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

**September 9, 2018**

**Baptism Sunday**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, again we just want to praise you and thank you for your goodness. We just again praise you and thank you for the gifts that you give us and not the least of which is the gift of your word. So again, Lord, this part of our service is the part where we open up your book, the part where we ask for the presence of your Holy Spirit to make your book understandable and once again we pray for the ability to not just make it understandable but to make it a permanent part of our lives, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as you know today we were going to have our baptism picnic but the weather decided otherwise, so begin our new date is the 23rd, that's two weeks, that's two more weeks to prepare because I'm going to be preaching about baptism, two more weeks to perhaps decide that this is something that God wants you to participate in. And so we want you to just take this time and just use it to think about perhaps the idea that maybe God is giving you two more weeks to decide about baptism.

And if you've never been baptized, there are three questions that we would like to answer for you this morning before you consider this step. Number one is just what is baptism; number two, what is the point of baptism; and number three, why should I get baptized? I want to reprise my baptism message of last year to answer those questions and first the obvious one is: What is baptism? Well, the word "baptize" is a transliteration of the Greek word "baptizo" which means just simply to immerse something in liquid. If the Greeks wanted to dye a piece of cloth, it was baptized by plunging it into a dye-filled vat. So the word "baptize" simply means to immerse in liquid. So what is the point of immersing someone in 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. It's a powerful symbolic act that demonstrates three different aspects of a believer's new life in Christ. In that act, there is death, there is burial, and there's resurrection, and it's all summed up in that one single act.

So first let's talk about death. God says in *Romans 6: The wages of sin is death*. He also says in *Ezekiel 18: The soul that sins, it will die*. This is a spiritual pronouncement of fact that's more certain, it's more set, it's more determined than any physical pronouncement we might think about or see. God simply says when we sin, we die. I mean now it might be a hard thing to convince

people of, I mean all of us in this room are sinners for sure and yet all of us in this room are still very much alive. And because the judgment of sin isn't immediate, folks tend to think that it's nonexistent. This is what God told Adam in the Garden of Eden, he said in *Genesis 2:16*, 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, you're going to die. Well, Adam and Eve both ate the fruit and guess what? They didn't immediately drop dead. Was God making an empty threat? Well, consider what actually happened. They did have an immediate change and it was death, but it was a spiritual death, not physical. Adam and Eve both went from being flawless creatures who had shared perfection itself with their creator to now becoming flawed, fallen creatures, no longer perfect, no longer 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. Now there were certain immediate but non lethal effects, I mean, they instantly recognized and realized that they were naked. They were also filled with guilt and they were also filled with fear. But there seemed to be no immediate physical effect. Well they didn't realize it but the moment that fruit touched their lips, they began the process of dying that took hundreds of years to complete. Now for us it takes considerably

less time. Adam and Eve didn't even have a frame of reference for what dying was all about because they never had experienced death before. Unlike them, all of us know that we are all in the process of dying because we've been born into a world where death is always there but it's usually at a distance, and it's that distance, 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 you sinned you died, there'd be no sin because there'd be no people. And because God withholds the judgment that we're due, because he gives us time and opportunity to repent, we frequently blur the connection from sin to death. Now that was not the case for Jesus. Isaiah prophesied this about his coming. This is in *Matthew 4:16*, it's Isaiah's prophecies, it says: *"The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."* So what we're talking about with Jesus is, Jesus came literally into a world of the walking dead and he came into that world offering life itself. And Jesus knew precisely that the wages of sin was death because it was our sin that led to his death. *John 3:16* says: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not" -- what? -- "should not perish but have eternal life."* So make no mistake about it, all of us were on our way to perishing because all of us had inherited the results of Adam's

rebellion. Sinner is who we are by nature, sin is what we do by desire. It's the direction that our fallen nature is bent toward because all of us have inherited Adam and Eve's predilection for law breaking and that predilection also includes a deep unconscious resentment of anyone, anywhere, any way that tries to claim authority over us.

