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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Baptism 2017

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you for the gift of your Son, we thank you for the gift of this place that we can gather and corporately worship you; we thank you for the gift of the freedom that we have to do just that. It is a freedom that not every one of our brothers and sisters around the world has. We just thank you for it. We pray this morning, Lord, that you would just continue and give us the gift of your Holy Spirit, Lord, we want to examine baptism this morning and we just again pray that you would give us the power of your Holy Spirit to accompany your word so that as we delve into your word we could again make it of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well as has already been noted, today's our baptism picnic and once a year we get together for some fellowship and for some food and to provide an opportunity for folks to get baptized. And we meet at Spears pond which you can see the directions that are in the back there, but Spears pond is a great place to have a picnic, but once again, the pond itself is very weed-choked and it's -- the level,

water level is so low that we've had to put a pool up to do the baptisms in. So we're going to be baptizing in a pool. And if you've never been baptized, there are three questions that you need to have answered before you consider taking this step. Number one is: Just what is baptism? Number two is: What is the point of baptism? And number three: Why should I get baptized? I want to reprise my baptism message of last year to answer those very questions.

And first the question is: What is baptism? Well, the word "baptize" is a transliteration of the Greek word "baptizo" which simply means "to immerse in liquid." If the Greeks wanted to dye a piece of cloth, it was baptized by plunging it into a dye-filled vat. So the word "baptize" simply means "to immerse in liquid." So what is the point of immersing someone in water? Well, the actual ritual of baptism consists of being plunged beneath the surface of the water and then immediately being brought back out of the water. It's a powerful symbolic act that demonstrates three different aspects of a believer's new life in Christ. There is death, there is burial, and there is resurrection all summed up in that one single act.

First let's talk about death. God says in *Romans 6* that *the wages of sin is death*. He also says in *Ezekiel 18*: *The soul that sins,*

it shall die. Now that's a spiritual pronouncement of fact that is more certain, it's more set, it's more determined than any physical pronouncement that we can see with our eyes. God says when we sin, we die. That may be a hard thing to convince people of because everyone in this room, we're all sinners and yet every one of us is still very much alive. You see because the judgment of sin is not immediate, folks tend to think that it is nonexistent. This is what God told Adam in the Garden of Eden. He said in *Genesis 2:16*, he said: *"You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in that day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* Well, God said if you eat this fruit, you're going to die. Well Adam and Eve both ate and guess what? They didn't immediately drop dead. So we ask the question is God making an empty threat here? Well, here's what actually happened. You see, they did have an immediate change and it was death but it was spiritual, not physical death. Adam and Eve both went from being flawless creatures who had shared perfection itself with their Creator to now becoming flawed and fallen creatures no longer perfect, no longer suited for fellowship with their Creator. It happened the instant that Adam's teeth touched that fruit, but neither Adam nor Eve realized the full extent of what had happened. I mean, there were certainly immediate but non lethal effects. They instantly realized that they were naked. They were filled with guilt and they were filled

with fear, but there seemed to be no immediate physical effect. They didn't realize it but from the moment that that fruit touched their lips they began the process of dying and for them it took hundreds of years to complete. For us it takes considerably less time. Adam and Eve didn't even have a frame of reference for dying, never having experienced death in any way, manner, shape or form. And unlike them, all of us know that we are in the process of dying because we're born into a world where death is always there but it's usually at a distance. And it's that distance, that separation from cause and effect, from sin and from death, that allows people the fantasy of thinking that their sin is just not going to find them out. I mean if the moment that you sinned you died there'd be no sin because there'd be no people. Because God withholds his judgment, he gives us ample time and opportunity to repent, we frequently blur the connection from sin to death. Now that was not the case for Jesus. Isaiah prophesied about Jesus coming into this world where death really reigned, and this is what he says. This is *Matthew 4:16*. It says: "*The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light is dawned.*" I mean Jesus literally came into the world of the walking dead and he came offering life itself, and Jesus knew precisely that the wages of sin was death because it was our sin that led to his death. *John 3:16* says: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,*

