

# What is the Significance of Water Baptism?

*By Melanie Stone*

If you don't understand the meaning of water baptism, you are not alone! Standing in a tank of water alongside someone who is getting ready to dunk you is not something most people do every day. Some people get water baptized simply because that is what the preacher said to do. Some people get water baptized because other people are doing it. However, when you understand the significance of water baptism, your decision to be baptized can be profound.

Water baptism is symbolic of our salvation through Jesus Christ. Our salvation includes eternal life; it also includes wholeness in spirit, soul, and body. Our salvation includes soundness in mind and emotions, peace in turmoil, physical healing, financial provision, and freedom from bondages, just to name a few. Water baptism is not just a natural experience; water baptism can be a miraculous, spiritual experience.

I have a pastor friend who had a skin condition when he was water baptized. When he came up out of the water, his skin had been instantly and miraculously healed! The rash he had was completely gone!

## Where it all started

We read about water baptism in the New Testament, starting with John the Baptist, a prophet who foretold about the coming ministry of Jesus Christ. However, before then, immersion in water was not unfamiliar to the Jewish people. Prior to the life of Christ on the earth, Jews would immerse other Jews in water for times of purification or to convert a person to Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

When John the Baptist began his ministry, he was calling Jewish to be immersed in water, but it was for a different reason. John preached a message of repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah. This was a big deal for the Jews. At this time they were underneath the rule of the Romans. The Messiah was promised to deliver Israel from oppression and rule over them as their King. John was preaching it was time to get ready for the coming of their promised King (Read Matthew 3:13-17).

Jesus came out to John to be water baptized. John recognized and identified Jesus as the Messiah. John resisted baptizing Jesus, saying that he was in need of being baptized by Him. Jesus answered, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." This illustrated the death that Jesus would die for us. When John baptized Jesus, God confirmed Jesus as the Messiah by opening the heavens, sending the Holy Spirit, and letting the people hear His voice saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Imagine being on the bank of the Jordan River on that day! If you were a Jew, this event had great significance! This was your Messiah!

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<sup>1</sup> Tevilah is the Hebrew word to describe immersions in a natural water source for purification or conversion. In ancient times a river was used, but later on a mikveh, a specially constructed pool, was used.

John was not the only one to baptize Jews for repentance. We read in John 4:1 that Jesus' disciples were also doing water baptisms. The Bible says they were baptizing more people than John the Baptist was. This was quite a movement before Jesus' ministry began, a preparation for to receive Christ's earthly ministry through repentance.

## Public profession

After Christ rose from the grave, He instructed His followers to disciple and to baptize new converts. We refer to these verses as "The Great Commission."

*Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen*

Water baptism became a public profession of our salvation. It symbolizes how we have conformed to Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The general practice was to get baptized right after conversion; however, the timing is not a requirement.

There are several examples of water baptism in the New Testament. One Bible example is when Peter preached salvation through Jesus to the Jews, and three thousand were saved. Peter said in Acts 2:38, "*Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" In verse 41 it says, "*Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.*"

Other examples include Philip baptizing people after he preached salvation in Samaria (Acts 8:12) and to a eunuch in verse 38. Paul was baptized by Ananias in Acts 9:18 (Acts 22:16). Peter baptized Gentiles in Acts 10:47-48. Lydia was baptized in Philippi in Acts 16:15. The Philippian jailer was baptized in Acts 16:33. Crispus, a Jewish ruler of the synagogue received Christ and was baptized, along with his family, in Acts 18:8. We read in Acts 19 about believers who were water baptized.

Some of the examples show us that people were water baptized immediately, and for some they were baptized later. Here are some examples of how we see people getting water baptized today:

1. Some are water baptized immediately after receiving salvation.
2. Some get baptized later when they understand baptism better.
3. Others may have been water baptized before they had a full grasp of the experience, so they get baptized again.
4. Some were baptized or sprinkled as a child, but did not get born again until later in life, so they get water baptized at their conversion.
5. There are even those who knew the Lord, but fell away. They decide to get water baptized when they rededicate their lives back to God.
6. Others just feel a prompting of the Holy Spirit in obedience to participate in a spontaneous water baptism as a renewing of their surrender.

There are people who would disagree with some of the above reasons, but there is nothing in scripture that would prevent any of them. As long as a person understands his or her salvation is complete and finished the moment they receive Christ, they know going under water isn't changing that. Going under water is simply the profession of their surrender and celebration of their salvation.

What happens in our heart should cause us to give a public profession of our faith. In Matthew 10, Jesus tells us to shine our light and tell the world of our faith in Him.

*Matthew 10:32-33 says, "32) Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. 33) But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."*

Part of our surrender to the Lord is telling other people about Him. Obedience to identify with Christ in water baptism has significance, and I encourage you to step out and do so. However, you will not lose your salvation if you do not publicly profess your faith by water baptism or going forward at an altar or shouting it on a street corner. When you are saved, you will want to share salvation with someone else, and you can share Christ in different ways. Don't live in fear of losing your salvation or being denied by Christ if you are not water baptized.

