



BAPTISM IS GOD'S PROMISE

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ May 15, 2016

³⁸ Peter replied, “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. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” ⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:38-41)

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

“I promise to build a wall across our border with Mexico to stop illegal immigrants.” This is the gist of one of the campaign promises of the presumed Republican nominee Donald Trump. “I promise that no college student will have to go into debt to attend a four-year university.” This is the gist of one of the campaign promises of the presumed Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. Whether those campaign promises are realized or not is still a question, but there are many voters who have become wary of politician’s promises.

But it’s not just politicians who have smeared their promises. Every day people like you and me have on occasion either been the recipient of a broken promise or the breaker of the promise itself. Sometimes these are just small promises we break, like when we tell our children “I’ll play with you once I get my work done.” While an example of a bigger promise broken is when a husband or wife decides to renege on the promise to stay married for a lifetime. Each promise broken, whether big or small gives us slightly less confidence in any future promises made.

The Bible is not devoid of broken promises either. The Israelites promised to follow God when they entered the Promised Land, and our Sunday morning Bible Class knows how well they kept that promise. The Apostle Peter promised Jesus that he would never leave him, even if it meant death. It only took him a few hours to break that promise.

It’s no wonder why we can be skeptical about promises. A promise is meant to be a binding contract. But imperfect, sinful people have a hard time keeping a promise. That’s not to say that every promise made by us will be broken, but some of them surely will. But our skepticism should be checked at the door when we take a look at God’s promises. To see a perfect example of a promise is to look at God. And when God makes a promise in Scripture, he wants us to pay attention. The promise that we take a look at this morning is about baptism. Because BAPTISM IS GOD’S PROMISE.

1. For the forgiveness of sins
2. For the future

Today is the day that Pentecost is remembered. Pentecost is the wonderful event in church history that God promised to his first disciples. It was when the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, came down upon the disciples in what looked to be flames of fire and enabled them to know and speak in languages they had never studied before. There was a purpose to God's plan, for at the time of Pentecost was another great feast of the Jews. Jews from all over the Mediterranean world and beyond traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate. These languages the disciples were able to speak could be understood by these pilgrims.

While most of the focus on Pentecost is the Holy Spirit enabling the disciples to speak in different tongues, we also see another important job of the Holy Spirit. This job could be considered even more important than speaking in tongues, because it is this job that he continues to work today. The job of the Holy Spirit that is mentioned in Acts and continues today is creating faith, or to put it a different way, creating believers. And connected with that in this section of Acts and in many other places is one of the ways that the Holy Spirit creates faith in a believer's heart, that is baptism.

It was Peter, one of Jesus' 12 disciples that got up and explained to the crowds what was going on. Part of his speech we heard in our second lesson for this morning. Peter recalled Old Testament prophecies that predicted this event. But then, in the section we didn't read, Peter told them about Jesus, the reason this event was being fulfilled. He reminded them that Jesus died as a sacrifice for their sins. Some may have even been in Jerusalem 50 days before when this happened, but all were responsible for it, for all of them had sinned. Peter put it plainly, **"Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."** They were cut to core, recognizing their wicked hearts and asked what could be done.

This is where our lesson picked up again. Peter did not tell them to do something to make up for their wrong. He did not give them a seven-step process. He merely said, **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you."** The word repentance describes not only being sorry that you've committed a particular sin, but it also describes turning your back on that sin. Then Peter called for them to be baptized.

Now listen carefully to why Peter tells this crowd to be baptized. **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins. The promise is for you and your children."** Be baptized...for the forgiveness of sins. This is what baptism is, BAPTISM IS GOD'S PROMISE, it is his promise for forgiveness. You see, Peter never separates the two, "baptism" and "forgiveness," but rather he connects them as a way that God brings forgiveness of sins. The gospel writer Mark confesses the same truth when he records Jesus' words, **"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."** Jesus doesn't divide "believing" and "baptizing" as two independent events, but joins them together.

