

According to His Mercy

Baptism Devotional – Pastor Joe Davis
Union Baptist Church – September 2, 2018

Today we get to experience the great joy that always comes from witnessing people publicly testify that they have found true spiritual life in the only place it can be found: *in Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of the World*, the one who boldly said: ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"*** (John 14:6). How did they get this new spiritual life in Jesus Christ? Well, I can tell you that they didn't get it by being good people, or by being religious, or by going to church, or by earning it any way. The Bible says no one has any reason to boast about the salvation they've received through Christ.

These people coming up today, like every other child of God, didn't get new spiritual life in Christ because they deserved it or because they were smarter than other people or more well behaved. No, they found it by God's grace in the opposite way...by simply admitting that they didn't deserve it and could never earn it...that their sin and rebellion against their Creator God was real and had separated them from him...that their personal sin and shame needed to be dealt with and forgiven...and that only Jesus Christ could do such a thing and give them what they needed to be at peace with God and living in an eternal love relationship with him. It's that simple.

I want to briefly share with you this morning one of my favorite passages of Scripture that beautifully affirms what I just told you. It's found in the book of Titus, chapter 3, verses 3 to 7. This is a great one to memorize, by the way, because it's jam-packed with truth about what God does for us in salvation through Christ. Here we go:

3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he

poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Notice first, in verse 3, that picture of what life looked like before God saved us through Christ: We were *foolish, disobedient, led astray, chained up to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another*. Guess what? That's the place we all were apart from Christ, whether we realized it or not...A very hopeless and empty place where we were chained up to destructive ways of living that damaged our relationships with others and kept us separated from God.

But in that dark place, a light came on. God opened our eyes to see not only our empty and destructive ways of living, but also something amazing: *the goodness and lovingkindness of the very God we were ignoring and rebelling against...a goodness and lovingkindness that didn't just stay in God's heart, but that was expressed to us in tangible form as God the Father, while people were still in full rebellion against him, sent his only Son to live a sinless, human life and then die on the cross as our substitute...dying in our place...paying the penalty we deserve for our sin...and then rising from the dead victorious over sin and death!* As so well expressed in Romans 5, verse 8:

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Back in Titus 3, looking now at verses 5 through 7, notice that our salvation in Christ was in no way a result of our own goodness or our works or anything we had earned or deserved. Instead, God saved us through Christ because of his own mercy. You see, God is not only perfectly good and full of lovingkindness, but he is abounding, overflowing, running over with mercy toward every person he has created. He wants every one of them to discover the one simple way to be saved and at peace with him in an eternal love and life-filled relationship. As so clearly stated in 1 Timothy, chapter 2, verses 4 to 6:

[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all...

God does the saving, and he only does it through simple repentance of sin and surrendered faith in Jesus Christ. We just own up to our sin and ask Jesus to forgive us for it through his work on the cross and lead us out of it into his way of living life.

And when we're willing to simply surrender to God in that way by his grace, notice, back in Titus 3, the amazing things that happen: the Holy Spirit regenerates us...brings us to new life spiritually. This is what we call being born again. We suddenly have life sprouting up within us. And the Holy Spirit moves in. God himself takes up residence within us permanently. Sins are washed away and forgiven forever. Renewal comes. God begins growing life within us so that we start to change and leave behind those old dead and destructive ways of living life. We begin living the eternal kind of life connected with God in his kingdom and walking into his purposes and plans...his good intentions toward us. And we become heirs, inheriting the riches of eternal life with God as his adopted children. As Paul tells us in Romans 8, verses 15 to 17:

15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,...

Perhaps there's someone here today, who's ready to undergo this transformation ...from being *foolish, disobedient, led astray, chained up to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy* to being saved by God's great grace and mercy through Jesus...born again to new spiritual life...forgiven forever...free from the penalty and power of sin...indwelt by God's Holy Spirit...at peace with God and able to live connected with him in his presence...walking into his good purposes for your life. If you're ready for this transformation today, I invite you to read over this simple prayer I've put up on the screen. If it expresses what you want to express to God and you believe it in your heart, I'm going to give you an opportunity after the baptisms to come up and pray that prayer with me. What a day this could be for you!

A Prayer to Accept God's Free Gift of Salvation

God, I admit that I have sinned against You...
I turn from that sin right now...
I don't want to live my life that way anymore...
Jesus, I believe that you died on the cross for my sins...
And that you rose from the dead...
Right now, I put my trust in You alone for my salvation...
Jesus, You are my Lord and my Savior...My life is Yours...
Thank you for forgiving my sins and making me a new creation...
Thank you for giving me Your Holy Spirit and adopting me as your child...
Teach me through Your Word how to live life with You...
Amen.

Well, let's go ahead and baptize a few people who have already repented of their sin and placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Let's enjoy this beautiful representation of what happened at that moment they invited Jesus Christ to save them and lead them into their new life in him.

Just a few reminders about baptism:

Baptism is a public confession of our faith in Christ and our commitment to follow him and obey his commands. Physical baptism in water is not necessary for salvation, but it's a matter of obedience to God's commands and provides us with a beautiful picture of several different spiritual realities:

- 1) Us dying to our old self and to sin and being raised to new life in Christ...under the water = death; out of the water = new life. Scripture describes our old self with its sinful ways as being crucified with Christ and our new self then being created in righteousness and holiness!
- 2) Our sins being washed away and forever paid for by the work of Christ on the cross...washed by the blood of Christ and coming out whiter than snow.
- 3) Our immersion in Christ...ALL IN...EVERY PART. He's all over us now...we're clothed with Christ and we now have his righteousness in God's eyes. He's in us and we're in him.

- 4) Our entry into the perfect, eternal love relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that has existed for all eternity. Notice that we baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We're now a part of the most perfect love relationship in the universe that will endure in peaceful communion for all eternity!