## **Water baptism is an outward expression of an inward work.**

Water baptism is meaningful to our salvation, but it is not the substance of our salvation. It's a sign of our salvation. Water does not save you; Jesus saves you. Going under water will not change your heart. If a person goes under the water without the change of heart, that person has not received salvation; he or she has only gotten wet!

Salvation comes by receiving forgiveness through Christ and surrendering to His Lordship. Being sprinkled as a baby will not save you. Being dedicated by your parents does not save you. A change of heart does not take place in you because of the life lived by your parents. Salvation is a decision each person has to make on their own.

Furthermore, we cannot be saved by doing religious works, like going to church, reading our Bibles, or getting water baptized! Salvation is an inward work. Water baptism is an outward expression of what has taken place on the inside of our hearts.

That outward expression could also be meaningful as a proclamation of what Christ is doing in our hearts later in life. I was first water baptized when I was nine years old. I had received Christ at a very young age, and I understood water baptism was a way to share my salvation with others. As I got older, my relationship with Christ deepened after I learned more about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came to me and revealed a deeper meaning of scriptures in Romans about my surrender to the Lord. It was the Holy Spirit that led me to be water baptized again as a teenager. I had a fresh revelation of God's love for me, He was asking me to dedicate my life to Him, so I gave Him my life out of love. I was water baptized again at Open Bible Christian Church in Dayton, Ohio, and it was an unforgettable moment between my Lord and me.

## Identification with Christ

The scripture the Holy Spirit had quickened to me are found in Romans 6. Here the Apostle Paul explained water baptism in comparison to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is something that should be personal to each of us, a willing surrender to a love that is like none other. Our Father loves us and invites us to relationship with Him (Read Romans 6).

Let's remember that Jesus came to identify with us in our sin so that we could identify with Him in His life. He entered the world in a similar way to our entrance. He was born of a woman. He chose to leave the glory of God's presence to become a human being so He could identify with us. He lived on the earth to share the human experience. He identified with our struggles, our world, and our death - dying in our place. Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." Our salvation is when we identify with Him, and His life, His resurrection, and experience the Holy Spirit.

### When we go under the water

We identify with His death when we are put under water. This illustrates His sacrifice to willingly offer His life through dying on a cross. Thankfully we don't have to die a death on a cross because Jesus did that on our behalf. However, we die to ourselves like Jesus did when He took our place, praying, "Not my will but Yours be done." The plunge into water is illustrative of our conformity to His death by surrendering our life to His Lordship.

Salvation doesn't come from doing good works or saying a prayer. Conversion comes from the reliance of faith, putting ourselves in a position of dependency on God through Christ.

*Colossians 2:12 "buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."*

*Romans 10:9, 10 "9) that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10) For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."*

The decision to die isn't a temporary decision. It's a decision to give Christ the rest of our lives, all of it. He bought us with a price so we are no longer our own. Thus, death, a finality, an ending of self. As a result of our death is a daily surrendered life to our Lord.

Living water or running water, such as a river, also illustrates the purification from sin. While it is not a requirement to be water baptism in flowing water, we don't want to lose the significance that goes along with the washing forgiveness Christ offers.

*Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."*

### When we rise from the water

We identify with the life of Christ when we come up out of the water. Jesus did not stay dead or in a grave. Once the price was paid for sin, God was able to raise Jesus from the dead. When we come up out of the water, it is symbolic of the new life we have in Christ. Not only were we conformed to His death, but we are also made alive together with Him.

*II Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if anyone is IN CHRIST, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."*

*Romans 6:5 "For if we have been UNITED TOGETHER in the LIKENESS OF HIS DEATH, certainly we also shall be in the LIKENESS OF HIS RESURRECTION."*

*Romans 8:10, 11 "And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."*

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

*Ephesians 2:1 "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins."*

*Ephesians 2:5 "even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*

*Ephesians 2:6 "and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,"*

## **Covenant with God**

Sin separated us from a union with God, our life. They way to reconcile with God and enter back into that union could not be accomplished on our own. We were outside of God's sphere. It was impossible for us to reunited with God because we were all guilty. Jesus came to be one of us and die our death. When we surrender to Christ, we enter a union with Him. In our union with Christ, together with Christ, we can be reconciled to God.

*Colossians 3:3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

It is through our covenant union that we can know God, and I mean we can really know God. We can experience Him, His life, His power, His love, His anointing, His healing, His provision, His salvation! Water baptism symbolizes the end to our own ways and our new life in union with Him.

If you would like to be water baptized, please talk with the leaders in your local church to let them know of your interest. Be blessed!