know I need earthly support. Because I know I can't, I can't do this on my own. I need God.

God's going to do it. But I need earthly support. And I'm so thankful for the family of believers here at Grace who have been encouraging. I see you guys encourage me, encourage one another, and I'm so thankful for that.

I know that I need to grow, continue to grow, and I thank God for His grace, His mercy every day. I know that I'm not going to, even though I deserve eternal damnation, I know I won't be there.

I will be in heaven someday with my Lord and Savior. Well, these are the four that will be baptized this evening, and then two others will be joining the church along with them.

And we'll hear next from Caleb Berry. It is difficult to recall the exact details surrounding the time when I was baptized because I was only 12 at the time.

[14:26] For most of the first 12 years of my life, I was brought up at a church that taught while Jesus saves, Christians must continue to keep many of the Old Testament rules and special days in order to maintain their salvation.

Basically, it was a workspace salvation. It wasn't until a few years immediately before my coming to Christ that the church that we went to in Elkhart underwent a drastic change in its beliefs. During this time, the idea that we are saved by God's grace alone and not by works began to be taught. I can't remember what exactly prompted my desire to ask Jesus to be my Savior, but I do remember several times that in the years prior contemplating what would happen to me when I died.

It was plain to me that I was a sinner and that meant when I was going to die, that when I died I would be going to hell. I also realized that I was not guaranteed a long life and that I could die at any time and the combination of these two facts terrified me.

Up until just a few years before my baptism, I had been under the impression that becoming a Christian meant living a spotless life under the law. Even with my compelling fear of death and hell, I was paralyzed for several years by the fear of having to live a perfect life once I made the decision to come to Christ.

[15 : 54] It wasn't long, however, before the new teachings of salvation by grace alone began to take hold. Under these new teachings, my fears of committing my life to Christ melted away. In 1998, I came to Christ and was baptized.

And in 2000, our family stopped attending our church in Elkhart. Shortly after, we began to attend a different church in Goshen. This was a large church and a very lively church, which was very attractive to a young believer like me.

And looking back on my time there, I came to realize that just how little emphasis the church placed on the teachings of holy living.

And seeker sensitivity was a big influence on the content of the sermons. Sunday after Sunday was spent on how Jesus died for sinners with little to no attention given to the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit that is received in our coming to Christ.

In 2004, I graduated from high school and began attending Purdue University. By this time, I began to realize the shallowness of the seeker-sensitive churches like the one I was attending back home.

[17 : 04] Many of the churches that I had visited while I was at Purdue were similarly seeker-sensitive, entire sermons being preached without once cracking open the Bible.

For my first two years at Purdue, I used this as an excuse not to regularly attend a church. And after my sophomore year, my parents began attending Grace Fellowship Church here in Bremen. During the summer and when I came home for breaks during the school year, I would attend GFC as well.

And I was first resistant to the Reformed teachings that were of this church because they were so different from anything I had experienced before in any of the previous churches I had attended.

My junior and senior years at Purdue went by with me being in a state of spiritual confusion. I believed that I was saved, but from my brief visits at Grace Fellowship and my exposure to Reformed theology, I saw that my life was not matching up to the life of what a Christian should look like.

I had trusted Jesus for my forgiveness of sins, but I had not trusted in the Holy Spirit's power to sanctify me. During my last year at Purdue, I often prayed for God to change my heart and to continue the work of salvation that He had started in my life nearly ten years ago.

[18 : 20] Little did I know that God was already at work in my life. I struggled with some major decisions as how to continue my education as it was becoming obvious that a Purdue engineering degree was not the path that God had intended for me.

I was disillusioned by my seemingly wasted four years at Purdue and increasingly disappointed with the state of my spiritual life. After my senior year, I decided to move back and begin attending IUSB in pursuit of a computer science degree.

Having led my parents to Grace Fellowship two years earlier, God had paved the way for me to now begin regularly attending this church in the summer of 2008. In my short time here, God has been working powerfully in my life.

In my years at Purdue, I believed that for Jesus' sake my sins would be forgiven, but I was not relying on God's grace to sanctify me and guide me in holy living. I can look back on my wasted four years at Purdue and see God's sovereignty and mercy and showing me the utter futility of my self-reliance and sinful independence.

Already, I'm overwhelmed by the blessings God has been pouring out on me since the beginning of my attendance here at Grace Fellowship. And I am encouraged by what the Lord has been doing in my life and it is my prayer that God continue to humble me, guide me, and teach me to rely solely

upon Him in everything.

[19 : 38] I feel that this prayer can be answered at a church like Grace Fellowship and I look forward to growing in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ along with my brothers and sisters here at GFC.

