

What is Baptism All About?

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Now just for a little while this morning because as part of our worship service we always liked to open the Bible and I preached from the Bible for a little while and I'll do that today as well and I hope you don't mind me doing that.

We believe that it's a living word that is not a dead and dry and dusty and boring book, it's a living word of God and I want just the theme I guess of the sermon is why or what is baptism all about and that's what I want to speak about for a little while and I hope that that's obviously relevant today as we baptised Clementson and James in a little while and it's really great to see everyone here it's tremendous to see so many friends of the families whose babies are being baptised today it's great and it's great that we have two babies being baptised we don't have that very often but we've only got two sets of grandparents that's great work that one out okay there's lots of yeah there's lots of things going on there and it's great but this is the free church and it's a bargain church too for the price of one we like to do things here that bog-off deal you know baptised one get one free and so that's what we're doing today we're having two baptisms and but they're of course hugely valued and rich and expensive there's nothing free about them wonderful but it is great because we have the opportunity today and we would love to do this just to point people to Jesus Christ and to his gospel if you're new here today if you're just unsure about what's going on well what in there's happening if he thinks all a bit weird or completely different to anything you've experienced before and you may be even asking well what is baptism all about and why would we bother doing that it seems such a strange ritual to be engaged in just like to explain a little bit of why we do what we do and why it's real and important and significant and meaningful to us and I want to go first of all really back to basics so two for one thing again this supermarket deals you know the supermarket so just have these I don't know if they still do them and do the shopping very often these days sad admission but you know you get back to basics deals or two for one deals and where you know the everything was stripped back that was just the basic reality that you got there wasn't any fancy packaging there's not going to be any funny fancy packaging today in the sermon but just really look at the basics of what baptism is about because there's lots you know that lots of different churches and there's lots of different ideas about different things different aspects to baptism different bits of baptism and who should be baptized and when should be baptized and and what the significance of baptism is but there's a really basic significance for everyone in the Christian church with regard to baptism and really is that baptism is a badge of association with Jesus of Nazareth that's what it is when we are baptized we are associating in a very close and intimate way with the teaching with the person with the life with the death and the resurrection of Jesus

Christ that becomes hugely significant that has become hugely significant to people who are baptized and every reference to baptism in the New Testament will link it with this person with Jesus so you get you know in Acts 2:38 repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ Galatians 3 baptism has been clothed with Christ Acts 16 those who believed in the Lord Jesus were baptized 1 Peter 3 be baptized with a resurrection of Jesus so Jesus is really central to our understanding of Jesus Christ so anyone who's been baptized has come to that place where they have come to believe that they are more than simply just a random collection of atoms that have come together and that live for a little while and then one day cease to exist people who have chased a sense of God inside their lives and questioned this need for purpose in their existence and looked at morality and looked at justice and beauty and creativity and love and relationships and who have questioned evil and in badness and pride and division and death and have been perplexed sometimes by a sense of their own guilt and questioning as to why they're here and what is about and who have found their answer in Jesus Christ and found their answer in his claims in his teaching in his death in his resurrection and have found that his teaching about us as people being made in the image of God and but that image being broken in the relationship because of sin being separated it's something that resonates and strikes home as true and there are a lot of people that you know say well you know you're bonkers because you believe in that and you're mad because you can't see them and you know this is just a you know a glorified Santa Claus or figment of the imagination or Disney character for weak-minded and weak-willed people and you can't see God so you can't know him and for us what we have found to be true is that Jesus claims to be and reveals himself to be God in the flesh so that he has revealed himself very clearly and come become like us in order that we can know him and in order that we can understand him and he came not just to sit kind of be like a movie picture for us but he came to be a substitute for us to be an example but a substitute to be the kind of person the human person that we couldn't be and yet take the the just sentence of separation from God and death that we all face because of a rebellion against God and he paid the price and rose victorious over the grave to show that any who trust in him also has the price paid and their sins forgiven and can live with him and that is kind of very briefly in a nutshell the back to basics but that we realize we come as people to recognize and see who Jesus Christ is and how much he's made sense of the good and of the evil and of the purpose and of the longing and belonging that we're looking for and baptism is very much that symbol of association with this Jesus this person and what he has come to do as we see in this chapter with the testimony the witness of Paul and what he speaks about

