TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Don Taylor / Opening Prayer by: Daniel Balch
Morning Assembly Song Leader: Brooks McKelroy

#470 Victory in Jesus
#712 Jesus Is Coming Soon

Scripture Reading by: Parker Balch
#662 All to Jesus I Surrender

Communion Devotional by: Robert Ward
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#867 To Canaan's Land I'm On My Way
Sermon: "The Chosen: Andrew"
John 1:40-42

#349 Ten Thousand Angels
#574 Oh, How I Love Jesus
Closing Prayer by: Gus Tristan

Don Taylor's small group meets today
at 5:00 pm at the building

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

Sunday: 9:00am — Bible Study Classes, 10:00am — Worship
Wednesday: 6:30pm — Bible Study Classes

Mar. 23, 2025

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

Does Baptism Matter?

I had a meeting with Liberty County Responds this week, a group of local church and non-profit leaders focused primarily on disaster response as well as now other types of community engagement. We are in the initial stages of trying to form partnerships with the schools here, looking at ways that we can help students and teachers, and there was some lamenting that it is difficult to get more involvement because of differences in doctrine that exist. I pointed out in response that this group exists for benevolence, and that just because we had theological differences that might preclude us cooperating in evangelism, it did not mean that we could not still work together in other ways; I gave the example of our inability to participate in the upcoming Go Tell crusade due to significant disagreements in teaching—some of the leaders of that initiative are part of this group—but that I was still happy to meet with them and look for ways we might be able to serve in the community if needed.

A little after the meeting, my friend Jeff Schulz, the Executive Director of Houston Responds, called me to just ask me what those disagreements were. I explained to him that they were primarily about the response that a person makes to the gospel and the significance of baptism: not just saying a prayer and asking Jesus into your heart, but the very real work of God that takes place in responding in faith, repentance, and immersion. A good conversation ensued; Jeff is not from this part of the country, and was not terribly familiar with churches of Christ, so he was unaware of this emphasis.

I say all that by way of introduction because it occurred to me afterwards that a series of articles on baptism might be beneficial. What if we find ourselves in a similar situation, where someone asks us what we believe about baptism? We need to know what Scripture teaches beforehand well enough to explain it. I have taught an entire Bible class on this topic before, I believe in the first or second year I was here; that was largely based on a book "Baptism 101" by Tim Alsup. The contents of this series will largely be an abridgement of those classes and, ultimately, that book.

But before just diving in, by way of introduction especially in such a controversial area—at least in the religious world—it is good to consider what Paul says in **Ephesians 4:15.** The context here is of unity and growing toward maturity: *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ…*Here is a tremendously important concept: we must first know the truth in order to speak it; realizing the importance and the sensitivity of topic, we must speak it in love. Let's consider those two basic principles as they relate to our study of baptism.

Speaking the Truth
We should all have a determination to find truth and tell it to others, regardless of the topic being discussed. But I think that finding and presenting the truth about baptism is particularly important. That's not only because we have to decide individually what to do about baptism, but also because our beliefs can impact those around us. Let's imagine a truth-seeking friend comes to be to talk about faith. This friend has decided he needs to get his life right, and he wants to follow Jesus. He asks me the question of the jailer in Philippi: *what must I do to be saved*? What do I tell him? Should baptism be a part of my response or not? How do I know? Even if I fully believed what I was saying were true, if my answer is not God's answer, what effect might I be having on his life? I might be hindering him from obeying God and receiving salvation. That's a terrible thought; I don't want to be in that position.

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Steve Lunceford has cancer.

Kim Berka is having health problems.

Bruce Roberts will be having a procedure on Tuesday.