David Goodrich, come. This past week I've been looking through God's words, see if something He would have for me and He kept pointing me back to the Psalms written mostly by a man by the name of David, same as my name.

He brought me to 25. It's not a popular one but it's one that I've been reading almost daily. In particular, verses 8 through 10.

God is upright, is the Lord. Therefore He instructs sinners in His ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way.

All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of His covenant. And God has been faithful to me.

[20 : 53] I've been part of a lot of churches and even attending some since I started coming here.

But this seems to be the one that's home for me when God wants me in. I do appreciate you inviting me. He's blessed me since I finally gave in and moved to Mishawaka.

Of course, I can come Sunday morning and Sunday night and Wednesday nights. God has just been blessing since I've been part of this church.

Thank you so much. Each one, individual paths that God brought them down and yet all to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm going to ask the four who are being baptized to stand here and to make their baptismal affirmations at this time. Do you confess that you are a hell-deserving sinner whose only hope of mercy is found in Jesus Christ and what He has done for sinners?

[22 : 04] If so, say I do. I do. Do you trust only in His blood and righteousness to save you and realize that the waters of baptism do nothing to wash away sin and merit favor with God?

God? I do. I do. Do you desire tonight to publicly identify yourself as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and purpose by His grace to turn from your sins and to follow Him in faith and obedience for the rest of your life?

I do. I'll ask Caleb and David to join them for their membership commitments. I ask you all, do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and commit to follow His Word in every area of your life?

I do. Do you agree to submit to the discipline of this church and the oversight of its elders? I do. Do you commit yourself to support the ministries of the church by your faithful attendance and by serving in it according to your talents, spiritual gifts and God-given responsibilities?

Do you agree to cooperate in the outreach of this church to the world by bearing witness to Christ, praying for the spread of the gospel and giving of your financial resources?

[23 : 33] I do. And do you understand that the 1689 Confession of Faith is the doctrinal statement of this church and agree to not spread among us doctrines contrary to this confession?

I do. Do you then commit yourself to this body of believers to love them and to seek their good, to work and live with them in harmony, to encourage and watch over them in the Lord, all to the end that Jesus Christ may receive glory in His church?

And I'm going to ask the members of Grace Fellowship Church to stand where they are and to commit yourself to these. Members of Grace Fellowship Church, do you welcome these folks into the membership of this church and thereby commit yourselves to them as you have to one another, to pray and labor for their building up and growth and grace and to esteem them in love as brothers and sisters in Christ, all that Jesus Christ may be glorified in His people.

If so, say, we do. We do. Well, amen. Let's pray. Lord Father, we give You thanks for the salvation of these that stand before us tonight.

They were once as lost as anyone as they've testified to us, but You have been the Good Shepherd who's gone out searching after the lost sheep and have drawn them to Yourself.

[25 : 18] We give You thanks for each truth of Scripture that You've opened their eyes to. We thank You that You have made the Lord Jesus Christ most precious of all to them.

We thank You that You've brought them to us and that we've been able not only to hear but to see the reality of Christ in their lives. And we thank You tonight that each one of these will be joining this church and committing ourselves together to follow on after the Savior.

Lord, would You make us helpers to each other, keep us from biting and devouring one another, keep us from being temptations and hindrances to each other, but rather cause us to spur each other on to love and good deeds.

May it be evident that Christ reigns in our hearts, that His Word is our rule and His Spirit is our power. So receive our thanks and give us help as we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. We've heard from Greg of the grace of God in his life and so now, Greg, on the basis of your profession of faith in Christ, I now baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[26:40] Buried in the likeness of His death, raised in the likeness of His resurrection. Amen.

Amen. Amen. We've heard from Kate as well of God's work in her life.

And so, Kate, on the basis of your profession of faith in Christ, I now baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son. And the Holy Spirit, buried in the likeness of His death, raised in the likeness of His resurrection.

Amen. We've heard of the grace of God in our brother Andrew.

And so, I now baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, buried in the likeness of His death, raised in the likeness of His resurrection.

Amen. Amen. And we've heard from Daniel, the grace of God in his life.

[28:20] And so, being you on the basis of that profession of faith, I now baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, buried in the likeness of His death, raised in the likeness of His resurrection.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. I'm going to say this again in a minute from right down there. But there are some here tonight who haven't been baptized.

And I would love for you to come through these waters, for you to put your hope and trust in Christ, that we might hear your profession of faith and see of the grace of God further working in our midst. May God make it so. Amen. Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Acts 22. I took my watch off.

And forgot to put it back on. So, we'll take some moments to look into God's Word from Acts 22.