You know there's a reason why evolution is so popular. There's a reason why people cling to evolution with such religious fervor, and it has more to do with authority than it has to do with science. You see, evolution's primary assertion is that I'm the product of nothing more than random chance and vast expanses of time, therefore I owe allegiance to no one. God disagrees. God says he is the creator, we are the creatures. He is the king, we are his subjects, and we disobey the king at our peril. You know, many folks think that God gave us the law, that he gave us the ten commandments as just kind of a set of rules designed to make us worthy of heaven if we do a good job at it. Well, they are not. What the ten commandments really are is a set of non-negotiable demands that the king has placed upon his subjects. And understand, violating any of these commands in any way is a capital offense for which all of us have earned the death penalty. I mean listen to what *Romans 3:19* 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.*

Accountable to God, I mean, most folks don't even remotely think of themselves as accountable to God. And I bet most folks don't think of themselves as guilty of capital offenses and death as our sentence because all of us think that death is just a natural process. I mean after all, the gospel according to Disney is that there's this circle of life and we're just a part of it by dying. And all Disney's circle of life could ever offer us about death was this idea that after we die we rot and we become fertilizing for something else before it dies and rots and continues the cycle. I mean how folks find that attractive, I just, I don't get it. I do know that this was never supposed to happen. It was Adam's rebellion that introduced us to sin and brought death into our world. *Romans 5:12* says: *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 may seem natural because we accept it as such but it's not. We were intended to live in a world where there was no death but because of Adam we are all born under this death sentence that takes a full lifetime usually to execute. I mean it's the distractions of living that make us forget that we're all of us, every single one of us, in the process of dying. Growing old just removes the distractions. I mean I know, I just turned 69. I can tell you I'm not looking forward to growing old physically. I've been to enough nursing homes to see folks just

gathered around who have lost their sense of purpose, their drive, their energy, their enthusiasm, in many cases having lost their physical sense of even who they are. And you go to those places and you see them all kind of gathered around, you get the sense that many of them are just waiting for their number to be called so they can leave this life. And it makes me realize that death and dying is the fate that awaits all of us because we're all, every single one of us, under the sentence of death. The funny thing about aging is that it forces you to address your mortality. And understand, mortality is directly related to Adam's sin. *Romans 5:12: Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin.* And so eventually every one of us will have to come face to face with the fact that every one of us is facing the death penalty for Adam's sin and our sin as well. And the fact that we're able to put such distance between the sin in our lives and the death penalty that sin demands only serves to avoid the obvious, that we're born and we're all living under the sentence of death. But understand, God hates that. God sent his Son into the world to rescue us from the curse of that death, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Jesus came into this world to fulfill what the ten commandments demanded and having done that, he then stood in our place bearing the guilt of our sin. You know, we did the sinning and he did the dying. And death is the first thing that baptism is all about.

You see, baptism first symbolically represents death. Secondly, going under the waters of baptism represents burial. But here's the good news about death and burial in baptism. The good news is this. This is a death that you choose to die, and it's the door to life. Listen to what Jesus said in *Matthew 10:39*. He said: *"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* Baptism represents your willingness to lose your life for Christ's sake and Christ partnering with you in a new life. Here's the amazing fact. When you go under that water, you are representing not just one burial but two. You see in baptism you do not go under that water alone. You are there symbolically participating in the death that Jesus died for you. When you go under that water, you are symbolically saying when Jesus died, I died with him. Listen to what *Romans 6:3* says. 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 what God's saying is we're dead and buried with Christ when we go under the water.

So first we have death to our old life; secondly, we have burial, we are buried with Christ in our sins; and thirdly, there's 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.* You see, when we come up out of the water, we are raised and released in Christ, we are now dead to sin. As we come back up from the water, we visually demonstrate that truth. Now just what does "dead to sin" actually mean? You know, I lust, I envy, I lie, I gossip, I steal, then I get baptized with Christ and it all goes away? Well, the answer to that situation put that way is no, it does not just go away that way. Baptism doesn't do that at all. Baptism does not confer new life, because God alone 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. He says no matter how hard we try, we still lusted, we envied, we lied, we did all those other things that God's law had forbidden. We all had hearts that were dead set against the will of God. Baptism is the symbolic way of demonstrating that that person, that person who once had a heart that was dead set against the will of God, that person has died. He or she is the one being buried with Christ under the waters of baptism and raised up in Christ when we come up out of the water. Some folks mistakenly think that the waters of baptism are what cleanses us from sin. That's not the case. Water does not have the power to do that. The only power to do that lies in the blood of Jesus Christ. So understand, baptism is not what cleanses us from sin, it is instead a sign that the cleansing has already taken

place. Baptism is actually a celebration and a demonstration of a successful heart transplant that's been undertaken by God himself. And that event God makes perfectly clear in Ezekiel 36, something that you've heard me quote over and over again. What you might not realize is its connection to baptism. Let me read you the quote from Ezekiel again. 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 give 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 the old life in baptism and coming out of the water celebrating the newness of life in Christ, he's talking about something far more profound than cleaning our acts up. *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 speaking about here, it's literally dying to one way of living and then being re-created to live in a new life, of having an 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.* You know, for all of us that's a brand new way of walking.

