

Text: Acts 10:34-48 (esp. v. 47-48)  
 Title: What's Stopping You?  
 Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB  
 Date: January 6, 2008

**“Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.” Acts 10:47-48**

If you'll excuse me for a moment, I'd like to perform a baptism.

[take Timbit and dip it into the coffee – take a small bite!]

In Ontario, we used to have a chain of donut stores called “Dunkin’ Donuts.” If they had existed in NT times, they might have been called, “Baptizin’ Donuts” because the word “baptize” really means “to dip, immerse or submerge.” In other words, to “dunk.”

The early Baptists in England weren't called “Baptists,” they were called “dunkers” because they “dunked” people when they came to faith in Christ. This set them apart from the other churches that baptized by sprinkling or pouring.

In a recent Christian newspaper the question was asked, “is the practice of believer's baptism drying up?” There seems in some places in North American Christianity to be a de-emphasizing of baptism. While this de-emphasis might be true in North America, it certainly doesn't seem to be the case elsewhere in the world.

Illir and Kate Cami are missionaries serving in Athens, Greece, with International Teams. They write:

“For some years we have worked with a ministry to refugees in Athens, Greece. Athens is part of the “Refugee Highway,” where people from around the world pass through on the road to a better life. In May 2006, one of the missionaries in Athens, Kallie Skaife, reported what happened to an Iranian man identified as “M.”

In 2003, everything “M” knew was destroyed by an earthquake measuring 7.45 on the Richter scale. He was tortured by the question of why something like this would happen. “M” went to live with relatives in Afghanistan, was married, and had a daughter. But he was still filled with despair.

Leaving his family behind, “M” headed west and ended up in Athens, staying with more relatives. Though he and all his family were Muslim, “M” became interested in Christianity, finding himself strangely moved by the sight of the crosses he saw

decorating the Orthodox churches in the city. "M" was given a Bible and started reading. Since his relatives forbade such a thing, "M" used a tiny flashlight to read during the night after his uncles were asleep.

He studied the Bible this way for two years. Finally, "M" realized God was calling him to be born again. He contacted the refugee ministry center, declaring his faith in Christ and asking for more information.

On Sunday, May 7, 2006, "M" set his alarm for 6 a.m. He wanted to spend time reading his Bible and praying that morning, because on that day he was to be baptized at a fellowship with other Iranian believers. But "M's" cousin had discovered the plan. Before "M's" alarm went off, the cousin boiled water in a saucepan and poured it on "M" while he slept, scalding both thighs and one arm. "M" came to the baptism anyway. Standing before those gathered, the burns on his arms clearly visible, "M" declared, "No matter what they do to me, I will love Jesus."

After the baptism, "M" said he felt like standing in the center of the city of Athens and shouting to everybody, "I belong to Christ!" (© 2008 PreachingToday.com John Beukema, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania; source: a personal e-mail sent by Ilir and Kate Cami of International Teams)

Let me make one thing clear this morning...

***Baptism is a decisive declaration of our commitment to follow Jesus.***

In many places of the world people still understand the decisive nature of this act. Many religions will tolerate talk about Jesus. They'll let you say you believe in Jesus. They'll let you read the Bible and talk about Jesus. But the decisive turning point is baptism. Once you've been baptized they see you as "one of them." Once you're baptized, the rejection, the hostility and the persecution begins in earnest.

For 2000 years people have been giving witness to their faith in Jesus through the simple drama of believers' baptism. The act of baptism is really a simple two act play. Let me read the "script" for this drama from Paul's Letter to the Romans.

**"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Romans 6:3-4**

The **first act** pictures our belief that we died with Jesus when he died on the cross.

It was our sin that he bore;  
 It was our punishment that he took;  
 It was our death that he died that day.

We were buried with him – that’s what is pictured as we are lowered under the water. We’re saying that Jesus died for me and I will die for Him! My old life, the life of sin and rebellion, is gone!

