



1 Peter 3:21-22
“Our Sins Washed Away”

21 There is also an antitype which now saves us -- baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

How many of you as Christians sometimes feel like strangers in a strange land living here in the United States in the 21st century? By that I mean the feeling of not fitting in, being different, being a small persecuted minority in the midst of a majority that does not know the Lord nor care to listen to His commands?

That feeling can of course be very discouraging, it can lead to a longing just to be like everyone else to fit in with the majority. Christian kids, for instance, often feel that way when they get to college and realize that if they continue in the evangelical Christianity they were raised in, they are not going to fit in with their peers. A lot of them, therefore, make the decision to leave the persecuted minority at that point and blend in with the unbelieving majority.

That’s nothing new though, there is an entire book of the Bible – the letter to the Hebrews – that was written specifically to a community filled with people who were leaving the Christian faith so they could fit in with their peers and stop the persecution. In this letter as well Peter was writing to Christians who were a tiny and increasingly persecuted minority in their own society, and Peter knew that the persecution was going to get a lot worse. Many of them were already feeling the urge to just go back to being pagans. So like the author of Hebrews Peter is trying to show them and you, that while going back to the world may seem to make sense, it’s actually the worst mistake that you could ever make.

So he writes and he draws their attention to another time when Christians were a tiny persecuted minority. *You feel a persecuted minority?* Well let me tell you about a time when in the entire world, the only people who loved the Lord was a man named Noah and his family. Now there was a minority. Do you people make fun of you for your faith? Well let me tell you, you haven’t experienced mockery until you’ve spent over a hundred years building a giant boat on dry land, all the while preaching that the day of judgment is going to come upon everyone who doesn’t join you inside what looks like a giant useless boondoggle.

“Noah, come out to the party with us, there will be wine and music and dancing girls.”

“No, no, I have to work on the Ark that God commanded me to make, and if you were wise you’d join me!”

“Right Noah, when we need to be saved from having fun, and living a normal, healthy life, we’ll come join you.”

Oh sure, they mocked him, they thought he was an idiot, but when it started raining and it didn't stop, suddenly it was Noah who was the wise man, and the mockers who were the fools. Peter is pointing out a universal truth, *that those who strive to get into Christ, to be saved while there is still time, are called fools by the world, but when judgment comes, they are shown to be have been wise to have gotten into the ark while there was still time.*

Peter is saying "Look! It's not different today! Christ is the Ark, he's the reality that the big wooden boat in Genesis 6-9 pointed to. And the floodwaters that divided believers and unbelievers forever, that's symbolized in baptism. If you aren't in Christ then the same waters that save believers will drown unbelievers. Judgment day, is happy day for all those found in the Ark, but a day of perishing for those without it, and the day of judgment comes to everyone. Either when Christ returns or when you die. *"it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment"* as Hebrews 9:27 assures us.

So he can say, to Christians you've all experienced something like Noah and his family's salvation through those waters of divine judgment in their baptism. Since all Christians are supposed to be Baptized, all Christians have had an external and visible sign of their salvation applied to them.

But while Peter wants those who are truly in Christ to be assured that when the judgment comes they will be safe, what he doesn't want to do is to encourage a mistaken belief that all that is required to be saved is to be baptized. So immediately after he says that baptism saves, he follows it up by saying I don't mean just the outward part of baptism, the external application of water to the flesh.

Hear me when I say this, *while all Christians are baptized, not all the baptized are really Christians.* All of you have met people, no doubt, who have proven that their baptism was like Simon Magus' just an external washing. How can that be? Well brothers and sisters, water alone can never wash away our sins.

You have a wonderful image of that in that scene from Macbeth, where Lady Macbeth washes her hands compulsively, trying in vain to wash away the guilt of Duncan's murder. No matter how often she washes in water she cannot remove that spot, that stain, from her hands.

There is one thing and one thing only that can wash away our sins and cleanse our conscience,

Rev. 1:4 John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

Heb. 9:14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

It is the blood of Jesus Christ, and that is the only thing that can wash our sins away. If it has not been applied to us, then like Lady Macbeth, all the water in the world will not wash out one spot of sin.