You think back to where we were beforehand, God's law said you must do this and you must not do that, and we felt imprisoned by that law. Not only could we not do it, we had no desire to do it in the first place. We were what God calls prisoners of the law. You see, fallen mankind's default drive of rebellion is actually a unique form of slavery. It's a slavery that deeply resents its liberation. It's a slavery that fights tooth and nail to remain enslaved. It's a slavery that completely blinds the enslaved to what their real status actually is. I mean they think they're free as a bird but they're not.

You know, the best illustration I can give for this occurred over 40 years ago when I was living in San Francisco. I've used this a number of times and you've heard this, some of you, but it's worth repeating. I was working with a group of non-Christian carpenters who thought I was a religious nut. I mean, we had frequent discussions about my Christianity because they saw me as a curiosity. And a lot of those discussions centered about how my faith or what they thought of my faith, how it took my freedom completely away. And the way they saw it, if you were a Christian, that's it, there's no sex, there's no drugs, there's no parties, there's no fun. So why in the world would we want that? I was working with this one fellow named Tom and we went to his apartment for lunch, and we sat down at his kitchen table and I immediately

noticed he had a huge stack of *Penthouse* magazines there on the side. And as we were eating, Tom points to the magazines, he says, "You see, you Christians don't have the freedom to look at a *Penthouse*." And interestingly enough there was a brand new *Penthouse* on his kitchen table still in the brown wrapper that they had the decency to package those things in back then. I pointed to the magazine and I said, "And you don't have the freedom to not look at it." I mean I said, "Look, I can look at the cover of this magazine and still just walk away and you, Tom, you can't do that." Well he instantly got a grin on his face and he got that grin because he knew that what I said was true. He knew he did not have the wherewithal to not look at that magazine. I mean he hadn't realized it before but he understood that he was enslaved to it. And at least he had the honesty to recognize with that grin that what he had been touting as freedom was really a form of slavery. And whether it was lust or envy or bitterness or jealousy or gossip or all the other sins that plague us, without Christ we are all hopelessly enslaved to sin.

Listen to how Martin Luther puts this. It was Martin Luther who 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." See my friend Tom had never realized that he was in fact a prisoner. But here's what the prisoner part becomes self-evident. You see, Tom knew where he was and he may have even hated where he was, or not, but he also knew that he lacked the will to change where he was. He knew where the right thing was, he knew how you're supposed to do the right thing, he just didn't have the ability to want to do the right thing enough to do it. He was a prisoner of the law. Listen to how Paul puts this in *Romans 7*, he says: *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 I hate.* See, as long as we live, the law has the power to demand what we cannot supply. In baptism, the plunging under the water is a living picture of what it means to die to the power of the law. I mean we're talking about dying to one way of living and being re-created to living in a new one, and when we say we are dead to sin we mean that the power that sin used to have over us is now over. It's been killed. It's been ended by a death. Because once a person has died he's been freed from any power be that the law has over him.

I remember years back seeing pictures of Mussolini. He was the fascist dictator of Italy during World War II. I remember seeing pictures of him and his mistress hung upside down in the town

square, their bodies riddled with bullets. They were hung upside down and people were pummeling their bodies with sticks and rocks. It was a futile gesture because they were already dead. I mean you can beat a corpse, you can desecrate it, you can threaten it, you can torture it, but it's only symbolic because for all practical purposes nothing can touch a dead man. In one sense he's absolutely free. Of course 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 it saw you as a dead man or woman but you're very much alive? Well, this is what baptism represents. Again, listen to *Romans 7*. It says: *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.* You see in baptism you symbolize that the day you placed your faith in Christ is the day you died. And you died to the law and its demands of perfection. You died to the law because Jesus Christ stood in your place to receive your punishment, so now you're dead to its demands. You've been buried with Christ under the water and you're resurrected with him as well and again, *Romans 6:4*: *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.*