and it's our symbol of association with him so I just want to say a couple of things about that one is that's because of that it's for as it's life-changing and the other thing is that it's life-defining so for believers and that's the bell if someone wants to get that I think that'll be going quite a lot during the service so it's life-changing and it's life-defining okay so for the Christian and the message of the gospel for us isn't kind of incidental it's not just by the way it's not just a kind of icing on the cake it's not just a little bit extra for us it's life-changing and life-forming and life-defining and that's hugely significant and it's one of the reasons we like to share that message life-changing and here in the passage that Richard read for us is the story of Paul who was also known as Saul who became Paul changed his name when he became a Christian and whose life was dramatically changed on the road to Damascus so a lot of us will have heard that expression that you might have had a road to Damascus experience sometimes it's related to becoming a Christian sometimes people use it just in a wider context when something really big and important or dramatic road to Damascus experience so anyway that's the story that he's telling here and it's really about the change that happened in his life and this chapter and some other chapters earlier on in Acts tell us about that change because Paul was someone Saul whatever you want to call him he what was he before he was a Christian well he was a real academic he was a clever bloke he was a zealot he was passionate he was keen he was a religious zealot he was a God fear he was part of the Pharisees which were a religiously extreme and committed sect of the Jews he was upright morally good and he was proud and he was proud of what he achieved and he's proud of what he done and he was a interestingly talks about hearing being a Jew which is fine isn't it but he was also a citizen of Rome and that was very unusual it was really unusual for a

Jewish person person to be a citizen of Rome now I wonder if there's a sweepstick going in the church to see if I would mention America in the service because I've just come back from America well I'm going to on the plane back from America I watched Pompey okay it's a film it's in the pictures here but if you fly with Eirilingus you get the most up-to-date films and we I was watching Pompey and what was interesting about that film was well there was lots of things there was lots of pretty awful things to be honest about the film as well but it was great great kind of digital effects in the film but it was interesting is that one character well various characters but it was all about you know Roman citizenship and the kind of the spread of the Roman Empire and what was really interesting was just how you could see and I'm not sure how historically accurate these Hollywood blockbusters are but how privileged and how powerful Roman citizens were you know wherever they went in the world and you know we see it later in this story that Paul uses his Roman citizenship to in effect to get better treatment for because he's getting beaten up because he's passing on the message of the gospel and it was a real position of privilege and honor to be a Roman citizen so he had all these things going for him and he was passionately anti-Christian he hated Christians his life work was to root out this young Christian movement that was beginning and beat up the leaders and destroy this fledgling work because it was standing against what he believed to be the truth and 15 chapters earlier although it's mentioned here we're told that Paul was the guy who was sitting watching over the the murder of