that whoever believes in him should not what? -- "should not perish but have eternal life." Make no mistake about it, we were all of us on our way to perishing because all of us had inherited the results of Adam's rebellion, I mean, sinner is who we are by nature; sin is what we do by desire. It is the direction our fallen nature bends toward because we've all inherited Adam and Eve's predilection for law breaking. And you know that also includes within it this deep, deep resentment we have way down deep, maybe not even expressed but it's a deep resentment of anyone trying to claim authority over me. I mean it's one of the reasons why evolution is so incredibly popular. The reason we cling to evolution with such religious fervor is that its primary assertion is that I am the product of nothing more than random chance and vast expanses of time and therefore I owe allegiance to no one. God says no, no, no, I'm the creator and you are the creature. I'm the king and you are my subjects, and you disobey at your peril.

You know folks think that God gave us the law, that he gave us the ten commandments as a set of rules that are designed to make us worthy of heaven. They are not. If you put it into its proper context, you understand the ten commandments are a set of non-negotiable demands that the king has placed upon his subjects and violating any one of those commands in any way is a capital offense for which all of us have earned the death penalty. Listen

to what *Romans 3:19* says, it says: *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.* Accountable to God, I mean most folks don't even remotely think of themselves as accountable to God. Certainly most folks don't think of themselves as under a capital offense and guilty of a capital offense and death being the sentence that we justly deserve. I mean we don't think about that because for all of us death's just simply been touted as just a natural part of our world, it's a natural process. I mean after all, Disney told us that there's this circle of life and every one of us gets to play a part in it. And you know, all Disney's circle of life could ever tell us about death was the idea that after we die we all get to rot and we get to become fertilizer for something else before it dies and it rots and so continues the cycle. Somehow or other folks find that attractive. I can't imagine how somebody would find that attractive, and the idea is that it was never supposed to be this way. I mean it was Adam's rebellion that introduced us to sin and brought death into our world. *Romans 5:12* says: *Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.* You see, death may seem natural to us because we all accept it as such but it's not. I mean we were intended to live in a world where there was no death, and because of Adam we are all born under a death sentence that

literally takes a lifetime to execute. And it's the distractions of living that make us forget that we are, all of us, in the process of dying. Growing old just removes the distractions. I mean I know, I just turned 68, you know, I'm like a car that has like 120,000 miles on it, it's still got some decent miles left but not without usually some mechanical intervention. Anybody my age knows, we get together, we all sound alike, we sound like cars that have a lot of miles on it. This one's got a tranny that's going, this one's got an exhaust leak, this one's got a leaking seal. The funny thing about aging is it forces you to start looking at your mortality. And mortality is directly related to Adam and Adam's death that he brought into us. *Romans 5:12* says: *Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin.* See, eventually every one of us is going to come face to face with the fact that every one of us is literally facing a death penalty, and we're facing it for Adam's sin as well as ours. And the fact that we were able to put such distance between the sin in our lives and the death penalty that that sin demands, it only serves to hide the obvious, and that is that we are born and we all live under the sentence of death, and God hates that. I mean God sent his Son into the world to rescue us from the curse of that death so that *"whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* I mean Jesus came to perfectly fulfill what the ten commandments demanded; and having done that, he then stood in our place bearing

the guilt of our sin. I mean, we did the sinning and he did the dying. And death is the first thing that baptism is all about. So baptism first symbolically represents death.

And then secondly, going under the water represents burial. But here's the good news about the death and burial that takes place in baptism. This is a death that you choose to die, and it's the door to life. Jesus said in *Matthew 10:39*: *"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* Baptism represents your willingness to lose your old life for Christ's sake and Christ partnering with you in a new life. And when you go under the water, you are representing not just one burial but two. You see in baptism, you don't go under that water alone. You are there symbolically participating in the death of Jesus. And when you go under that water, this is what *Romans 6:3* says. 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.* So we are dead and buried with Christ when we go under that water.