This is why we believe that baptism saves. This is why Martin Luther saw it important to include a section in his small catechism on Baptism. This is why we call baptism, a means of Grace. A means by which God connects us to the grace that Christ won. This is a wonderful and beautiful promise of God. As an all-powerful God, he could choose to save us in any way he wanted, but he chose something as simple as baptism. I am reminded of the story of a man named Elisha from the Old Testament. He was visited by a man

who had the skin disease of leprosy. Elisha's cure was not some great act, but simply washing in the Jordan River seven times. Such is true with baptism, it is not received in some outwardly spectacular way, but in simple washing. If you take a look at Luther's small catechism on page 13 you'll find, *"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. For without God's Word the water is just plain water and not baptism. But with this Word it is baptism, that is a gracious water of life and a washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit."*

Unfortunately some don't believe that BAPTISM IS GOD'S PROMISE. Some believe baptism is something that only a believer does after he has become a believer, as a symbol showing his commitment to God. But God clearly says there's more to it than that. He says, **"This promise is for you and your children."** We confess that we are all equally sinful – adults and children alike. We confess that we are all equally undeserving of God's love. We are all equally needing God's forgiveness. Baptism, which offers God's forgiveness, is God's promise not just for adults, but for children as well.

Trusting in this promise, my parents brought me to the baptismal font when I was only a few days old. It's the same reason I have brought my three children to the font. And why wouldn't I give them this wonderful gift of God? Does this mean that everybody who is baptized will be saved and will never fall away? Of course not, but that doesn't negate God's promise. Permit me to share another analogy. When a gardener plants a seed, that seed is alive. A good gardener will continue to water that seed so that it become a plant and remains alive. As soon as that seed/plant no longer is watered, it dies. In baptism, God plants the seed of faith in our hearts. It grows when it is fed and nurtured by his Word, but it will slowly die when it is deprived of its food. But if there comes a time in a Christian's life when they start to question their faith, when they start to question God's love, they can be reminded that BAPTISM IS GOD'S PROMISE.

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It is not only God's promise for the forgiveness of sins, but it is also God's promise for the future. I may not be able to remember the day of my baptism, but I know it happened. I've seen the pictures, I've been told by my parents, and that baptismal promise gives me strength to live day-by-day. If you would turn back to your small catechisms to page 14, and read with me the answer to the question, "What does baptizing with water mean?"

"Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." Every Christian comes to the unfortunate realization that even after becoming a Christian, he continues to sin. There are three attitudes he can take to this realization. One is apathy – it doesn't matter what he does, so he keep on sinning. Two is despair – I must not be a real Christian because I can't stop sinning. But it's the third attitude that a Christian will take – daily repent of his sins and strive to live a new and holy life.

And we can continue to repent, we can continue to strive to live our new lives, because of our baptisms. Because our BAPTISM IS GOD'S PROMISE. How unfortunate when we don't always see it that way. How unfortunate when we don't give God's promise the credence it deserves. How unfortunate when we

take this, and other promises of God and don't trust them. "Come to me and I will give you rest," "I will not give you more than you can bear," "I will always be with you." By our restless worrying, our complaining and our search for something more, we lose the peace God wants us to have.

Thank God that his promises don't depend upon us for them to be true. Because it is that sure foundation of God's promises that we return to every time – not only when we fall into sin, but when we look for assurance. Jesus living didn't depend on you believing it. Jesus dying didn't depend on you believing it. Jesus rising didn't depend on you believing it. And God connecting you to Christ in baptism didn't depend on you believing it. In fact, believing doesn't make baptism, but baptism makes believing.

Which is why we can look back with fondness on our baptisms and every baptism we witness as a reminder that we were made a child of God, with no effort or action on our part. BAPTISM IS GOD'S PROMISE. The promises we hear from politicians, the promises we hear from others, the promises we make ourselves don't hold a candle to this promise that God has made. May we hold the promises of God near to our heart and believe them with a simple childlike trust. May we hold especially tight to the promise of God in baptism. For BAPTISM IS GOD'S PROMISE for the forgiveness of sins, and for the future. Amen.