You know, all of this talk of death and burial and resurrection might sound way ethereal, spiritual, kind of up there, impractical. How do I grab ahold of this? Well let me make this as practical as I can. I raise the issue about dying to sin this way. I say I lust, I envy, I lie, I gossip, I steal and then I get baptized with Christ and it all just goes away? Is that the way it is? Actually what happens is this: I become born again first, and when I become born again, God's Holy Spirit begins to live inside me. Again book of Romans, *Romans 8:9* says: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if -- and it's a gigantic "if" -- 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 when I'm born again, I become this new temple where God's Holy Spirit now lives. And as he comes into me, he now begins to change my sinful desires and they literally begin to transform. Baptism represents the dying of the old man with these old sinful desires and it means that not only can the law no longer legally touch me because I've died with Christ but I also now find that my very desires, well, they become brand new as well. They're not the same desires I had all along. These are the desires that now begin to line up with God's desires. You start to do what the law used to require but now you do it for the pleasure of doing it. I mean you think of things like worship and giving and singing and praying. I mean these are all things that I can live quite nicely without, thank you, before Christ came

into my life, but now that's unthinkable. We now do those things not because we have to but because we want to. The difference is now our heart of stone has been replaced with his heart of flesh, and we freely do now what the law requires.

Jonathan Leeman sums it up nicely. This is how he describes the freedom that a heart transplant provides. He says: "Biblical freedom is the 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."

I look at myself. I'm 69 years old. For 45 of those years I have been a new creature in Christ. But I go back to the first 24, and during those first 24 I was a prisoner of the law. And in fact I hated my life. But it's critical to understand, I hated the thought of God even more. I mean if someone could have ever stopped me back then and described for me then what my future life would be including what my likes and dislikes would be, I would just -- I wouldn't have believed him. If somebody were to tell me

at age 24 that in the second half of my life I'd be going to church, I'd be studying scripture, I'd be praying and singing all for the pleasure of worshiping God, I would have burst out laughing. In fact I'm sure I would have laughed in their face. The newness of life in Christ means there's a brand new set of appetites that God has placed within me, within you. But let me make a distinction here as well. I mean if someone said to me as I grow older I'm going to feel a need for God, for religion and for church, I might have as a 40- or 50-year-old man paid some attention to that. I mean I might have seen some positive benefit for my kids, maybe for my family in doing kind of the God thing. And so perhaps I would have been willing to hear that. I mean I might have even been willing to do the religion thing for its obvious benefits. And make no mistake about it, religion, any religion, has its benefits. *Romans 3:10* tells us no one, and that's absolutely unequivocal, *no one seeks for God*. But we all know that on any given Sunday morning there are hundreds of thousands of churches, and during the week there's churches and synagogues and temples and mosques that are filled with people who are apparently seeking God. Well, in reality if we went down to the very, very bottom line, what God is saying is they're not really seeking God, they're seeking the benefits of seeking God rather than seeking God himself. Why? Because God says no one seeks him on their own. And all religions offer a sense of

security, a sense of belonging, a social structure, an identity structure that can make them very attractive. I mean there's a benefit there that can have nothing to do with seeking God, and lots of contemporary westerners now choose a religion like you would make any other life-style choice, on the basis of what is their perceived benefit. You could argue that God has nothing to do with this. I know that if God had not intervened in my life, if he had not done a spiritual heart transplant, I, too, would have made such a lifestyle choice. And what I never, never would have believed is someone telling me that I would be worshiping God not for the benefit but for the sheer pleasure of doing so. I mean 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 ever would have imagined, I would have dismissed it as the rantings of a madman. But that's what newness in Christ is all about. We start loving what Christ loved. We start hating what he hates. We start valuing what he values because the Spirit of Christ has now taken up residence within us. As he says in *Ezekiel 36: I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* You know, all of this is symbolically captured by the simple ritual of baptism. We are dead in our sins, buried with Christ under the water and then raised with Christ as we come back out of the water.

So to review, we look back at our three questions. Question number one, what is baptism? Well, it's merely plunging something underwater. What is the point of baptism? Well, it's 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 we have question three: Why should we get baptized? Well, the simplest most basic answer is because God tells us to.