So first, we have death to our old life, secondly we have burial, we are buried with Christ in our sins, and thirdly there's

resurrection. *"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."* See, we are raised out of that water, we were raised and released, in Christ we are now dead to sin. And as we come back up from the water, we visually demonstrate that truth. And we have the question of, you know, just what do you mean by that phrase "dead to sin"? what does that mean? You know I lust, I envy, I lie, I gossip, I steal and then get baptized with Christ and suddenly all of that stuff just goes away? Well, the answer to that question put that way is no. Baptism doesn't do that at all. Baptism does not confer life. God alone can do that. Baptism simply demonstrates that new life has already taken place. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 that we were all by nature dead in our trespasses and sin. No matter how hard we try, we still lusted, we still envied, we still lied, we still did all the other things that God's law had forbidden. We all had hearts that were dead set against the will of God. Baptism is a symbolic way of demonstrating that that person who once had a heart dead set against God, that person has died. He or she is the one being buried with Christ under the waters of baptism.

Now you know some folks think that the waters of baptism are designed to cleanse us from sin. They don't have the power to do that. I mean it's only the blood of Christ that has that power.

So baptism does not cleanse us from sin. It is instead a sign that this cleansing has already taken place. And baptism is actually a celebration and a demonstration of a successful heart transplant undertaken by God himself. That event God makes perfectly clear in Ezekiel 36. I mean you've heard me quote this scripture countless times but you might not realize that it has a connection to baptism. *Ezekiel 36:25 says: I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* You see, when God speaks about burying the old life in baptism and coming up out of the water celebrating the newness of life in Christ, he is talking about something far more profound than simply cleaning our acts up. *Colossians 2:13 says: When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.* And God is literally speaking about dying to one way of living and being re-created to live in a brand new way, of having an ice cold heart of stone surgically removed and a living, breathing heart of flesh surgically implanted. God says: *I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* Now for all of us that's a brand new

way to walk. God's law says you must do this, you must not do that. And we all feel bound and imprisoned by that law. I mean not only could we not do it but we have no desire to do it in the first place. We were what you call prisoners of the law. You see, fallen mankind's default drive of rebellion is actually a unique form of slavery. It's a slavery that deeply resents the idea of liberation. It's a slavery that fights tooth and nail to remain enslaved. It's a slavery that completely blinds the enslaved to what their status really is. They think they're free as a bird. And they are not.

I've given this illustration many times but I mean, in 40 years it's the best one I can think of. And it happened when I was living in San Francisco and some of you have heard this before but it bears repetition. I was working with a group of non-Christian carpenters who thought I was a religious nut and we frequently had discussions and the discussion centered around my whacko faith. And a lot of the discussion centered around how they thought that my faith completely removed any freedom you might have. As they saw it, if you're a Christian, that's it, no sex, no drugs, no partying, no nothing. They would basically say so why in the world would I want that? Why would I have an interest in what you've got? I was working with this one fellow named Tom and we went to his apartment for lunch and we sat down at his kitchen table and I

immediately noticed he had a huge stack of *Penthouse* magazines right over there to the side of the table. And Tom pointed to the stack of magazines, and he said, "You Christians don't even have the freedom to look at a *Penthouse*." And interestingly enough there was a brand new *Penthouse* on his kitchen table that had the brown paper wrapper still on it. They still had the decency to wrap those things in brown paper back then. I don't know if they do that now, but I pointed to the magazine, I said, "And you don't have the freedom to not look at it. I mean," I said, "I can look at the cover of that magazine and walk away and you know you can't." He looked at me for a minute and then he just got a grin on his face and he got that grin because he knew that what I said was true. He knew he did not have the wherewithal to not look at that magazine. I mean he hadn't realized it before but he realized it now on some level, he realized he was enslaved to that sin. And at least he had the honesty to recognize with that grin what he had been touting as freedom was really a form of slavery. And whether or not it is lust or envy, bitterness, jealousy, gossip or all the other sins that plague us, without Christ all of us are helplessly enslaved to sin. Listen to what Martin Luther said. He said this so well, it was Martin Luther who said: "Scripture represents man as one who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick, and dead, but in addition to his other miseries is afflicted, through the agency of Satan his prince, with the misery of blindness, so that