You see Baptism is just an outward and visible sign of what should be an inward and spiritual reality the washing away of our sins that comes when we are regenerated and united to Christ by faith alone. That washing is a work of grace that minister can do, only God the Holy Spirit can.

In the Old Testament the outward symbol of that inward cleansing of the heart was circumcision, we see that in places like Deut. 30:6 ***“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”***

And we read about the regeneration that is being symbolized in Ezek. 36:25 ***“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.***

26 “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

27 “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

And in the New in Titus 3:4 ***But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,***

And in both the Old and the New Testament that washing of regeneration did not normally come when someone was physically baptized or circumcised, it came through the ministry of the word. The gospel is preached and the Holy Spirit effectually calls men to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It does not say in Genesis 15 that Abraham was justified by his circumcision, what does it say? God himself preached the Word to Abraham and we read in verse ***“And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”***

And so if you are looking for evidence of this salvation, evidence that you have been united to Christ, that you have been united to the Lord of Glory who was resurrected from the dead and even now is reigning on high, you will not find it in your outward baptism. I know there are many today say, look to your baptism for evidence salvation, but the Westminster divines knew better, they knew that because salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers that we would find the evidence of that salvation within us, not without us – and so they wrote in the Confession of faith of ***“an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.”***

That is why Peter appeals to the *answer of a good conscience towards God*. Only if we have been regenerated, been washed in the blood, will we have the answer of a good conscience.

And that is why you are responsible not merely to ask “Have I been baptized? Do I go to church?” You must search your own hearts to see if you have what Peter is speaking of, have you closed with Christ? Have you renounced sin and the world and turned to Him saying not self-righteously ***“thank You that I am not like other men -- extortioners, unjust, adulterers”*** but crying out with the publican “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”

Without it you have no hope. It is for that reason that Thomas Watson plead with people in the Church ***“Get a real work of grace in your heart. ‘It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.’ Heb 13: 9. Nothing will hold out but grace; it is only this anointing abides; paint will fall off. Get a***

heartchanging work. 'But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified.' I Cor 6: 2: Be not content with baptism of water, without baptism of the Spirit. The reason men persevere not in religion, is for want of a vital principle; a branch must needs wither that has no root to grow upon.'

If that is truly the case with you, then you have gone through the floodwaters, even now you are reigning with Christ, and shall reign with him when His kingdom comes in all its fullness. Sure you may look around now and see the unbelieving world scoffing, but remember you are living in the calm before the storm, and this time is a period of grace that has been appointed for men to get into the ARK, not to eat, drink, and be merry.

Kids in particular do not think for a moment that you would be better of leaving the Christian faith. Think of it as getting out of the ark, just before the flood. If you are tempted to envy worldly people, because of their money, or the stuff they do, ask yourself ***do I want to be them on judgment day?*** Yeah we Christians may suffer mockery here and now, as Christ suffered mockery during his earthly ministry. But if we cleave to Him we will reign with Him, and how glorious that reign will be.

Finally let me issue one final warning to those who while they are baptized, have not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. The sign alone does not save, the sign alone does not unite to Christ, the sign alone does nothing to wash away sin, and in the final judgment that sign will stand against us. Let us say that a man serves the enemies of the United States all his life, and is finally brought into a court, will it take away his guilt if he tries to defend himself by saying, "Yeah but I was wearing the uniform of a US soldier the whole time" will that take away his guilt? No, it will add to it.

"I am aware that many do not admit the truth of what I have just said. Some tell us that all baptized people are members of Christ by virtue of their baptism. Others tell us that where there is a head knowledge we have no right to question a person's interest in Christ. To these views I have only one plain answer. The Bible forbids us to say that any man is joined to Christ until he believes. Baptism is no proof that we are joined to Christ. Simon Magus was baptized, and yet was distinctly told that he had "no part or lot in this matter" (Acts 8:21). Head-knowledge is no proof that we are joined to Christ. The devils know Christ well enough, but have no portion in Him. God knows, no doubt, who are His from all eternity. But man knows nothing of anyone's justification until he believes. The grand question is: "Do we believe?" It is written, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." "He that believeth not shall be damned" (John 3:36; Mark 16:16). If Bible words mean anything, to be without faith is to be "without Christ."" - Bishop J.C. Ryle