The **second act** follows immediately without an intermission. As we are raised out of the water, we are portraying our belief that Jesus was raised from the dead to new life. But we’re not just pointing back to Jesus’ resurrection. We’re also making a declaration that we are going to live a new life depending on Jesus’ resurrection power at work within us. Baptism declares in a visual way what Paul declared in 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.” 2 Corinthians 5:17**

In the early centuries of the Christian church, when believers were baptized they were sometimes given a new set of clothes to wear after their baptism just to emphasize the fact that...

***Baptism is a decisive commitment to follow Jesus in a new life***

In Acts 10 we read about a decisive commitment made by Cornelius and others to become followers of Jesus.

Background:

- Peter was invited to Cornelius’ home to share the story of Jesus with him and some friends he had gathered
- Like any good story teller, Peter’s story has a beginning, a middle and an end.
- What Luke gives us in Acts is just the outline of Peter’s talk

1) Jesus **began** by being baptized by John

- the Holy Spirit came upon him and gave him power

2) The **middle** of Peter’s story was about the life of Jesus

He told them how Jesus had gone about doing good and healing people under the power of the devil

Peter might have included...

- eg. Peter’s mother-in-law was healed by Jesus
- eg. Jesus fed 5,000
- eg. If there were children in Cornelius’ home, Peter might have told them how Jesus blessed little children

- eg. Jesus healed a man who lived in a cemetery horribly enslaved by demons

But one thing is certain. Luke tells us that he told them how Jesus had been killed on a cross BUT raised from the dead 3 days later

- he told them there were witnesses who could prove that Jesus was alive

- 3) The **end** of Peter's story wasn't the resurrection of Jesus. He warned Cornelius and his family that the resurrected Jesus had been...

**"...appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead." Acts 10:42**

This was the heart of Peter's story – there was coming a day when all humanity would stand before Jesus the Judge and the question would be: guilty or innocent?

But Peter made sure to drive his story home to it's point! Humanities only hope on that day of judgement would be found in Jesus. The Gospel message that Peter preached was...

**"...that everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through [Jesus'] name." Acts 10:43**

As Peter came to the end of his story about Jesus, the Holy Spirit "came upon all who heard the message."

- v. 46 "speaking in tongues" – languages they'd never studied (cf. Acts 2)
- an evidence that God's Spirit had come upon them
- they had come to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord

**God had done something in the lives of these people!**

And so Peter asks, **"Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people ...?" (v.47)**

***Baptism is the celebration of the decisive reception of the Gospel of forgiveness of sins***

From this moment on, these people were ready to face the judgement that awaits the entire human race! Through faith in Christ, they had received the forgiveness of sins and they had peace with God through Jesus.

***One sermon and they were ready to be baptized!***

- all that most of these people knew about Jesus was what they had just heard from Peter

- they had received peace & forgiveness from God because they had simply believed the story about Jesus that Peter had told them

## What's keeping you from being baptized?

### Four Reasons Why You SHOULDN'T Be Baptized

#### #1 If you think baptism will save you – Don't get baptized!

If you haven't made up your mind about Jesus, don't get baptized. Baptism is a simple statement, "I Believe in Jesus." It's faith in Jesus, belief in who He is and what He's done for us that saves us, not baptism.

The Bible says...

**"...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Romans 10:9-10**

I get asked the question all the time: Can I be saved without being baptized? The simple answer is: Yes. Salvation is about faith in Jesus.

Baptism **pictures on the outside** what God has already done for us on the inside the moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

- 1) Jesus died for us – we go under the water in death
  - Jesus took MY death penalty for sin – through his death for us we have forgiveness of our sin
- 2) Jesus rose again for us – we come up
  - Jesus has given me the power to live a new life for Him – through his resurrection life we have the gift of eternal life

If you still need to make up your mind about Jesus, I encourage you to join me for **Christianity Explored** (starting on January 16) – check the bulletin for more information or give me a call. We're going to be studying the Gospel of Mark to answer three questions: 1) Who is Jesus? 2) Why did he come? 3) What does it mean to follow him?