he believes himself to be free, happy, unfettered, able, well, and alive." I mean my friend Tom never realized that he was in fact a prisoner. But here's where the prisoner part became self-evident. You see, Tom knew where he was. He may have even hated where he was or not, and yet he also knew that he lacked the will to change where he was. I mean he knew what the right thing was, he knew how you're supposed to do the right thing, he just didn't have the ability to want to do the right thing enough to change. He was a prisoner of the law. Paul says in *Romans 7*, he says: *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* See, as long as we live, the law has the power to demand what we cannot supply. And in baptism, the plunging under the water is a living picture of what it means to die to the power of that law. I mean we are talking about dying to one way of living and being re-created to living in a new one. And when we say we are dead to sin, we mean that the power that sin used to have over us has been ended and it's been ended by a death. Because once a person has died, he's been freed from any power that the law has over him.

You know, many, many years ago -- this is probably dating myself and a lot of you don't even know who Mussolini was, but he was a terrible dictator in Italy during World War II and when he was

overthrown, he and his mistress were executed, they were shot and they were hung upside down. Their bullet-ridden bodies were hung in the town square and people pummeled them with rocks and sticks. It was a futile gesture because they were already dead. I mean you can beat a corpse, you can desecrate it, you can threaten it, you torture it but it's only symbolic. For all practical purposes nothing can touch somebody who's dead. And in one sense he is absolutely free, the only problem is he's dead. But what if you had the same freedom, I mean, that the law could no longer touch you because it saw you as a dead man but you're still very much alive? Well that's what baptism represents. *Romans 7:4*, it says: *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.* You see, in baptism you symbolize that the day that you placed your faith in Christ is the day you died. You're a dead man as far as the law is concerned. You died to the law because Jesus Christ stood in your place to receive your punishment and you are now dead to its demands. You've been buried with Christ under the water and you are resurrected with him as well. Again *Romans 6:4* says: *"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."*

Now all of this talk of death and burial and resurrection might sound a little overly spiritual to some but let me make this as practical as I can. I've raised this issue of dying to sin by saying well, I lust, I envy, I lie, I cheat, I gossip, I steal, and then I get baptized with Christ and it all goes away. Well actually what happens is this: I become born again first and then God's Holy Spirit begins to live inside me. *Romans 8:9* says: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* You see, when I am born again, I become a new temple and inside this new temple lives God's Holy Spirit and he begins the process of changing my sinful desires. They literally begin to transform. I mean baptism represents the dying of the old man with those old sinful desires and it means that not only can the law no longer touch you because you've died with Christ, but you also now find that your very desires are brand new and they're not the same desires you had all along. These are desires that now begin to line up with God's. And you start to do what the law requires but you don't do it because it's hanging over your head any more, you start to do it now because you get pleasure out of doing it. I mean worship and giving and singing and praying, those were all things that I could have lived quite nicely without, thank you, before I became a believer, before Christ came into my life, but now that's unthinkable. We now do those things

not because we have to but because we want to. The difference now is that our heart of stone has been replaced with his heart of flesh and we do freely now what the law requires.

Jonathan Leeman summed it up nicely. He speaks of the freedom this heart transplant provides. He says this: "Biblical freedom is this remarkable state in which we want what God wants. How does this happen? How are we set free to want what God wants? At one time God's righteous law imprisoned us, but now, we are free to be 'slaves of righteousness' and Jesus and Paul want to call that 'freedom.' How is that possible? It is possible because of the new covenant. The Spirit gives us new hearts. He creates new desires in us so that we desire to love God and love our neighbor which is to fulfill the law."