[11 : 53] Stephen who was the first Christian martyr and Paul sat there giving his approval to that and the we're told that the clothes of Stephen were laid at the feet of a young man called Saul so he was you know powerfully the authority was he was an anti-Christian zealot who really wanted to destroy the Christian faith so not your typical kind of food for conversion really and yet here we are with his story this road to Damascus story where we're told that he meets with the risen savior as Jesus Christ who died third day rose again and ascended to heaven he meets specifically here with Jesus about noon I came here to Damascus certainly a bright light from heaven flashers I fell to the ground and heard a voice saw so why do you persecute me not my people would you persecute me and so says who are you Lord he says I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you're persecuting so he meets Jesus and kind of in that instant we've got Paul or Saul and I'm not quite know what I call him here as he changed the policy still saw but Paul as he looks back saying thought he was right he thought he was good he thought Christ was for losers and then all of a sudden he meets with Christ and he realizes he's on the Damascus road but he's on the wrong road he's in the wrong corner and he's with the wrong team and he's using his energies and he's using his his gifts and he's using his talents in the wrong way completely absolutely upside down and the majesty of this risen savior that's kind of inexplicable to us certainly isn't it I'm completely arrests him in that moment stops him literally stops him in his tracks and this is great paradoxical irony in the story isn't it that he's blinded by the light famous song blinded by the light in that moment but never in reality as it's seen so clearly so he's blinded physically by what he's seen but for the first time he's seeing clearly and so Paul comes from being a terrorist to be in a church planter with the gospel of love of Jesus Christ there's a huge change huge change in his heart huge change in his attitude and his hatred and the bitterness and the anger and the pride and the envy and all these things that have really motivated him and driven him get turned on their head and he knows in an instant that he's been forgiven and he's been accepted and that he has calling to do and so God says to him you know go and well God doesn't see them at that point but later on Anna Anais as a representative of the church says to him go get up be baptized and wash your sins away calling his name now that okay for most of us here maybe for one or two but for most of us the change hasn't been at least outwardly quite so dramatic but for Tom and Charlene and

Ross and Annie and for the Christians here the same reality is true is that we've been changed dramatically from the inside out by meeting with and no I coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ and we have that same purpose we've to get up we've got things to do we have been baptized because we want to have this badge of association with Jesus Christ and it is we are people who call on his name and that's tremendous we have come to recognize that greater love has no one in this than that you lay down his life for his friends and that's what the Bible says is the motivation and the desire of Jesus we've been made clean we've been forgiven been given life we've been given hope and not just by some kind of random punter in figment of our own imagination but by this great historical character Jesus Christ who's not only a historical character who uniquely uniquely in all world religion and everything has claimed not only to have died for a purpose and died deliberately and died radically but raised again and is alive this judge of all the earth the one and whose image we've been made and the one to whom we give account is the one who goes into the dock himself and pays the price and sets us free so that death doesn't have a hold on us as we trust in him and that's that's what's on offer in the Gospel that's what's from offer from Jesus Christ and it for us it's become the big issue isn't it's become the most important is it's important time in

Scotland just now a lot of big decisions to be made towards September big issues important things whichever way you vote you know there's and sometimes we have big issues in our lives and our jobs and our families careers whatever we do there's lots of issues but for us this is the biggest issue that he offers a heart change and he offers us acceptance and belonging and belief in him it's a great gift and he says I'm the way the truth in the life nobody comes to the father except by me so it's an important message and Jesus Christ is really important to consider and think about so it's life-changing and just very briefly before we move on to the baptism it's also life-defining so can I move in a way a little bit from Paul here because you might say oh that's okay for Paul he's a Damascus road experience and it's okay for Tom and Charlie and Ross and Annie and Eric and other people here that's fine they're grown up but what what is all this it's gonna be babies today are going to be baptized they can't have had a Damascus road experience it's ridiculous why why are babies being baptized you can understand grown-ups who become Christians getting up being baptized wash your sins away and call in the name of God but babies what's that about well the Bible makes clear throughout its right from almost from the beginning that becoming or becoming a believer and trusting God is never just about the individual ever just about the one person always has it's like throwing a stone into water very always as ripples it always has wider effects and wider impact and wider influence and God is always chosen to bless not just individuals but also work through families in a covenant relationship with them and when he made this great promise of grace right the big almost almost at the beginning of the Old Testament with Abraham this promise of grace was to him and to his children and there was to be a mark of the covenant a badge of belonging that they were to engage in circumcision and so in the New Testament that was reiterated on the day of Pentecost with a gospel message and it was a gospel message that was to go out to people to those who believed and to their children and there's one or two instances of baptism in the New Testament people apart from Paul here who was kind of on his own but you've got examples of Lydia who believed in the Philippian jailer who believed in they believed individually but were also told that then immediately their whole households were baptized and it seemed to be a carry on of this Old Testament focus on the sign and the seal being not just for the individual believer but for their children and this covenant sign is for parents but it's also parents with faith in Jesus