[29:30] What in the world was that, that we just did? Why did four people go into a tank and get dunked under the water by another person?

Well, it's not just some bizarre rite of passage or initiation into the membership of our church. And it's not just tradition.

Others have always done it, and so do we. Baptism is actually something far more significant and much greater than any of these things.

It's one of two sacraments or ordinances that Christ has commanded for His church to observe until He comes again. It's commanded by Christ.

Matthew 28, 19. Jesus, before He ascends into heaven, says to His disciples, 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.

[30:37] And so the church seeks to obey that command. We baptize those who repent of their sins and put their faith in Christ. And elsewhere, the new converts themselves are commanded to be baptized.

Peter on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2.38, He says, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

So it's a command that Christ has given to His church. And so that's why we do it. But why did He command that? Why does He want us to baptize people?

We want to talk very briefly tonight about one aspect of the significance of baptism, which will be important for three different groups of people tonight. So we're going to talk about why we baptize, why Jesus gave the command, what its significance is, and then why does it matter to you tonight? We'll look at three groups of people when we get there. But first of all, why do we baptize? Why do we do it? What's the significance of what just happened there tonight? To start with, baptism is a sign.

[31:42] It's an outward sign. The immersing of a believer in water is a picture that God has given to His church. Now we know that God has given the written Word to His church. And He requires the preaching of it in His church.

And so we seek to center what we do around God's Word. But He's also given us two pictures. Not just the written Word, but two pictures. The Lord's Supper and baptism.

To see the Word made visible. To see the Gospel in picture terms. And one of those pictures is what we've just seen tonight. That of baptism. And that outward sign always points to an inward reality.

And we can't confuse the two. The outward sign and the inward reality. But it's a beautiful, fitting picture of things that are true of the believer. Believers have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. And so we baptize them in water.

It's a picture of union with Christ in His death and burial and resurrection. And so you heard me say tonight. Buried in the likeness of His death. Raised in the likeness of His resurrection.

[32:43] It's for those who walk in newness of life. Dead to sin and now disciples of Christ. It's a picture of being incorporated into the body of Christ. The outward sign of baptism symbolizes all of these inward realities.

But tonight we want to focus on one other spiritual reality that baptism symbolizes. And that is the forgiveness or the washing away of sin. That's where we want to zero in tonight.

That's the significance of baptism that we want to notice. It means these other things that we've just said. But think with me for a few minutes about baptism and the forgiveness of sins. Washing sins away.

And just on the face of it, it's an appropriate picture, isn't it? When you're dirty. You've been outside working all day and you're covered in dirt. You come inside. And what do you do if you want to get clean?

Or you take a bath. Or you take a shower to wash that dirt away. And so baptism, a picture of washing away the dirtiness of our sin. And Paul makes that connection for us here in Acts chapter 22.

[33:43] Paul's been arrested. He's hated by the Jews in Jerusalem. They want to kill him. And he's allowed to make a defense for himself. And to do that, he talks about how he was a sinner.

And the nature of his sin. But how he called on the name of the Lord. Was saved and was baptized. And so notice with me. I'm just going to read these verses quickly. The first 16 verses of Acts 22.

So you can see Paul's defense. His account of how he was a sinner and how God worked in his life to draw him to himself. And then in verse 16, we'll see the connection with baptism.

We'll read the first 16 verses of Acts 22 from God's Word. Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense. When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said, I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel, I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.

[34:43] I persecuted the followers of this way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison. As also the high priest and all the council can testify.

I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me.

I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Who are you, Lord? I asked. I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting, you replied.

My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. What shall I do, Lord? I asked. Get up, the Lord said, and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.

My companions led me by the hand into Damascus because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there.

[35:42] He stood beside me and said, Brother Saul, receive your sight. And at that very moment, I was able to see him. Then he said, The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the righteous one and to hear words from his mouth.

You will be his witnesses to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

Well, you see how Paul there at the end ties together. The washing away of his sins and baptism. There's a connection there. Now, you should understand, even as they made clear in their

baptismal affirmations tonight, that we don't believe that the waters of baptism actually wash away sin.

That's the work of Christ. But again, it is a fitting picture, isn't it, of the washing away of sin. And we could even translate this verse at the end. Wash away your sins by calling on his name.

It's in calling on the name of Christ that affects that work of Christ to come and wash away our sins. It's not the baptism that washes it away. It's the work of Christ. And so, in calling on his name, our sins are washed away.

[36:54] The baptism, a clear picture of that. It's a picture of the forgiveness, the washing away of sins. Well, why is that a big deal? Why does it matter that your sins tonight are washed away?

Or why does it matter that they're not? I think most of you know the answer to that question. It matters because every one of you is a sinner.

