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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**September 11, 2016**

**Baptism 2016**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just again, I thank you for all the little ones that we see here and what an incredible encouragement it is to us to see them and what an incredible responsibility it is to guide and shape and mold their little hearts and minds and spirits. Lord, this morning we want to come before you mostly with the older people, the older folks who still need our hearts and minds and spirits guided, shaped and molded by your Holy Spirit, and so we pray this morning, Lord, as we are going to be once again examining just what baptism is, that you would be here guiding us by the power of your Holy Spirit and by your word. We pray that you would again enable us to by your Spirit's power, make it of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, today is our picnic as you well know and it's going to be at the Spears and we're getting together for really an opportunity for folks to be baptized. And again, we meet and we've done this for years, and we used to baptize in Spears pool -- pond but it's become so weed-choked and it's gotten so low that we basically

brought a swimming pool on, so we're going to be doing our baptisms in a pool. And if you've never been baptized, I want to address this morning three questions that you need to have answered before you consider taking this step. Number one, the question is, what is it? Just what is baptism? And number two, what is the point? What is the point of baptism? And number three, the most important question is why should I get baptized? And so I want to basically reprise the message that I gave last year that I devoted to answering those questions.

And the first one obviously is: What is baptism? And the word "baptize" is really just a transliteration of a Greek word, the Greek word is "baptizo" and it means to immerse in liquid. You know, if the Greeks wanted to dye a piece of cloth, it was baptized in a manner of speaking by immersing it into a dye-filled vat. So the word "baptize" simply means to immerse in liquid. So what's the point, what is the point of immersing somebody in this particular liquid, water? Well, the actual ritual of baptism consists of being plunged beneath the surface of the water and then immediately being brought back out of the water. And this idea, this concept or this picture that we see in baptism is a powerful symbolic act and it demonstrates three different aspects of the believer's new life in Christ. And in that one act there is death, there is burial, and there's resurrection, and it's all summed up

in this one single act.

So the very first thing that we want to look at, the very first aspect of this act is death. God says in *Romans 6: The wages of sin is death*. And he says in *Ezekiel 18: The soul that sins, it shall die*. Now, that's a spiritual pronouncement of fact that is more certain, more set and more determined than any physical pronouncement that we can see. God says when we sin, we die. Now that might be a hard thing to convince people of because I mean every one of us in this room, we are all sinners for sure and yet all of us are still very much alive. And because the judgment of sin is not immediate, folks tend to think that it's nonexistent. Listen to what God told Adam in the Garden of Eden. He said: "*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*" God says you eat the fruit and you will die. Well, we know that Adam and Eve both ate and guess what? I mean they didn't immediately drop dead. And so we say, well, is God making an empty threat here? Well, let's look at what actually happened. You see, Adam and Eve did have an immediate change and it was a death but it was a spiritual death and not a physical one. Adam and Eve both went from being flawless creatures who had shared perfection itself with their creator to now becoming flawed, fallen creatures who were no longer perfectly

suited for fellowship with their creator, and it happened the instant that Adam's teeth touched that fruit, but neither Adam nor Eve realized the full extent of what had happened. I mean there were certainly immediate but non lethal effects and we can see that, they instantly realized that they were naked, they instantly were filled with guilt and they were filled with fear as well but there seemed to be no immediate physical effect. Well, they didn't realize it but the moment that that fruit touched their lips, they began the process of dying, and for them it took hundreds of years to complete. For us it takes considerably less time. And understand, Adam and Eve did not even have a frame of reference for what dying consisted of. They had no idea what death was. They'd never experienced death before. There was no death before. And unlike Adam and Eve, we all know that we are in the process ourselves of dying. We all know that we're born into a world where death is always there but it's usually there at a distance. And it's that distance, it's that separation from cause and effect, from sin and death that allows people the fantasy of thinking that somehow or other their sin is not going to find them out. You see, if the moment that you sinned you died, there'd be no sin but there'd be no people because we'd all be dead. And so because God withholds his judgment and because he gives us ample opportunity to repent, we frequently blur the connection from sin to death. That wasn't the case for Jesus. Isaiah prophesied of his coming in