Christ but also for their children that means a couple of things it means privilege and it means responsibility means privilege the core reality for the mums and dads here today as their kids grow up is that their faith will be examined most and will be exposed most in a home context yeah we can all be anything in church can't we we could just put on a suit and look good on the outside and we can people ask is yeah everything's fine things good we look at nudge the person next to us and we all share the same faith and we think everything is going well but it's what we're like in the home that's what we're really like isn't it that's where the mirror kind of exposes what we're like what we're really like and how we really live and so kids will be the first ones always to expose whether what you have and what you believe in how you live is genuine and so very much that I guess I'm speaking here a bit more to the parents that it's a great responsibility to be genuine and to be real doesn't mean to be perfect far from it it's saying that yeah we make mistakes and we screw up but we go to God and we ask for forgiveness and we seek to live by grace but baptism for their children is a sign to the children that they themselves are set apart to be brought up in that atmosphere in that home and so that the foundation of their lives their worldview their morality their behavior their teaching is Christ-centered because they're set apart and because their parents have faith in Jesus Christ so there's an other ought to be we look for in our lives in our families in our homes and that was feed of grace of forgiveness and of sacrificial love and that's a great blessing that's a great privilege for children to have that they will I'm sure and we seek to for all our children show them as well the way of the cross not afraid to do that we're not afraid to show them and speak about very real things to them we will show them what we believe to be and what Jesus claims to be the truth because we believe that truth will set them free children of promise with which baptism is a sign and God is faithful to work through families and to work through children and so it's a symbol very much a sign of belonging for the whole wider family and that's hugely significant and it's also a privilege because in baptism it's a public service it's part of the church and so the children are kind of embraced into the wider family of the church and so today when we take the vows in a few minutes I asked Tom and Charlene and Ross and Annie to take vows but I also turn to the congregation and the congregation take a vow to pray for and to love the children who will be brought within the Christian church here and that's a great privilege to be part of not just their own nuclear family as it were but part of the wider family but it's also a responsibility baptism isn't a kind of magic formula for the children so we don't just get the way and done and that's alright everything's fine and we move on it doesn't bestow salvation in any kind of mystical way to any child it's a privilege it's an honour it's a setting apart but the children come to the place where they accept Jesus for themselves he's been laid before you in your parents lives and in your teaching and in your upbringing and in the worship that you receive and Christ will be the one who accepts you when you confirm your need for him and come to faith in him as well to set him apart in your hearts not just in your lives so it's life changing and it's life defining either way back to

baptism points to the centrality and the importance of Jesus Christ he is the life changer and I hope you enjoy your remaining time with us and enjoy the baptism which will be very shortly and if you have never heard about the Gospel of Jesus Christ before I do invite you to consider him very seriously consider his claims which are unchanging and because humanity is unchanging and our needs are unchanging the frailty of our life is unchanging our future imminent departure is unchanging is something very real to us and our hearts are unchanging and we need the Gospel of Jesus Christ he has transformed our lives as believers and we deeply and meaningfully want to share him with other people also because we believe he will turn your life upside down for good be a challenge but absolutely for good and for eternity so may God bless our few thoughts on that

[25 : 30] I'm just gonna pray briefly so we bow our heads and let's pray Lord God we ask and pray that you would bless your word to us we thank you for that living word of God from the by we thank you for the testimony of Paul that is given in this passage in Acts and that he in being changed had purpose and fulfilled that request that command indeed to be baptized to have that badge of belonging of ownership and to call in the name of God and we know how costly it was for him how everything that he had held on to his dear as important as significance including his own goodness and his own religiosity and his own understanding of things that he just count them as rubbish when he understood the love and the grace and the freedom and the acceptance of this love of God which was absolutely complete and we pray that we would live that and share that in our own lives and that it would be significant to others here today so bless us as we also move into the baptism and maybe something that we will remember and something that will be good for us to consider in Jesus name amen