#### #2 If you think it will give you some special power – Don't get baptized!

If you're struggling with stuff in your life, you need the power of God's Holy Spirit, not baptism. Notice that the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his friends **BEFORE** they were baptized in water.

When you come to believe in Jesus, the Bible says that God gives you his Holy Spirit to live inside you. (Romans 8:9-10) The Bible calls this **baptism “in [the] Spirit.” (1 Cor 12:13)**

**“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:13**

If you need God’s power in your life, you need Jesus, not baptism. Remember this truth: Water baptism pictures on the outside what God has done on the inside.

**BUT obedience to God IS empowering** – if you’re being baptized because you really believe in Jesus and want to obey His command then baptism could mark a turning point in your experience with God.

- the ritual doesn’t give you the power
- the water doesn’t give you the power
- BUT God promises that when we obey Him we come to know His power working in us in a deeper way.

**#3 If you’re doing it because it’s something that should be ‘done’ – Don’t get baptized**

Baptism isn’t something we check off of our list of spiritual “to do list.” It’s not a “rite of passage.” It’s not about getting “done” to fulfill some Christian ritual. Paul’s teaching on baptism in Romans that we read earlier mirrors what he wrote about the Christian life when he wrote...

**“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17**

The “old” passed away when we identified with Jesus’ death in baptism. The “new” came when we identified with Jesus’ resurrection in baptism. Baptism is a pledge: our old life is gone; our new life in Christ has begun.

You might be sitting there this morning thinking to yourself, “I’ve ‘done’ that. I’ve been baptized.” But baptism isn’t an end in itself – it’s the declaration of a beginning with Jesus that will go on until Jesus comes again.

Let me ask those of us who have been baptized: ***How’s your baptism going?*** Are you keeping your commitment to live a new in the power of the resurrected Jesus? Is your old life really gone?

**#4 If you’re doing it because someone else thinks you should – Don’t get baptized!**

God isn't interested in us "going through the motions."

- He wants you to believe in Jesus and from personal conviction

A number of young people will be baptized next Sunday. You need to know that Pastor Paris has been very careful in the classes he led to make sure he communicated to these young people that this is between them and Jesus ALONE! It's not because their parents want them to be baptized!

Parents, pastors, spouses, friends – we can all urge you to consider what the Bible says about faith in Christ and baptism BUT you need to make up your own mind about Jesus.

It's between you and Jesus!

### **Three Reasons Why You SHOULD Be Baptized**

#### **#1 If you believe in Jesus as your Lord & Saviour – Get baptized!**

If you want to declare once and for all that you are a follower of Jesus.

- you have come to believe that He died for YOUR sins and that you've been forgiven
- you believe that Jesus is alive and that He lives in YOU and you're going to live your life for Him.

How much more do you need to know?

How much did Cornelius and his friends know?

- they didn't have time to ponder and wonder and study – they were followers of Jesus and the rest would unfold along the way

Baptism marks **the BEGINNING** of your Christian life, not the end!

It's "**Registration Day**," not the Final Exam – that comes later!

It's like your **learner's permit** rather than your driver's license.

You're not saying, "I've arrived!" -- you're saying "**I'm on the way!**"

I love the picture painted by the story told by Jim Denison. When Denison was in college...

*... he served as a summer missionary in East Malaysia. While there he attended a small church. At one of the church's worship services, a teenage girl came forward to announce her decision to follow Christ and be baptized.*

*During the service, Denison noticed some worn-out luggage leaning against the wall of the church building. He asked the pastor about it. The pastor pointed to the girl who had just been baptized and told Denison, "Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again. So she brought her luggage." (© 2008 PreachingToday.com Raymond McHenry, Stories for the Soul (Hendrickson, 2001), p. 48; submitted by Steve May, Humboldt, Tennessee)*

This young woman was making a decisive declaration! What she was saying was that she was willing to follow Jesus wherever – her bags were packed!