Matthew 4:16. It said this, it said: "The people living in darkness have seen a great light; and on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." You see, Jesus came literally into a world of the walking dead and he came offering life itself. Jesus knew precisely that the wages of sin was death because it was our sin that led to his death. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him should not" what? "should not perish but have everlasting life." So we make no mistake about it at all, every one of us understands we're on our way to perishing and we're on our way to perishing because we have inherited the results of Adam's rebellion and so sinner is really -- sinner is who we are by nature. Sin is what we do by desire. It's the direction that our fallen nature bends toward now because all of us have inherited Adam and Eve's predilection for law breaking and that includes a very deep unconscious resentment of anyone and anything claiming authority over me.

You know, there's a reason why we cling to evolution with a religious fervor, and make no mistake about it, evolution is a religion. It's got religious principles just like any other religion but its primary assertion and the reason why it is so clung to by so many, its primary assertion is that I am the product of nothing more than random chance and eons and eons of time, and

therefore I owe allegiance to no one, to nobody. And over and against that God says, no, no, I am your King and you owe allegiance to me and you are my subjects. Folks think that God gave us the law, that he gave us the ten commandments as a set of rules that were kind of designed to make us worthy of heaven, but that's not what the ten commandments are all about. Let me put it to you another way. The ten commandments are a set of non-negotiable demands and they're demands the King has placed upon his subjects and he says violating any one of those commands is a capital offense. It's a capital offense for which everyone who violates deserves the death penalty. Listen to what *Romans 3:19* says, it says: *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.* We look at those words: Accountable to God. I mean you think about it, most folks don't even think they're remotely accountable to God and they certainly don't think that they're guilty of a capital offense because all of us think of death as this natural process instead of the consequence of sin. I mean after all, it's Disney who told us that there's this circle of life, and guess what? We get to die and participate in that circle, and all Disney's circle of life could ever tell us about death is the idea that after we die, guess what? We get to rot and we get to become fertilizer and some other creature uses us as fertilizer for its life before it dies and it

rots and continues the cycle. For some reason or another people find that attractive. I just don't understand it but the point is you know, Disney says, great, we're part of this circle of life. God says it was never supposed to be this way. This is not what natural is. You see, it was Adam's rebellion that introduced us to sin and brought death into our world. We read it this morning, *Romans 5:12: Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.* You see death seems natural to us because we're surrounded by it. We're just -- we're used to it. It seems to be so part of our nature but it's not. We were intended to live in a world where there was no death. But because of Adam we are all, all of us born under a death sentence that takes a lifetime to execute. And it's the distractions of living that tend to make us forget that we're all really in the process of dying. Growing old starts little by little to remove those distractions. And I know, I mean, I just turned 67. And I kind of figure I'm like the car with about 120,000 miles on it. It's got some decent miles left but not without some kind of mechanical intervention. And, you know, and we get together and now my age group, you know, I still think like I'm 13 or 14, sometimes like I'm five or six, but that's the way all adults are, we're like that and now that we get together with people my age, we all sound like cars that have lots of miles on them. You know, this one's got a tranny that's going, this one's

got an exhaust leak, this one's got a seal that's no longer working, and we're all sitting around talking about the various things that are not working in our lives, and it forces us to address our mortality. But, you know, our mortality is directly related to what Adam did. He's the one that brought us mortality because Romans says: *Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin.* And so eventually every one of us is going to come face to face with the fact that we're all facing the death penalty and we're facing it because of Adam's sin and ours. And the fact that we're able to put such a distance between the sin that's in our lives and the death penalty that sin demands, well, it only serves to hide the obvious and that is we all live under a death sentence. But here's the critical thing to understand. We live under a death sentence and God hates that. He truly does. See, God sent his Son into the world to rescue us from the curse of that death so that whoever believes in him should not what? Should not perish but have eternal life. And so Jesus came to perfectly fulfill what those laws demanded, what those ten commandments demanded and then having done that, he stood in our place bearing the guilt of our sin so that he could do the dying to save us. We did the sinning, he did the dying. And death is the very first thing that baptism is all about. See, baptism first of all symbolically illustrates death. Secondly, when you go under the water, you represent burial. But here's the good news about