Every one of us, I should say, is a sinner. Me too. And because of that, we deserve to die. We've broken God's law. We've earned the punishment that He promises to all who do not obey Him perfectly.

And that's a big problem. It means we're headed for an eternity of punishment and suffering in hell forever. It's a problem. So what do we need?

Oh, we need to have our sins washed away. So that when God looks at us, He doesn't see a guilty sinner any longer. So that we're no longer under His punishment. And that forgiveness only comes through the work of Jesus Christ.

[38:01] The work that He did at the cross. Suffering and dying in the place of sinners. He died there taking the punishment of God for all who have faith in Him. We call on His name and whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved because of what Christ has done.

And so these four tonight that went through the waters of baptism have given testimony of their faith in Christ. They've called upon His name and God has saved them. He's forgiven their sins in His grace.

And so they've gone through the waters of baptism. A picture of that sin having been washed away. We're dirty. Filthy actually. Our sin clings to us.

It's affected every part of us. We can't fix the problem. We can't wash ourselves clean. We can't try to clean ourselves up and say, look Lord, I've done some good deeds. Here I am. Save me.

That'll never do. Only through the work of Christ can we be saved. And so we get rid of anything of ourself and we come and humbly bow before Christ and say, God, be merciful to me, the sinner.

[39:09] And baptism is the outward sign that an inward reality has taken place. We've been washed clean. Our sins washed by the blood of Christ. You know, Paul was a persecutor of Christ's church.

He was the worst of sinners. Persecuting people who believed in Jesus to their death. The grace of God was greater than even Paul's sin. And he called on the Lord and he was saved.

And he was baptized. And so have these four that we've seen tonight. So that's why we baptize. It's a command given by God as a fitting picture of the reality of sins forgiven.

Sins washed away. But what does it mean for you tonight? I want to talk to three groups of people.

And first, to the four that were baptized. For you tonight, your baptism is more than just a picture.

That's what we've talked about so far. A symbol, a picture, but it's more than that. It's a means of grace to you. When you receive it by faith, it's God's blessing to you. A word of confirmation that you receive by faith.

[40:15] It's a gift. God has given baptism as a gift to His church. He's commanded that it be done. He's made it to be a blessing for you. A means of grace to you. And so, it's His word of affirmation.

Your sins are forgiven. You are a new creature. He's saying, this one is my child. No longer under my wrath. So receive it as such. Praise God that He's given you that gift.

That blessing. But it's also your word of commitment to God. You're professing that you have faith in Christ. And you're seeking to walk in newness of life with Him. You confess that you're a forgiven follower of Christ.

Christ. And will seek to live by His command. And so as you delight in your baptism tonight, delight in the reality that it symbolizes and pictures. Your sins are forgiven.

Praise God for that tonight. You're not guilty. You stand acquitted. And you're on your way to glory. Thank the Lord for it. You have newness of life.

[41:11] You've risen with Christ. You have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you. You're part of the body of Christ. You've been washed clean. Thank God for what He's done for you in Christ. But then for those of you tonight who have previously been baptized.

You've been through the waters of baptism including our two new members and many other members and others who are visiting perhaps that have been baptized. Your baptism was assigned to you of the very same things.

And so I hope that if you've seen these ones baptized tonight that you remember your own baptism. That you remember when you went through those waters and the means of grace it was in your life. This is the promise of Scripture for those who have faith in Christ. Your sins are forgiven. Praise the Lord. What a relief. What a blessing. You've called on the name of the Lord, had your sins washed away and have gone through those waters yourself.

Are you still delighting in the goodness of God to you? And the freedom that comes from having your sins forgiven. And you should be. It's God's blessing to you. What an unbelievable thing.

[42:22] Unbelievable thing. That a holy God takes hell-deserving sinners like you and me. And that He gives us the way of salvation in Christ and calls us to Himself and gives us that repentance and faith.

And forgives us. Forgives our sin. And what an unbelievable thing that Jesus, the perfect Son of God, took that punishment in our place. Do you remember that tonight?

Do you remember what He's done? As you do remember, may you go your way tonight having your faith strengthened, being reminded again. And I hope that you all will rejoice tonight that God has added not just to our local church, but to the universal church.

He's added believers to His body tonight. And Pastor John earlier mentioned the angels in heaven rejoicing over one who repents. If they rejoice over one, shouldn't we rejoice over four?

And six tonight, added to the body of Christ. Bless the Lord with me that God has brought these into His kingdom. And so for you too, newly added to the church that weren't baptized tonight.