## **#2 If you want to stand with Jesus' people – Get baptized!**

This morning, Nick is being baptized. On Saturday, Nick is beginning basic training with the Canadian Armed Forces. Nick is making a declaration today that he intends to keep as he heads off to face the challenges waiting for him in the army. It's going to be a challenge and we are going to gather around him and pray for him this morning.

Baptism is like signing up to serve. It's rallying to the colours of the cross. It's raising our standard – the cross of Christ.

Cf. "Glory"

- film re 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry regiment in American Civil War
- true story about black combat unit in the war
- commander had asked for honour of leading the charge against a Confederate fort coastal fort – it was going to be tough!
- Regiment massed on the beach – colours flying, band playing
- Commander asked flag bearer to stand forward and then asked regiment, "If this man shall fall WHO will take his place and carry the colours?"
- One of the men, a friend of the commander, stepped forward.

The church of Jesus Christ is a regiment in a battle – by being baptized you are publicly declaring that you've joined up and will share in the fight! You are carrying the colours of the church of Jesus Christ – THE CROSS!

The Book of Acts records the story of the first baptism service ever held by the church of Jesus Christ. Peter was the preacher, and after he told the story of Jesus to that crowd, 3,000 people stepped forward to carry the colours of the Cross.

**“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” Acts 2:41**

“there were added that day” – publicly marked out as followers of Jesus.

The battle the regiment of Jesus fights is a tough one – we need each other!

- the Bible tells us again and again that we can't do it on our own.
- Followers of Jesus are to band together for mutual support and encouragement.

Next week we're going to do the same thing we're doing for Nick today. We're going to rally the regiment around the colours of the Cross and pledge to support these who will be baptized.

The third reason for being baptized is the clincher!

### **#3 If you want to obey Jesus' command – Get baptized!**

Jesus gave his followers a job to do:

**"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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." (Matthew 28:18-20)**

Are you a disciple of Jesus? "Disciple" simply means that you're a follower of Jesus. Are you a follower of Jesus? If you are, then get baptized. It's the command of the Lord.

Notice that Peter "commanded" (v. 48) that Cornelius and his friends be baptized.  
- NOT an option if you claim to be a follower of Jesus.

You begin a disciple's life by being baptized and you continue it by obeying what Christ commands us through the Word of God.

If you call yourself a disciple of Jesus, do you find yourself saying things like...

"I'll obey when I'm ready"

"I'll obey when I feel like it"

"I'll obey when it's the right time."

Is that the way a **soldier** talks to his **Commander**?

Is that the way a **servant** talks to his **Master**?

Is that the way a **disciple** talks to his **Lord**?

Is that the way a **believer** talks to his **Saviour**?

Does Jesus want you to be baptized?

Do you **believe in Him**? Then the answer is **Yes**.

Do you want to **live for Him**? Then the answer is **Yes**.

Do you want to **publicly stand with Him**? Then the answer is **Yes**.

Forget me,

Forget your friends,  
Forget your family, your parents, your children  
Forget your wife or husband –  
What does Jesus want you to do?

**Perhaps you've decided today that you want to follow Jesus, what do you do?**

- believe that Jesus died to take the punishment for YOUR sin on the cross
- believe that Jesus rose again to give you new life and wants to live in you

**“If you confess with your mouth that “Jesus is Lord”...”** – ie. that He's the boss of your life from this day forward FOREVER!

**“... and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead ...”** – not just a ritual statement, it's got to be from the heart!

**“...you will be saved.” (Rom. 10:9)**

**Then get baptized as soon as possible.**

Perhaps you've done that some time ago – now, you need to be obedient.

Why wait any longer? Decide to obey TODAY!

**We are planning another baptism service for next Sunday (Jan 13) – sign up today!**

- talk to one of the pastors after the service.

**The Lord's Table**

**Songs of Communion**

- **“Communion”** (guitar)
- **“I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”** (acapella)

**Benediction**