burial. It's the good news about death and burial and baptism in that this is a death that you choose to die and that death is really the door to life. Jesus said in *Matthew 10:39*: *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* What baptism represents is your willingness to lose your life for Christ's sake and Christ partnering with you in your new life. You see, when you go under the water, you're being buried. But you're not representing just yourself, there's not just one burial when you go under the water, there's actually two. You see, in baptism you do not go under that water alone. You are symbolically participating in Christ's death as well as your own. And when you go under that water you're symbolically saying when Christ died, I died with him. Listen to *Romans 6:3*, it 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.* So we are dead, then we are buried with Christ as we go under the water. First we have death, then we have burial; and thirdly, when we come back up out of the water, we have resurrection. *"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."* See, we are raised, we are released as we come back out of the water. In Christ, we are now dead but we're dead to sin. You

see, as we come back up out of the water we visually demonstrate that truth.

And now we want to just ask ourselves, okay, what exactly does that mean? You know, I lust, I envy, I lie, I cheat, I gossip, I steal, can I get baptized and suddenly all of this nastiness goes away? Well, to answer that question put that way, the answer's no, that's not what happens. Baptism doesn't do that at all. See, baptism doesn't confer new life. It is God alone who can do that. Baptism simply demonstrates that new life has already taken place. See, Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 that we were all by nature dead in our trespasses and sins, and no matter how hard we try, we still lusted, we still envied, we lied, we did all of those other things that God's law had forbidden. We, all of us had hearts that were dead set against the will of God. Baptism is a symbolic way of demonstrating that that person, that person whose heart was once dead set against the will of God, that person has now died and he or she is the one being buried with Christ under the waters of baptism. Now some folks think, they mistakenly think that the waters of baptism are designed to cleanse us from sin. They don't have the power to do that. The only power to do that lies in the blood of Jesus Christ. So baptism does not cleanse you from sin. It is instead a sign that that cleansing's already taken place. I mean, it's actually a celebration and demonstration of a successful

heart transplant that's been undertaken by God himself. And that event God makes perfectly clear in Ezekiel 36, I mean you've heard me quote this over and over and over again, this scripture from Ezekiel 36 but you might not realize its connection to baptism. This is *Ezekiel 36:25*, God says: *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and gave you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

See, when God speaks about burying our old lives in baptism and coming up out of the water with this newness of life in Christ, he's talking about something far more profound than simply cleaning up our acts. *Colossians 2:13* says: *When you were dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. What God is talking about here is literally dying to one way of living and being created, re-created to live in a new life. He's talking of having that ice cold heart of stone surgically removed and a living, breathing heart of flesh surgically implanted. God says *I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. For all of us, that's a brand new way of walking. I mean I**

want you to compare your old life to new life. In the old days God says you must do this or you must not do that. And so we felt bound, we felt imprisoned by that law. I mean not only could we not do it but we had no desire to do it in the first place. Well, that's what God calls being a prisoner of the law. I mean you see fallen mankind's default drive of rebellion is actually a unique form of slavery. Understand it is a slavery that deeply, deeply resents liberation. It is the slavery that will fight you tooth and nail to remain enslaved. It's a slavery that completely blinds those who are enslaved to what their status really is. They think they're free as a bird, but they're not.

