

## PLUGGED IN TO GOD'S SALVATION – TITUS 3:4-7

PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ JANUARY 11, 2015

**<sup>4</sup> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.**



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

November 11, 1984 was not a date that my family taught me to celebrate, in some ways I wish that they had. Because on that date in Ndola, Zambia, water and God's Word connected a renegade creature of God with what happened at the Jordan River so many years ago. When the perfect Son of Man identified with sinners like me, so that I might forever be identified with a holy one like him. On November 11, 1984, God spoke unto me, "You are my son, with you I am well pleased." Yes, we associate those words more with Jesus at the Jordan River as he identified with sinners, but they are just as true of me, who have been connected with his Son through the saving waters of baptism. Nothing can change what God declared about me that day. He will prove faithful, even when I prove faithless.

I wonder how often we view our own baptisms in that way. On this day, when we commemorate the Baptism of Jesus, we often think that our own baptisms don't matter that much, we may regard our baptisms as just a confirmation of what we believe. But Jesus never viewed baptism in this way, as if it were somehow unimportant. The Apostle Paul, a messenger of God, never viewed baptism in this way either. Paul intimately ties our baptism to the baptism of Christ, and to his death and resurrection. One place he mentions that is in our second lesson for this morning from Titus. He shows how our baptism means we are PLUGGED IN TO GOD'S SALVATION:

1. A washing of rebirth
2. A washing of renewal

(1)

The book of Titus is one of the shorter books in the New Testament. It was written by the Apostle Paul to one of his young pastors on the island of Crete, in the Mediterranean Sea. Titus had been left on the island to pastor the young Christian congregations there and bring them up in the faith. Paul, the wily old veteran was giving his young pastor some common sense advice. The overall theme of the book is "A Christian minister provides instruction based on Christ." Such is the importance of this letter that it is studied by our Seminary students for encouragement on how to conduct their ministries.

The section of Titus we have before us this morning gets to the heart of the matter. Paul has made his encouragements, he has shown how the people should act. But the motivation, the reason they should act this way is found in these few verses. **"When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."** The kindness and love of God our Savior appeared when Jesus burst on to the scene. At Jesus' baptism, it was the

beginning of his public ministry, his ministry on God's behalf to save sinners. It is Jesus' baptism that connects him with sinners, makes him our brother.

This is the message we know so well – Jesus was baptized, he lived a perfect life, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification. This he did because of his mercy, not because he saw what wonderful upstanding people we are. Because we also know that we are not the upstanding people we like to think that we are, but rather the Bible describes us as rebellious sinners. That is obviously why we need a Savior. But God did not just want us to know about what he had done for us, he wanted us to be sure of what he has done for us. He wanted us to be sure that he died for us as individuals. He wants us to know that we are PLUGGED IN TO GOD'S SALVATION.

It's as if you are going into a department store, and you find this perfect lamp. It's what you've always been looking for, and you even find out it's on sale. You know what lamps are supposed to do – give light – but the way to be sure this particular lamp works is to plug it in. We are like that lamp, powerless until we are PLUGGED IN TO GOD'S SALVATION. And that's where the second half of our section of Titus comes in.

**“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”** So often when we hear that phrase, we tend to lump those two ideas together, when it's important to realize why both are there. We are PLUGGED IN TO GOD'S SALVATION through a washing of rebirth. The Pharisee Nicodemus probably understood this better than many Christians today. He went and talked with Jesus about what it took to get to heaven. Jesus said, “A man must be born again.” Nicodemus' mind went straight to a physical birth, and realized how impossible it was to be physically born again. But Jesus was not talking about a physical re-birth, but a spiritual re-birth. And just as we were not born of our own accord physically, we cannot be born of our own choosing spiritually either.

It is a re-birth that is from first to last the responsibility and action of God. It is this re-birth that connects us to Christ's baptism, it is this re-birth that connects us to what Christ accomplished two millennia ago on the cross. Christ's sacrifice is what saved us, this was a one-time action. It is through this re-birth that we receive the benefits of that sacrifice, not through any of our own actions. So it was when King David was anointed. He was the youngest of all his brothers, not worth a hill of beans at the time. And yet God chose him and made him the king he was, just as God chooses us, he PLUGS US INTO GOD'S SALVATION, and makes us his children.