Now I'm 68 years old and for 44 of those years I've been a new creature in Christ. But for my first 24, I too was a prisoner of the law. And in many ways I hated my life but I hated the thought of God even more. I mean if someone could ever stop me back then and describe for me what my future life would be including what my likes and my dislikes would be, I wouldn't believe them. I mean if somebody were to tell me at age 24 that in the second half of my life I would be going to church, I would be studying scripture, I would be praying for the pleasure of worshiping God, if you told me

that, I would have burst out laughing. In fact I'm sure I would have laughed right in your face. You see, the newness of life in Christ means a new set of appetites that God has placed within me. And again, I need to make a distinction here. You know, if someone has said as I grow older, maybe I would find the need for God and religion and church and I might have as a forty or fifty-year-old man paid some attention to that. I might have seen some positive benefit for my kids, maybe for my family, you know, it's probably about time to start doing "the God thing." So perhaps I would have been willing to hear that. I mean I might have even done the religion thing because it has obvious benefits. And make no mistake about it, religion, any religion, has its benefits. Here's the problem. *Romans 3:10* states unequivocally no one, no one seeks for God. But on any Sunday morning there are hundreds of thousands of churches and synagogues and temples and mosques that are filled with people who are apparently seeking God. Well in reality the vast bulk of those folks are seeking the benefits of seeking God without actually seeking God. And I say that because God says no one, no one seeks him on our own. All religions offer a sense of security, a sense of belonging, a social structure, an identity structure, it can make them very, very attractive. See, there's a benefit there that has nothing to do with seeking God and lots of contemporary Westerners now choose a religion like you would make any other life-style choice, on the basis of a perceived benefit.

God has nothing to do with it. Had God not intervened in my life, if God had not done this spiritual heart transplant, I, too, would have made such a lifestyle choice. What I never would have believed is someone telling me that I would be worshiping God not for the benefit of it but for the sheer pleasure of it. I mean, if somebody had told me even later in life the joy and the deep satisfaction of a relationship with Jesus Christ would far surpass anything I would have imagined, I would have simply dismissed it. I just would have thought you're nuts. But that's what the newness of life in Christ is all about. We start loving what Christ loved. We start hating what he hated. We start valuing what he values because the Spirit of Christ has now taken up residence inside us. And he says: *I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* All of this is symbolically captured by the simple act of baptism. We are dead in our sins, buried with Christ in the water, then raised with Christ to come back out of the water.

And so to review, what is baptism? Well, baptism is nothing more than plunging underwater. What is the point of baptism? It is a symbolic picture of the death, burial and resurrection that we have in Christ. It is not a cleansing from sin but rather a picture of the cleansing that's already taken place through the blood of Christ. And finally that brings us to question three which is:

Why should we get baptized? Well, there's a real simple answer, and the simplest of answers is: God said so. Doesn't get simpler than that. I mean Peter's first sermon made it crystal clear. I mean, it was on the very first day of Pentecost when the gift of tongues had descended on all of the assembled believers and everyone spoke and was understood in his native language. And Peter spoke and his words were extremely powerful and this is what he said. He said: *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know -- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it."*

Well, apparently Paul never got the memo that you're not supposed to be that blunt, that you're not supposed to make people feel guilty by telling them exactly where they stand and that you're not really supposed to accuse them directly of murder. Well that's what Peter did. I mean he just opened up and he let the people have it. And he went on to say this, he said: *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."* Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, *"Brothers, what shall we do?"* Now it's also

important to note here what Peter did not say in response to the question. He didn't say, "Smile, God loves you." He didn't say, "God loves you and has a perfect plan for your life." This is what he actually said. It says: *And Peter said to them, "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."* Why did Peter say that? Well, he said that because shortly before that day, shortly before Jesus was ascended into heaven, Jesus gave a final parting message to Peter and the rest of the disciples, and this is what Jesus said in *Matthew 28*. He said: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age."* So Peter in his first sermon is doing exactly what Jesus commanded him to do. And God was clearly pleased with Peter's approach. *Acts 2:41* says: *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

Something else remarkable happened that day. You see, baptism marked the birth of the local church. And here we are 2,000 years later and we are celebrating the very same process. And that leads to my question this morning. My question is this: Why are you here? I mean if you're a member of the kingdom of God and God the