I've given this illustration many, many times before, and I was trying to think of a different one, but this -- this is the best one that I can give. It's 39 years old, it's from when I was living in San Francisco. So if you've heard it before, it just bears repetition. I was working with a group of non-Christian carpenters in San Francisco, I was the only Christian, there were three other non-believers and we frequently had discussions about my faith. And a lot of those discussions centered around how they thought that my Christianity just robbed me of my freedom. You know, you Jesus freaks, blah, blah, blah, it's the same kind of thing, they would constantly be having this discussion, and they would say once you become a Christian, your life is over, there's

no more sex, there's no drugs, there's no rock and roll, there's nothing except holiness. Why would anybody want that? So I was working with a fellow named Tom and we were at his apartment for lunch, and we sat down at his kitchen table and I noticed that off to the right he had a huge stack of *Penthouse* magazines and so we're sitting there eating lunch and Tom pointed to the magazines and he said, "See, you Christians, you can't even look at a magazine like that." Well, interestingly enough there was a brand new *Penthouse* right there on the table still in its brown paper wrapper. Back then they had the decency to put them in brown paper wrappers. So I pointed to the magazine, and I said, "Yeah, but Tom, you don't have the freedom to not look at that magazine." He looked at me and I said, "I can look at that cover and get up and walk away. You can't." It's funny, he sat there and he looked at me and then he got a grin on his face, and the grin told everything. The grin told him and me that he knew that what I said was true. He knew he didn't have the wherewithal to not look at the magazine. I mean, he hadn't realized it before but he realized then that he was enslaved to that magazine. And at least he had the honesty to recognize it with his grin. And what he was recognizing was that what he was touting as his freedom was actually a form of slavery. And whether it's lust or envy or bitterness, jealousy, gossip, or all the other sins that plague us, without Christ every one of us is hopelessly addicted to something.

Listen to what Martin Luther said. He said: "Scripture represents man as one who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick, and dead, but in addition to his other miseries is afflicted, through the agency of Satan his prince, with this misery of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, unfettered, able, well, and alive." I mean, that's perfect. That's exactly what Tom was experiencing. Tom never realized that he was a prisoner. But here's where the prisoner part becomes self-evident. Tom knew where he was, he may have even hated where he was or not, he may have not cared at all, but one thing he knew is that he knew he lacked the will to change where he was. I mean he knew what the right thing was and he knew how you're supposed to do the right thing, but here's the key. He didn't have the ability to want to do the right thing enough to do it. That's what being a prisoner of the law is. Paul said in *Romans 7:14*: *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate.* See, as long as we live, the law has this power over us and it's a power to demand what we cannot supply. And in baptism, that plunging under the water is a living picture of what it means to die to that power that the law has over us. And what we're talking about is dying to one way of living and being re-created to living in a new one. And so when we say we are dead to sin, we mean that the power that sin used to have over us

is now ended and it's ended because we're dead to it. We died. Because once a person has died, he's been freed from any power that the law has over him.

Now once again I'm probably dating myself but I remember those pictures in *Life* magazine of Mussolini and his mistress, bullet riddled carcasses hanging upside down in the square having been pelted and beaten by the crowd. Well it's a futile gesture, they hated Mussolini, it was a futile gesture to beat his corpse because he was already dead. You can beat a corpse, you can desecrate it, you can threaten it, you can torture it but obviously it's only symbolic because for all practical purposes nothing can touch a dead man. And in one sense he's absolutely free. The only problem is he's dead.

