

Church Matters: Baptism (Matthew 28:18-20)

Big Idea: Jesus has given us everything we need to do to make disciples, and part of what it means to make disciples is to baptize.

On my right hand I have a silicone ring with two dates inscribed on it: December 22, 1990, and June 29, 1980. These are two of the most significant dates in my life.

The first date – December 22, 1990 – is when Char walked down the aisle and said, “I do.” I still can’t get over that this happened. I give thanks to God for the significance of that date.

But the other day – June 29, 1980 – is also significant to me. It’s the day that I was baptized. On that evening, I stood in front of a church at the age of 12. I professed my faith in Jesus Christ. And my childhood pastor baptized me. I came up from the water drenched and feeling that something significant had happened. It’s still one of the most meaningful days of my life.

I want to talk about the significance of that second day with you today.

For the next few weeks, we’re going to be in a short series called Church Matters. Sometimes we need a bit of a refresher on what church is, because church is central to what it means to be a Christian. We live in a very individualistic culture, but church is essential. I agree with what Eugene Peterson writes:

Love cannot exist in isolation: away from others, love bloats into pride. Grace cannot be received privately: cut off from others, it is perverted into greed.

Hope cannot develop in solitude: separated from the community, it goes to seed in the form of fantasies. No gift, no virtue can develop and remain healthy apart from the community of faith. "Outside the church there is no salvation" is not ecclesiastical arrogance but spiritual common sense, confirmed in everyday experience.

The Christian life can't be lived alone. It must be lived together in a community called the church.

Today I want to look at a passage that talks about one of the most important and yet neglected aspects of what we've been called to do together. We just read the passage. What we have here is a bit of a job description for what we're called to do.

Jesus tells us two things in this passage.

He has authority and he is with us.

Read verse 18 and the last part of verse 20: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me ... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus was about to leave. As we're going to see in a minute, he's given us a job to do. Here's the problem: we are completely incapable of doing what Jesus calls us to do. Jesus is about to hand the baton to a small group of people who don't have a stellar track record, and the job description he leaves them is massive. I'm sure they felt completely incapable of the high calling that Jesus left them to do.

I can relate. I don't know if you've felt this, but what we're trying to do as a church is impossible on our own. The job description that Jesus has left us is impossible. We simply can't do it on our own power.

It's in this context that Jesus gives us two very good pieces of news:

- He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus has the right and the power to do anything he wants in heaven or earth. As John Piper says, "There is no authority in *heaven* which can call the will of Jesus into question, and there is no authority on *earth* that can call the will of Jesus into question. And no power on earth or in heaven can frustrate his will when he exerts all his power to achieve it." He is in complete control. There is no geographic limit to Jesus' power.
- He is with us. God promises his presence and protection to his people. There is nowhere we can go in the world where he is not present with us.

Jesus is in charge, and Jesus is with us. That gives us complete confidence to carry out what Jesus says we're supposed to do.

Pause here. What if we really believed this? When we started this church, I was scared out of my mind. I could see all the reasons that it wouldn't work. It is super intimidating to plant a church here. Church planting is not easy anywhere, but it definitely isn't easy here.

But I figured we could bank everything on these two realities: that Jesus is in charge, and that he's with us. With these two realities, we can move ahead no matter how intimidating things look. I don't know about you, but I would not attempt to do what we're doing if we didn't have the promise of Jesus' power and presence. This gives us confidence to do what Jesus commanded us to do. Our confidence doesn't come from how easy it is or even from the results, but from the power and presence of Jesus.

As he tells us what to do, Jesus wants us to know that he is going to give us everything we need to carry out his instructions. But that begs the question: what has he called us to do?

He's given us a job to do.

Verses 19 and 20 say, "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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Okay. Here's the job that Jesus has given us to do.

The main overarching command given here is "make disciples." That's the business that Jesus has given us. That is the central focus of the command. That's what it's all about. We exist to glorify God and make disciples. That is the purpose of everything we do. We want to see more people encounter Jesus, understand the good news of what he has done, and to grow in knowledge, love, and obedience in every part of their lives. We exist to glorify God and make disciples. That is the big picture of why we exist.

But how do we do this? Jesus unpacks this for us: go, baptize them and teach them.

Let's look at each quickly, and then circle back and focus on baptism.

- Go. Without getting too technical with grammar, this is not the main command of the text, but it is something we're supposed to do. It's implied we'll do it. We're not supposed to stay. We're supposed to take the gospel to places where it's not believed. It's not "Come and see" but "go and tell." We

join Jesus on mission. And because he's with us, we know that our mission will succeed. So let's go.

- Baptize. We'll come back to this in a minute.
- Teach. What do we teach? We teach them everything that Jesus taught. We don't just teach head knowledge. We teach obedience. We teach people to obey. We want people to not just understand but to live in the story of Jesus and what he is doing in the world. We need to be continual learners about Jesus and what he taught us to believe and do.

Go. Baptize. Teach. Repeat. Doing these will accomplish the goal of making disciples. This is the job description that Jesus has given us to do.

But let's zero in on the baptism one for a minute, because we often ignore this. One of the central ways we make disciples is to baptize people. As John Piper puts it:

Jesus made baptism a normative part of becoming a Christian in Matthew 28:19, and the apostles carried this out ... Jesus commands baptism as a normative part of disciple-making because baptism signifies in an outward way what it means to become a disciple—death to self-reliance and a new life of faith following Jesus.

What is baptism?

The Bible teaches that there's a way to respond to the gospel of Jesus. It's the step we're supposed to take that begins our journey as his disciples. It's the way of responding in faith to the gospel. It's why we read in Acts 2:

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Re-

pent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:37-38)

Baptism is the first step you take to respond to what Jesus in repentance and faith.

And what does baptism mean?

It's an outward representation of what happens internally. Let me tell you three things that baptism means:

- **It's a picture of our death, burial, and resurrection with Jesus.** Romans 6 says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4). When we're baptized, we're identifying with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Our old selves died and were buried, and we get to enjoy his new life.
- **It's a picture of our cleansing.** Acts 22:16 says, "Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." It pictures our sins being washed away.
- **It's an acted-out prayer.** 1 Peter 3 says, "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience" (1 Peter 3:21).

That's what baptism is. It's the step that Jesus gave us to respond to his gospel. It shows our death and resurrection with Jesus and our cleansing. It's an acted-out prayer.

One of the big questions we get asked is about the baptism of babies. Is baptism meant for babies or believers? Some see baptism as the new covenant version of circumcision, something that's done with babies to include them as part of the covenant people of God.

I have good friends who disagree with me on this, but I agree with the Joint Committees on Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion of the Church of England:

In every recorded case of Baptism in the New Testament, the Gospel has been heard and accepted, and the condition of faith (and presumably of repentance) has been consciously fulfilled prior to the reception of the Sacrament.

Theologian Millard Erickson says, "The meaning of baptism requires us to hold to the position of believers' baptism, as does the fact that the New Testament nowhere offers a clear case of an individual's being baptized before exercising faith."

Let's draw this all together.

Jesus has given us everything we need to do to make disciples, and part of what it means to make disciples is to baptize. Baptism isn't incidental. It's not optional. It's part of what it means to respond to Jesus in repentance and faith.

That's why June 29, 1980 was such a significant day in my life. And it's why I want to invite you to be baptized. If you have trusted Christ in repentance and faith, respond in obedience by being baptized. It would be our privilege to see you baptized here at Liberty Grace Church.

Lord, thank you that you've given us a job to do. Thank you that you've given us your power and presence. Help us to make disciples. As part of that, may we see as many people baptized here as possible. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.