Holy Spirit is living inside you, he is uniquely conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ. He is shaping and molding his very appetites within you and that includes the appetite that has caused you to want to be here in the first place. I've said many, many times there's a thousand other places you could be but here, so why are you here? Well, is it not because God has placed within you a desire to meet with other believers? A desire to worship and share the word of God, to become part of a chosen called out group of fallen sinners that God has elected to pour his blood, his grace and his mercy into in order to display his glory? That's the living body of Christ. That is the church. That's all part of the newness of life that's represented when we come up out of the water in baptism. You see, the ceremony of baptism affirms the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ and my resurrection along with him. Again: *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.* But understand something. Something critical to get here, that newness of life is always displayed within the context of the local body of Christ, the church. Baptism is oftentimes our first opportunity to publicly affirm what God has done in our lives while at the same time basically affirming the church's role as an alternative reality to the world that we live in. Baptism proves that you cannot be a lone ranger Christian. Nobody baptizes

themselves. God designed baptism to be a physical declaration that you are lining yourself up with God's people in his body. He says we are to be in the world but not of the world, and baptism represents our entry into the kingdom of God while we are here on earth and as such it is always a public declaration. Baptism is never a private affair. I mean even if it has to be done surreptitiously in persecuting countries, it still takes place before witnesses and it still tells the world "I am publicly declaring my allegiance to Jesus Christ and his church."

Jonathan Leeman sees baptism in athletic terms and it really has to do with publicly acknowledging whose team you are on. And you know, lots of times the ones who are coming forward for baptism are young men and women, boys and girls who may see it more plainly in terms of athletics. But the important point is this, conversion -- this is what Leeman makes very clear, conversion and baptism are two very different things. He says: At conversion by God's grace personally and privately we change teams. We leave the kingdom of darkness, we enter the kingdom of light, all things become new. *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.* Well baptism takes place afterwards. Sometimes it's a matter of hours. If you remember the Ethiopian eunuch, that was just a matter of hours. There were three thousand baptized after Peter's first

sermon. And sometimes it's a matter of years, but the act of getting baptized always takes place after, after we've switched teams. I mean athletically speaking what baptism is saying is that now that I've already switched team, I'm now going to publicly switch jerseys. Baptism represents a new start with a new team and it's going to go on forever with a new king, King Jesus, the one who gives us life eternal. It's publicly putting on a new jersey and it's publicly declaring my loyalty to this new team for all time. Listen to how Leeman puts it when it comes to baptism, he says this: "Whether people's decision to swap allegiances comes gradually or quickly, a point comes when they must decide to change their team: 'You've been playing for the red team. You've been thinking about switching to the blue team. What's it going to be, red or blue?' Conversion occurs at the moment the decision is made to leave one team and join the other." Leeman goes to say: "Baptism, then, is putting on the new jersey. It's when we publicly identify ourselves, by the church's representative authority, with his death and resurrection. All the thinking and journeying come to a head right there. Through the church, Jesus asks whether we will die to ourselves and our own rule, be buried with Him, and trust that he will raise us up with Him according to a new power and rule."

Today some of our people are going to publicly enter the water,

they're going to go under that water and then rise up out of it having obeyed their Lord. By God's grace and by his mercy they have been led from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. They've already switched teams. By God's grace through baptism we will have the pleasure today of watching them switch jerseys. Let's pray.

Father, again I thank you for the gift of salvation, and I thank you for baptism which represents the death, the burial and the resurrection of Christ and our death, burial and resurrection with you. Father, I pray right now today this morning if there's anybody that your Spirit is prompting to go ahead into the waters of baptism that you would give them no peace until they make that decision, make that plunge. So often I see folks who are just frightened and thoughtful about abandoning it, then they go through it and they feel so much better, they feel so much at peace because they recognize that this is something they need to be doing. Lord, if there is somebody in this body right now, just speak to them gently, suggest that they have this opportunity to go forward in the waters of baptism. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.