But what if you had that very same freedom that the law could no longer touch you because the law saw you now as a dead man but you're still very much alive. Well, this is what baptism represents. Again *Romans 7: Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.* See, in baptism what you're doing is you're symbolizing that the day you placed your faith in Christ is the day you died, and you died to the law and its demand of

perfection. And you died to the law because Jesus Christ stood in your place and received your punishment. So now you're dead as far as its demands are concerned, you've been buried with Christ under the water and now as you come back up, you are resurrected with him as well. *Again, 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.*

Now if all of this talk of death and burial and resurrection and all of this symbolic stuff sounds too spiritual for you to kind of get your mind around, let me make this as practical as I can. I raise the question about dying to sin, and I said, you know, here's the problem, we sin, we lust, we envy, we lie, we cheat, we steal, we get baptized with Christ and it all goes away. This is what really happens. This is what really takes place. See, I become born again first way prior to baptism, I won't say way prior but prior to baptism I get born again first. When I'm born again, God's Holy Spirit begins to indwell me, he begins to live inside me. *Romans 8:9* says: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* So here's the amazing thing. When I'm born again, I become a temple as it were of God's Holy Spirit. This is where he now lives. And while he's living within me, he begins to change my sinful desires



and they literally begin to transform. Well, baptism represents the dying of that old man and all of those old sinful desires that he had, and it means that not only can the law no longer legally touch me because I've been now viewed as dead in Christ, but I also find now that my very desires are different, my very desires of that, of a new alive creature that was dead before and they're not the same desires that you had all along. These are now desires that begin to line up with God's desires. And so you start to do now what the law used to require but you do it now for the pleasure of doing it. You know, worship and giving and singing and praying, these are all things that I could have lived quite nicely without, thank you, before Christ came into my life. But now that's unthinkable. And now we do those things not because we have to but because we want to. See, the difference now is that our heart of stone has been replaced with this heart of flesh and we now freely do what the law requires. Listen to how Jonathan Leeman sums this up. He's describing the freedom that this heart transplant provides. He says this: "Biblical freedom is this remarkable state in which we want what God wants. How does this happen? How are we set free to want what God wants? At one time God's righteous law imprisoned us, but now, we are free to be 'slaves of righteousness' and Jesus and Paul want to call that 'freedom.' How is that possible? It is possible because of the new covenant. The spirit gives us new hearts. He creates new desires in us so that

we desire to love God and love our neighbor which is to fulfill the law."

Now I'm 67 years old, for 43 of those years, I've been a new creature in Christ. But I can still vaguely remember my first 24 years when I was a prisoner of the law, and I remember hating my life but hating the thought of God even more. I mean if someone could have ever stopped me back then and described for me what my future life would be like including what my likes and my dislikes would be, in a million years I would have never believed them. If somebody told me at age 24 that the second half of my life would consist of going to church and studying scripture and praying and doing it all for the pleasure of worshiping God, I would have burst out laughing. I would say, "You're joking. You can't possibly be serious." See the newness of Christ means a brand new set of appetites that God places within you. And again, let me make a distinction here. If someone said to me as I grew older, well, you really do need to find God and find religion. You really need to get kind of cinched into that thing because it would be good for you." If somebody said that, I might have even paid attention to that. I might have seen some positive benefit for my kids, for my family in kind of doing the God thing and perhaps I would have been willing to hear that. I might have even done the religion thing because it's got lots of obvious benefits. And make no mistake

about it, religion has a lot of benefits. You see, Romans 3 tells us there is no one, no one who seeks for God. But you and I both know that on any given Sunday morning there are hundreds of thousands of churches and synagogues and temples and mosques that are filled with people who certainly look to me like they're seeking God. Well in reality what most people are seeking is the benefits that they think seeking God can provide rather than God himself. Because it's God who says there's no one who seeks just me, G-O-D, and not all the other stuff. And there's lots of other stuff. All other religions offer a sense of security, a sense of belonging, an identity structure, a social structure that make them very, very attractive. And there's benefits there that can have absolutely nothing to do with seeking God, and lots of contemporary westerners now choose their religion like any other life-style choice, on the basis of a perceived benefit. But God has nothing to do with it really. And I can tell you right now, had God not intervened in my life, had he not done this spiritual heart transplant, I, too, might have made the same kind of life-style choice. And what I never would have believed is someone telling me that I would be worshiping God not for the benefits but for the sheer pleasure of worship. If someone had told me even later in life that the joy and the deep satisfaction of a relationship with Jesus Christ would far surpass anything I would have imagined, I would have dismissed it as the rantings of a madman. But that's

what newness in Christ is all about. You see, we start loving what Christ loved, we start hating what he hated. We start valuing what he values because the Spirit of Christ is now inside us, he's taken up residence inside us and he tells us: *I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* And all of this is symbolically captured by the simple act of baptism. We're dead in our sins, buried with Christ under the water and then raised with Christ as we come back out of the water.