You know, Peter's first sermon made the importance of baptism crystal clear. It was on the very first day of Pentecost, the gift of tongues had descended on the assembled believers and everyone spoke and was understood in their native tongue and so Peter is speaking to the crowd and his words are extremely powerful. This is what he said he said: *"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."* Now apparently Peter never got the memo that you're not supposed to be that blunt, that you're not supposed to make people feel guilty by telling them exactly where they stand, that you're

not supposed to directly accuse them of murder, which he did. Peter just opened up and let the people have it. He went on to say: *"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?"* I look at that, I say what a question! What an amazing question to hear! What's important to understand what Peter did not say in response to their question, he didn't say, *"Smile, God loves you."* He didn't say, *"God loves you and has a perfect plan for your life."* Listen very carefully to what he said. *And Peter said to them, "Repent" -- and what? -- "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."* There's your marching orders. Peter said that because shortly before that day, shortly before Jesus was ascended into heaven, Jesus himself gave a final parting message to Peter and the rest of the disciples. He said this in *Matthew 28*, 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 was doing exactly what God commanded him to do. And we can tell that God was clearly 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.*

There's something else going on here that you have to understand. You have to put this in context because what is also taking place here is that baptism marks the birth of the local church. And two thousand years later, we're going to be repeating the same process. And that leads to one final question this morning. The question is: Why are you here? I know we've said it many, many times, there's a thousand other places you could be but here. So why are you here? I mean 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 what the living body of Christ is. That is what we are. That is the church. See, if you are a member of the kingdom of God and God's Holy Spirit is living inside you, he is uniquely conforming you into the image of Jesus Christ. He is shaping and molding the very appetites that are inside you. That includes the appetite to want to be here in the first place. I mean that's all part of the newness of life that's represented when we come up out of the water in baptism. See, the ceremony of baptism affirms the birth and death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ and most importantly my resurrection

along with him. Again, *Romans 6:4*: *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 something. What's going on here, the newness of life is always displayed within the context of the local body of Christ, the church. We have no idea how precious this body, this ekklesia, this group of called-out ones, this meeting of people, we have no idea how precious this is to God. Baptism is oftentimes our first opportunity to publicly affirm what God has done in our lives while at the same time affirming the church's role as an alternative reality to the world that we live in. You know, baptism proves that you just cannot be a lone ranger Christian because nobody baptizes themselves. I mean God declared and designed baptism to be a physical declaration that you're lining yourself up with God's people in his body. God tells us 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 a public declaration. Baptism is never a private affair, I mean, even if it's done surreptitiously as it's done in countries that persecute the gospel, it's still taking place before witnesses and it still tells the world I am publicly declaring my allegiance to Jesus Christ and his church.

Jonathan Leeman sees baptism in athletic terms and it really has to

do with publicly acknowledging, as he says, whose team are you on? And the important point in all of this is to understand that conversion and baptism are two very different things. I mean at conversion by God's grace personally and privately what he's saying is we change teams. This happens at conversion. We leave the kingdom of darkness, we leave that team, and we enter the kingdom of light, a very new team and all things become new. *2 Corinthians 5* says: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* So we've already switched teams, baptism takes place afterwards and sometimes it's a matter of hours. If you remember the Ethiopian eunuch, he got baptized right after he believed. There's the three thousand that got baptized after Peter's sermon. But you all know that sometimes it can also be a matter of years. But understand, the act of baptism always takes place after we have switched teams. And athletically speaking, baptism says now that I've already switched teams, I want to publicly switch jerseys. Baptism represents a new start with a new team that's going to go on forever with a new king, King Jesus, the one who gives us life eternal. It is a publicly putting on of a new jersey. You're taking off the old jersey and you're putting on a brand new one. You're declaring your loyalty to this team for all time. Mr. Leeman puts it when it comes to baptism's represents, he says this, he says: "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?'" Well, conversion occurs the moment the decision is made. You've left this team and you're playing for another team. You've been playing for the world. You place your faith in Jesus Christ's perfect life offered up for you at the cross and now you're playing for the kingdom. Well, Leeman goes on to say: "Baptism, then, is putting on of the 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, two weeks from now some of our people are going to publicly enter into the water, go under the water and then rise out of it, having obeyed their Lord, and by God's grace and mercy, they will have been led from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. They've already switched teams, and by God's grace, through baptism two weeks from now, we're going to have the pleasure of watching them switch jerseys. Let's pray.

*Father, I just again, I thank you for this extra two weeks that the weather has given to us and I want to pray right now if there are*

people who have already switched teams, who have left the kingdom of darkness and are now in the kingdom of light but have never switched jerseys publicly, that you would be speaking to them, that you would be speaking of the need to publicly declare their allegiance to the new team, the team that represents eternal life. So I pray, Lord, in these next two weeks you would continue to move in the hearts of those who need to get this done, who need to say I have in obedience come forward for baptism. I pray that you would speak to hearts, I pray that people would get and understand what a privilege this is and that we would do this all to your glory. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.