

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
January 10, 2016

Blessings of Baptism

Romans 6:1-4

6:1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

6:2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

6:3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

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.

Today is a commemorative day when our Lord Jesus was baptized. Therefor we would like to learn about the blessings of baptism which we received, or going to receive. Blessings from baptism are so many that we can't talk all of them in a short time. Today, I will pick up three and talk about them.

1. Understanding of Faith

First, baptism gives you understanding of faith. Bible is called "Audible Word of God." Baptism and the Lord's Supper are called "Visible Word of God." Baptism and the Lord's Supper show the salvation of Jesus Christ visibly.

We can say that the Bible is similar to the sentences and baptism is similar to a photograph of a travel journal book. Travel book can write about an area's history and culture in detail. We can imagine the area's circumstances from the writings only. But if there are photographs in the book, we understand more deeply. Like this, baptism shows the

salvation of Jesus like a photograph. We are able to understand the whole truth learned from Bible at once, like we see one photograph.

Until, printing machine was invented, books were very expensive and ordinal people could not have the Bible. People listened to Bible readings and got God's words during the services . Also, as there were many who couldn't read letters, churches displayed many pictures and stained glasses which showed important scenes from the Bible. We could say these were "Visible Bible".

I went to a Harvest America meeting at Prestonwood Baptist Church on November 16 last year. At the overhead of the huge entrance hall, there are stained glasses which show the pictures of each book from Genesis through Revelations. These are well made and I was so impressed. But if you have not read the all books of the Bible, you do not understand why those pictures are displayed even though beautiful works were shown. As we have learned the Bible, we understand the visible pictures of Salvation of Jesus through Baptism, there is no reason to say that we don't need the Bible.

So, do we not need the baptism as long as we have the Bible by contraries? Well, we do need the baptism to help ourselves understand what the Bible teaches us, because the baptism teaches us exactly what the Bible says.

In Roman 6:3-4, 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." It sounds too mystic to understand that we were dead with Christ and were raised from the dead with

Christ. However, we do understand “the old is dead” when we see the one who get immersed; moreover, we also see “the one is now alive as new” when they get up in the water.

One of the baptismal candidates asked, saying “Pastor, I’m such a bad sinner so please soak me longer than usual for perfect death of my evil oldness.” Of course, the time of immersing is not the matter to be raised as new after death of oldness. People cannot be dead and alive by themselves. The one who does it is God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ was dead on the cross for our sins, and at the same time, God crucified us, the sinners, with Christ. Finally, then, God recreated us as the new lives with Christ who is raised. As it is written 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.”

I remember a certain person, who was once saying, “I cannot understand the Bible,” then said after baptism, “I now totally understand the meaning of salvation, right after baptizing.” So, baptism is the experience to understand the faith and the Bible; that is the grace of the baptism.

Moreover, the grace of baptism is given to not only those who are actually going to be baptized, but also everyone who has already been baptized. They remember the time they got baptized, and they witness again the God’s love, to achieve our salvation, “the old is dead and the new has come,” through crucifying His one and only beloved Son. We get back to the love of beginning from God, through witnessing the salvation, which is described in the baptism, and renewing our faith. Like that, those who have already been baptized, shall call on understanding the richness of Jesus’ salvation that baptism expresses,

more deeply.

2. Decision of Faith

Secondly, baptism confers decision to our faith. Baptism visualizes the salvation by Christ, but at the same time, it clearly shows our faith. We express our faith to others by baptism and dedicate our decision of faith to God.

The Bible tells us in Romans 10:9-10, “because, 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.” We are saved by faith. But the faith that the Bible teaches us is not something like “we acknowledge how great Jesus Christ is” or “we are fond of Christianity”. Our faith is that we believe Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins and resurrected from the dead to save us from the sins. We should confess our faith with our mouth and we should live our life according to our faith. We are required to explicitly express our faith in our heart and testify by our action.