And so to review, first question was: What is baptism? Well, it's just plunging something under liquid. What is the point of baptism? It is a symbolic picture of our death, our burial and our resurrection in Christ. It is not a cleansing from sin but rather a picture of the cleansing that's already taken place through the blood of Christ. And finally the most important question of the three is: Why should I get baptized? I mean, why should I get baptized? Well, the simplest answer is because God tells us to. It's simple obedience. You know, Peter's first sermon made it crystal clear, this is -- remember just the history of what's going on, it's the very first day of Pentecost, the gift of tongues has descended on all the assembled believers, everyone's speaking and being understood in their native language, and Peter speaks these words which are extremely powerful, he says this: *"Men of*

*Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know -- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." And I said apparently Peter never got the memo, you're not supposed to be that nasty, you're not supposed to be that unfiltered, you're not supposed to be that blunt, you're not supposed to make people feel guilty by telling them exactly where they stand, you're not supposed to accuse them directly of murder. Well, that's what he did, I mean, just opened up and let the people have it. And he went on to say in Acts 2:36: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." 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?" It's also important to note here what Peter did not say to that question. He did not say, "Smile, God loves you." He did not say, "God loves you and has a perfect plan for your life." What he said was this: And Peter said to them, "Repent 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." Peter said that because shortly before that day, shortly before Jesus ascended into heaven*

Jesus himself gave a parting message to Peter and the rest of the disciples, and this is what he said in *Matthew 28:19*, he said: "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. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." So Peter in his first sermon is doing exactly what Jesus commanded him to do, and God is clearly very pleased with Peter's approach. *Acts 2:41* says: So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. That was a remarkable day. You know what that day also marked? It was the beginning, the birth of the church. Realize baptism marked the birth of the church. And now two thousand years later we are repeating the very same process.

And again that leads me to this question that I want to ask this morning and that's: Why are you here? You know, if you're a member of the kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit is living inside you then you know he is uniquely conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ, he is changing and molding the very appetites that are within you and that includes the appetite that has caused you to want to be here in the first place. You know, we've said it many, many times, there's a thousand other places you could be this morning, I mean, what made you decide to be here? And I would say

is it not because God has placed within you a desire to meet with other believers, to share worship and the word of God, to become part of a chosen, called-out group of fallen sinners that God has elected to pour his blood, his grace and his mercy into in order to display his glory? That's the living body of Christ. That's the church. It's all part of the newness of life that's represented when we come up out of the water in baptism. You see, the ceremony of baptism affirms the death, the burial and resurrection of Christ and my resurrection along with him. *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.* But understand, that newness of life is always displayed within the context of the church, of the local body of Christ. See, baptism is often the first opportunity to publicly affirm what God has done in my life. And at the same time it affirms the church's role as an alternative reality to the world that we live in. And baptism proves -- you know, there's a lot of -- unfortunately there's a lot of lone ranger Christians out there today. Baptism proves you cannot be lone ranger Christian because nobody baptizes themselves. God designed baptism to be a physical declaration that you are lining yourself up with God's people in his body. He says we are to be in the world but not of the world, and baptism represents our entry into the kingdom of God while we're here on earth. And as such it's always, always a

public declaration. Baptism is never a private affair, even if it has to be done surreptitiously, and it has to be done that way in lots of countries, it still takes place before witnesses and it still tells the world I am publicly declaring my allegiance to Jesus Christ and his church no matter how small that church may be.