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Steve Ward, Caitlin Smith, Virginia Cole, Ken Coleman, Joe Edd Stifflemire, Donna Wilson, Jo Ella McKewen, Oscar Cantu, Jennifer Stelly, Steve Ward, Geri Cryer, Gloria McKelroy, Scott Overton, Rickey Lucas, Debbie Lynn, George Votaw

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Catherine Parker, Peggy McIntosh, Lois Watts, Willo Dean Ellis

Our Missionaries

Aaron & Marisa Bailey in Montepuez, Mozambique , Rod Kyle in the South Pacific, Mani Pagidopali in India

Upcoming Activities

Elders, Minister meeting Monday, Mar. 24th at 5:30 p.m.

We will have a Houston Food Bank truck on Tuesday, April 1st at 8:00 a.m.

Sympathy

We extend our sympathy to the family of Stacy Lunceford Copeland. She passed away Friday morning.

Food Bank

We served 139 families on Thursday, Mar. 20th at our food bank. That equals to 435 individuals. We had 20 volunteers.

Barrett Station Church of Christ will be having an area wide tent revival in April. We want to show our support for them. Bryant Perkins will be speaking on Tuesday, April 15th at 7:00 p.m. We will have more information and the dates to follow.

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

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Or let's imagine a friend from church comes to me with a question about his baptism. He was baptized as a baby, he explains, which means he had no choice in the matter. Since he didn't have faith, he now wonders if his baptism was acceptable to God. What do I tell him? Do I encourage him to be baptized with an understanding of faith?Do I say that since he has been in water, as long as he has faith now, he's ok? Most importantly, what are my reasons for either answer?

We are not always going to know the right thing to say when talking to others. Often we won't have all the answers; I don't always when people ask me a question. But surely we want to do the best we can! If baptism is wrapped up in our obedience to God—and it is, virtually everyone would agree there, regardless of their particular religious background—and if we want to please him, then we need to understand it as best we can, both for ourselves and for others.

Another reason it is important to study baptism ourselves is that there are so many different views. Some believe that baptism is necessary for salvation (everyone did until Zwingli in the 16th century—but that's another lesson); other believe it is optional, as a symbol of salvation already received. Some practice believers baptism, that it is based on penitent faith; others infant baptism, likening it to circumcision in OT. Some believe baptism is full immersion in water; others that method is unimportant, and sprinkling, pouring, etc. are valid. How can we possibly know the truth with so many competing voices? Should we just throw up our hands and give up? No. We must remember that our standard is Scripture. So as we consider different viewpoints in our study, want to go to that standard.

Speaking in Love

What do we sometimes see happen when people discuss topics they disagree about? Arguments. Harsh language Shouting. Hurt feelings. It doesn't have to be that way, but it seems unavoidable sometimes. That goes for any number of controversial topics we might consider, and religions is unfortunately no exception. That is especially true when talking about issues of salvation: what makes one saved? What makes one lost? Those are extremely important questions. They can also be very sensitive questions. And, sadly, many harsh words have been exchanged through the years on baptism. What can be done?

Well, we must teach truth. But not with an attitude that is argumentative or self-serving. We must teach truth boldly, but teach it in love. Regardless of how true a thing is, if it is presented rudely or arrogantly, people won't listen. Imagine I come up to you and defiantly told you are totally ignorant and wrong, and if you don't do what I tell you, you are going to burn in hell for eternity—and you deserve it! Are you going to listen to me? No way—not even if I'm right! I have injured your pride, turned you off. You are probably going to feel backed into a corner and argue back at me.

You see, it's not enough to simply know truth about something and start telling people. We must tell them with a spirit of love. We must keep an attitude of humility because we don't know everything either. I have seen some people say that speaking the truth IS love because it's true. For one thing, that makes this statement null—it's nonsense. But it's amazing how these people are also the most mean-spirited, dismissive, and self-righteous in their presentation of the truth. That's no coincidence, I think.

So when we think about purpose of this (or any study), I want to know what Scripture says about baptism and salvation. But I don't want to know that just to be able to win a debate, feel smarter, superior. This is not about finding who is right or wrong. It is about finding the truth so that we can prepare ourselves, help others, and please God. Shouldn't we all want that?

Bryant Perkins