And the first step is baptism. The Bible described that the first thing people who believed in Jesus Christ did was to be baptized. On the day of Pentecost, those who were pierced by Peter’s Sermon got baptized according to the Act 2:38, “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.” The Ethiopian officer who believed Jesus Christ through Philip’s preaching said: “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” and asked Philip to baptize him (Acts 8:36). Ananias, when he was sent to

Saul, who had just repented, said to Saul: “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” and baptized Saul (Acts 22:16).

This Saul became the apostle Paul afterwards. When Paul and Silas were persecuted and put into prison, a miracle happened. The prison guard who witnessed the miracle got baptized with all of his family. The Bible describes this story as follows in Acts 16:33-34, “And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.” The prison guard cleaned Paul’s wounds, which he got through persecution, and Paul cleaned and healed spiritual wounds of the prison guard and his family. Paul’s words, as is written in Acts 16:31, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” was fulfilled. I would like to see the same thing happens among us. I would like to see our family members listen to God’s word and get saved. That is what I would like to see more happen among us.

This Saul became the apostle Paul afterwards. When Paul and Silas were persecuted and put into prison, a miracle happened. The prison guard who witnessed the miracle got baptized with all of his family. The Bible describes this story as follows in Acts 16:33-34, “And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.” The prison guard cleaned Paul’s wounds, which he got through persecution, and

Paul cleaned and healed spiritual wounds of the prison guard and his family. Paul's words, as is written in Acts 16:31, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." was fulfilled. I would like to see the same thing happens among us. I would like to see our family members listen to God's word and get saved. That is what I would like to see more happen among us.

In any era, those who truly believed in Christ got baptized and expressed their faith. If you express your faith by baptism, then the baptism will strengthen your faith and gives you more assurance to your faith. In addition, the fact that "you got baptized" will support and encourage your Christian life. When Luther was tempted by Devil, he wrote "I was baptized" on the desk and he got rid of temptation.

When I asked a seeker if he believe Jesus Christ, he replied "I cannot say I believe Jesus Christ yet, but I would like to believe him." "I want to believe" is almost the same as "I believe". Baptism will change your desire that you say "I want to believe" to faith that you say "I believe". I would really like seekers to make a step ahead towards baptism.

3. Preparation for Faith

Thirdly, the baptism gives us opportunity to sort out our feeling for faith. Since the time of early Christianity, churches had a baptism preparation class for people who were going to be baptized. During the lent, which is 40 days before the Easter, we remember Jesus Christ on the cross but also this is a preparation period for the baptismal candidates. The Apostles' Creed is the study material for the

preparation class. They learn the basic doctrines of the Bible such as God our heavenly father, his son Jesus Christ, God Holy Spirit, and church. The pre-baptismal class gave them the preparation for Christian life following baptism.

This is the same for our church, and we have six hour preparation class before being baptized. During the time, they start to write a confession of faith and finish it. On the day of baptism, they are going to read it and receive baptism in the pool. As I mentioned before, the grace of baptism is given to them immediately and after the baptism. The grace of baptism is also given during the preparation period because they can sort out their feeling of faith during this period. They can receive answers for their questions and avoid misunderstandings and confusions.

Of course, the preparation class is not enough to learn about the Bible and Christian life. Therefore, there are many churches that have post-baptismal class for people who were just baptized. They attend this class at least one year and learn about the basic doctrines and receive the training of Christian life. I actually took three months sabbatical before and did research on various churches. I found out that the churches, which is growing and active in evangelism, have very good post-baptism class. In those churches, there are a variety of classes such as the one for people who received baptism in early ages, and its purpose is building a firm faith before growing into a competent adult. I pray that we can this class here too. Please pray with me. Even you have been saved before and had Christian life in many years, don't forget to grow in faith. Let's grow up with new members and young Christians in the knowledge of the Lord.

(Prayer)

Dear heavenly father, you gave us baptism and Lord's supper as well as the Bible. You speak us about the salvation of Jesus Christ in each ways. Help us learn the Bible more, and we can understand deeply what baptism is. And help us understand what the Bible teaches and keep them in our hearts by baptism. We appreciate the blessings of baptism. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.