[43:29] I hope you remember the blessings of your baptism when you were baptized. And I hope you know that we rejoice with you that you've been added to this body of Christ and to the body of believers as a whole, to the church at large.

And brothers and sisters, let's pray for these six tonight. Let's pray even as we already have that having begun well in the power of Christ, they might finish well in the power of Christ.

And may that be true for each of us. But finally tonight, a word for those who have never been baptized. Maybe some are here tonight trusting in Christ.

You have faith in Christ, but you haven't yet been baptized. You haven't followed the command of your Savior to be baptized. I simply ask you, why not?

Ananias asked Paul, what are you waiting for? So I ask you, what are you waiting for? Your baptism will be a blessing to you. And if you truly are trusting in Christ and love Him, then you'll want to obey Him, which will include obeying His command to be baptized.

[44:37] So come and talk with one of your pastors so that we can have another one of these services soon. Even in uncomfortable chairs and everything, I delight to be down here tonight to rejoice in these baptisms.

We want to do it again. Come to faith in Christ. Or if you're already trusting in common, then be baptized. But others tonight haven't been baptized because you have no faith in Christ.

you haven't called on His name. And do you know what that means? It means that these blessings that we've talked about just ever so briefly tonight, the forgiveness of sins, and the power to live a new life, and the delight that comes from knowing that we no longer stand under the wrath of God, none of that is yours.

None of it is yours tonight. You're still an object of God's wrath facing His coming punishment. And there are two options for you tonight. You can continue down your present path, indulging your sin, pursuing the pleasure that this world has to offer.

And that will land you in an eternity of suffering and torment. There is no other option should you continue in your sin. You may think that you're free from God's restraining rules, but you are enslaved.

[45:59] You're in chains. But tonight, you can be set free. This is the other option. You can find the freedom and delight that come with repenting of your sin and turning in faith to call on Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners.

Would you come to Him tonight? Would you say, God, be merciful to me, this sinner. Call out to Him and He'll hear you. He'll answer you. He'll forgive your sins. Your sin isn't too great tonight.

You can't say, I'm too far gone. I'm too far down that road. Too set in my ways. I can't turn back and I don't think God would have me anyway. We've just read about Paul tonight. The chief of sinners. Or so he thought. But a great sinner persecuting Christ Himself. And his sins were washed away in the blood of Christ. And yours can be too.

There is no sinner too great. That's to say that there's a limit to the grace of God and there isn't. His grace is infinite. Grace that is greater than all my sin and all of your sin.

[47:04] And so you come to Christ tonight and you trust in Him. And you'll find that the freedom of sins forgiven and no more guilt is unlike any so-called freedom you've ever known.

You ask any believer here tonight about what it means to be free from slavery to sin and free from that thought of guilt hanging over your head impending, coming, doom and punishment.

It's joyous. It's a weight lifted off your shoulders. It's the ability to sleep peacefully at night. So you come to Christ and you can have that freedom of sins forgiven only in Jesus.

Come in faith to Him believing that His sacrifice and bearing the wrath of God are for you and they will be. We have a wonderful Savior from sin.

Jesus, come and find forgiveness in Him tonight. Rejoice in Him tonight. You've been baptized. You have been previously added to the church. Thank God for what He's done in you and these new ones and pray that He'll do it in more of us.

[48:04] That we might come again and have more to be baptized, more added to the church, more voices to join with ours in singing the praise of our God who has loved us, called us, who has forgiven us of our sins.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank You for Jesus tonight. We thank You for His perfect life. We thank You that He suffered and died on the cross in our place.

That He took our sins on Himself. And that You poured out Your wrath on Your own Son. And for all who would come and believe, our sins are forgiven there by the work of Christ on the cross.

We rejoice in it tonight. We delight that You have done this work for us. We delight for these four who have been baptized, these six who are being added to our number tonight. That You have drawn them to Yourself.

That You've poured out Your mercy and grace upon them. And that You've washed their sins away. Thank You. We praise You. We bless You tonight for that work. Encourage our hearts afresh with it.

[49:15] And we pray that You would yet draw lost sinners to Yourself, even tonight. May they see the glory of Christ and what He has done. We pray that as they've heard Your Word and as they've seen the picture that You've given to us, that they might run to Christ and find their sins forgiven.

That they might be added to our number as well. To the church, the body of Christ. Christ, we give You thanks, we give You praise, we are undeserving. Everything short of hell is a mercy from Your hand.

And so we give You thanks for the very breath in our lungs tonight. The ability to be here. To hear from Your Word. And to rejoice in the blessings that You've given us. We do rejoice with the angels tonight that You've added to Your church.

Continue building Your church until Christ should come again. And we thank You and we pray in His name, the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.