(2)

But when we are PLUGGED IN TO GOD'S SALVATION, we not only undergo a washing of rebirth, but also a washing of renewal. While we might consider a “re-birth” as a one-time action, the washing of renewal is a continuing action throughout our lives. And so, when we are PLUGGED IN TO GOD'S SALVATION, our lives are made new. Because the spiritual birth that we undergo does not only affect the spirit, but the whole person – body and soul. When we are PLUGGED IN TO GOD'S SALVATION we are continually forming ourselves more in line with God and his Word.

And just as Paul encouraged Titus to share this message with his members, so I share it with you. This washing of renewal is not possible without the Holy Spirit. It is not possible when we are not connected to the power source. And so being PLUGGED IN is important. This washing of renewal affects

how we live our lives, it affects how we think. When we are angry with someone, our first reaction will not be to retaliate. When we are tempted to slip into our pet sin, we fight against it with all our might. When we are faced with the decision of going to church or reading our Bible, the renewal inside of us knows what we must do.

But you know as well as I, while we have been renewed, we are not perfect. This is not an excuse, this is not any less of a sin. Our ever present sin reminds us to go back to the source of renewal, it reminds us to get PLUGGED IN TO GOD'S SALVATION. And in this section of Titus, there is an even closer connection that we can be reminded of every day, a connection that not as many people make in this passage. When Paul is talking about how God **"saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,"** he was talking about when God the Holy Spirit came upon us in the Holy Sacrament of Baptism. In Holy Baptism, God PLUGGED US INTO HIS SALVATION.

Baptism is not just something in which we remember what Christ did for us, it not just something where we now have chosen to be a Christian, it's plugging ourselves in to the promise of God, the promise of salvation. We see that here at the end of the section of Titus, **"so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."** As the result of being justified by his grace in baptism, we have the hope of eternal life. And it's not just in this section that talks about baptism actually forgiving sins, it's found in 1 Peter, **"and this water symbolizes baptism, which saves you also."**

Martin Luther explained it well in his explanation concerning baptism. He asked the question, "How can water do such great things?" He answered, "It is certainly not the water that does such things, but God's Word which is in and with the water and faith which trusts this Word used with the water." In his explanation, he makes clear the teaching of the Bible – baptism isn't another way of being saved, as if it's apart from Christ, baptism is a way that Christ's sacrifice is brought to us. This is a reason we also baptize little babies who cannot think for themselves. Because the same grace that brought about a new birth in us, brings about a new birth in babies. And the same washing of renewal that works in us, works in a little baby.

It is because we are connected to the forgiveness of sins in baptism, that we can be sure of our eternal life. It is because we are connected to the forgiveness of sins in baptism, that we can look back to our own baptisms as a reminder of God's forgiveness to us. Baptism truly is something special, and not just Jesus' baptism, but our own. May we never take for granted our own baptisms, may we never think that our own baptisms mean so little.

God knew that we are always looking for proof for what we believe. He knew that it would be hard for us to understand his forgiveness. He knew of our tendency to question ourselves when we fail to live up to his perfect standard. And so he gave us a sign, he gave us an assurance, in our baptisms. It is something we can look to every day for assurance. It is a motivation to get baptized if we have not been already. We confess that our God not only came down and became one of us and identified with us in his baptism, but that through our own baptisms we are connected to him.

Baptism brings the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Christ and David were anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. When we were baptized, the Spirit was poured out on us as well. It was a washing that brought rebirth for sin-deadened hearts and spiritual renewal for fleshly minds. And so maybe it was OK that my parents never taught me to celebrate November 11, 1984. Because it is every day that I have

the opportunity to celebrate the death and resurrection in baptism, how I am connected now and forever with Jesus, PLUGGED IN TO GOD'S SALVATION. Amen.