Jonathan Leeman sees baptism in athletic terms and it really has to do with publicly acknowledging the team that you're on. And you know, lots of times the ones who are really coming forward for baptism are young men and women, boys and girls who actively see these things in terms of athletics. But the important point that I want you to see through his analogy is that conversion and baptism are two very different and distinct things. See, at conversion by God's grace personally and privately we change teams. We leave the team of darkness, the kingdom of darkness, we enter the team of light, the kingdom of light and all things become new. 2

*Corinthians 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

That's conversion. Baptism takes place afterwards. Sometimes it's a matter of hours, sometimes it's immediate. Remember the Ethiopian eunuch? He wanted to be baptized immediately. You know Peter, three thousand people got baptized the very same day. And sometimes it's a matter of years, sometimes the Spirit is working on us over and over and over again, you need to get this done, I



need to take this step of obedience. But understand, getting baptized always takes place after we've switched teams. And athletically speaking, baptism says now that I've switched teams, I'm going to switch jerseys.

You know, I've used this analogy before. I've talked about LeBron James and the LeBron James story. The story centers around the best basketball player in the world and what does is he decides after many, many years he's going to leave one team and he's going to join another. And you have this top level athlete switching teams and he switched from Cleveland to Miami. And how did they talk about this change? Well, they showed LeBron and he's now in Miami and he's holding up a Miami Heat jersey, this is his new jersey, this is his new identification. And in Cleveland, the team that he left, they show them enraged, burning his jerseys on a bonfire. LeBron had very clearly and very publicly switched teams and traded jerseys. And if you follow it all you know the story has changed again. He left Miami, LeBron did, after winning two championships with them and then he returned home to Cleveland. He traded in his Miami Heat jersey in for a Cleveland Cavaliers and this year he brought them finally a championship. And so you look at somebody like LeBron, you say, well, twice now he's publicly declared his allegiance to a different sports team and twice now he's done that by switching jerseys. Now he does it for money,

which is fine, he does it for fame. Understand, it's only temporary in his case because even the best athletes like all of us understand, we're still in the process of dying. Baptism is entirely different. It represents a new start with a new team and this team goes on forever. It's got a new captain, the captain is King Jesus, and he's the one who gives us life eternal. And what baptism is is publicly putting on a new jersey declaring my locality to this team for all time.

This is the way Mr. Leeman puts it when it comes to what baptism represents, he says this: "Whether people's decision to swap allegiances comes gradually or quickly, a point comes when they must decide to change their team: 'You've been playing for the red team. You've been thinking about switching to the blue team. What's it going to be -- red or blue?' Conversion occurs at the moment the decision is made. You've left one team and you joined another." But Leeman goes on to say this: "Baptism, then is putting on a new jersey. It's when we publicly identify ourselves, by the church's representative authority, with his death and resurrection. All the thinking and journeying come to a head right there. Through the church, Jesus asks whether we will die to ourselves and our own rule, be buried with Him, and trust that he will raise us up with Him according to a new power and rule." Well today some of our people are going to publicly enter the

water, go under the water, and then rise up out of it having obeyed their Lord. And by God's grace and through his mercy they have been led from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. They've already switched teams, now they're going to switch jerseys. And by God's grace through baptism, we're going to have the pleasure of watching them switch jerseys. Let's pray.

*Father God, again, I want to speak to anybody out there that is hearing of the tug of the Holy Spirit saying this is something you need to do, this is something, it's a step of obedience you need to take and I just would encourage anybody who is being pressed on by the Holy Spirit, to come to me, speak to me, speak to one of the elders about doing that very thing this afternoon. I just pray Lord, that if there's any that need to go forward in baptism you would touch their hearts. I just again want to pray for any -- the elders come forward as well for anybody else who needs prayer this morning, and I just again want to pray that this celebration that we have at the Spears pond, this celebration of this death, this burial and this resurrection in Christ would be one that would bring honor and glory to you. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*