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## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

When looking at biblical passages it is useful to have a commentary handy that applies the passage to our lives today. A good example would be the **Bible Speaks Today** series by IVP. Remember that you are looking very specifically at what this passage says about **baptism**. A good commentary will raise many other issues which the passage refers to, but stay focused on baptism and its implications.

1) *Matthew 28: 16-20*



#### **GOD'S MISSION:**

Note that Jesus says that all authority has been given to Him; this is the way that Matthew avoids using the holy name of God and makes it clear at the same time that he is speaking about God. So, Matthew is saying much the same as John when Jesus says in John's gospel that He only does what the Father does. This is **God's mission on which Jesus is working**. It is that mission into which Jesus calls His disciples.

Jesus has not started on a project apart from the Father and neither do we. We are not called to be creative and clever and think of new projects to tackle: we are called in baptism to be faithful, to grow and to continue the work of Jesus. We are not starting our own franchise or doing God a favour; **we are called to serve God**.

#### **DISCIPLESHIP:**

The goal that Jesus wants His disciples to reach is not baptism, but **discipleship**. It is very important to realise this, otherwise baptism becomes the only aim and we miss **Jesus' aim which is to bring people everywhere into discipleship**. Baptising people is the first step towards making disciples, because it relates people to God through Jesus where there was previously no relationship at all. It is the first step which is not worth very much without the next steps:

- ✓ **teaching** people what **Jesus taught** and then **doing** what **Jesus did**;
- ✓ sharing in the abiding presence of Jesus for ever.

*Baptism has never been an end in itself.*

## **BAPTISING:**

this should not be seen as saying baptism is unimportant! **Baptism is part of the response that we make to God's** reaching out to us in the love and sacrifice of Jesus. It is part of our faith pilgrimage with God. It is a visible expression of our faith in Jesus and a physical action we take to show our commitment to Jesus and our desire to become active members of His Church.

It is also, as already noted, the **first step** in the process of helping people to become disciples of Jesus.

It is important to be fully aware that **baptism is the start of a life-long process** that ends when we see God face to face. Anything that takes all of our lives will have its ups and its downs – we do not for that reason give up!

## **TEACHING:**

**Jesus knows that growing in our relationship with God in the power of the Holy Spirit requires teaching.** Nobody comes into baptism and has nothing further to learn. In the early church this was a lengthy process of mentoring. Today most of this is expected to happen after baptism as those baptised take their place in the Christian community.

## **BAPTISM IS ABOUT CHANGED LIVES, NOT JUST A MOVING SERVICE:**

As with any life, the baptised life is lived **one day at a time** and only one day at a time. There are no shortcuts. Without this daily effort of living the Christian life, baptism is robbed of all power, meaning, and blessing.

## **COMMUNITY/TRINITY:**

We have been reminded in recent years that God is a glorious **“working model” of community.** God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet not three separate entities but one being. God is one in love and purpose.

The harmony and commitment that we see in God encourages us in our **life as Christian community** even as we fall so far short of it. **Baptism is a communal sacrament** not because it is only effective when the whole community is present, but because it makes each one baptised an integral part of the local church, the Body of Christ.

It also means taking one another seriously and interacting with respect towards all as we live out our commitment to Jesus day by day. **We share Jesus' teachings** with others first and foremost by the **way we live as His followers every day**; and then by what we say.

## **JESUS:**

It may seem obvious that **Jesus is at the centre of the lives** of those baptised, but so many of us live as if it was actually all about “*me*”.

**Jesus is at the centre** because God has empowered Him for that very role. Jesus isn't being arrogant when He claims all authority in heaven and on earth; He is stating a God fact; it is not His opinion, but God's decision.

And because **it is all about Jesus**, the disciples had to come **to Jesus** and submit to His authority and **surrender** their own clever ways to Jesus.

As the disciples needed to come to Jesus, so **we also need to come to Jesus and submit** our clever ways to Jesus. Every day we need to live out our submission to the will of God.

Because all authority has been given to Jesus, there is real power available to those who follow Him. Only it is not power as our world understands it: power to do as we please without accountability. It is power as Jesus lived it to win the victory that He gives us in baptism.

**This is the power of self-sacrificing love** which does not use the weapons of this world.

**All of this only makes sense because Jesus promises to be with His disciples for ever.** By the Holy Spirit, Jesus is real and present in the lives of His followers so that they are able to live baptismal lives. Of course, we can say “No” to Jesus in our own power, but we cannot live for Him in our own power. The Christian life can not be lived in our own ability or strength.

Baptism reminds us not only that we are not our own, but that we shall never be on our own because God will never leave us. Jesus has given His word to “be with us” always and that remains true whether or not we feel Him near. **The promise depends not on our feeling it to be true, but on the dependability of God's Word.**

## 2) Romans 6: 3-11

### **“DEATH” & “RESURRECTION”:**

As surely as death brings about a dramatic change and resurrection describes something equally extraordinary, so **baptism makes us a part of what God has achieved for us in Jesus.**

We become **free to choose** to live for God or without God. Baptism is a preparation for turning away from our former self-centred, selfish way of living. We are empowered to live life in “Jesus mode” because we share in the same Spirit in whom He was baptised.

**We are no longer trapped by sin** in death-producing results. We have the choice to do what pleases Jesus. Jesus was clearly different after the resurrection, and after baptism so are we, because we share in His resurrection benefits. But the choice to live in this newness and power in obedience to Jesus, is always still a choice because God does not trap or force us.

### **NEW RELATIONSHIP:**

**Baptism makes us sisters and brothers of Jesus**, which we were certainly not before. We become part of Jesus’ family and that makes us daughters and sons of God. Clearly, only God can make such a thing happen. No wonder people speak about living in a whole new reality in relationship with God.

### **NEW COMMUNITY:**

In baptism we enter into this new family one by one. Yet all share in the same baptism which brings into existence a new kind of humanity: a humanity that does not have to struggle for recognition or love. The theological name for this new humanity is “the Body of Christ”. **Every baptised Christian becomes a full member of that one body because all are baptised into the one and only Jesus Christ.**

This new life in Christ is renewed in the Eucharist again and again and again. The Eucharist is shared in a community of faith, just as baptism is a communal sacrament. Our new risen life is fed and nourished as we celebrate in a resurrection community – which seeks to live out the risen life of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to God’s honour and glory.


## “DEAD TO SIN / ALIVE TO GOD IN JESUS”:

Please see what has been said above on this. (*compare this with Romans 1:5; John 3: 36; Romans 16:19; 2 Corinthians 9: 13; 1 Peter 1: 2; and all of Romans chapters 6 and 7*)

## GOD ACHIEVED THROUGH JESUS:

Through baptism it is now possible for us to choose to live a life obedient to God’s love. In all of this glorious transformation in God’s power (Holy Spirit), **Jesus is our model and mentor** and we always only respond to His initiative. The results of God’s victory over all the forces of darkness are among others:

- ❖ Jesus has brought God’s people back to God;
- ❖ Jesus has rescued the world from being trapped in sin;
- ❖ Jesus creates the possibility of real newness and the ultimate healing of the world’s woes;
- ❖ the grip of sin that strangled the life out of us has been broken – if we choose to sin, it is now our choice;
- ❖ Jesus sets us free to serve God or the forces of evil.

3) *John 3: 1-8* 

## HOLY SPIRIT:

As we have seen a number of times already, **the initiative lies with God and not with us**, no matter how much we think we have chosen and are in control. In this work of grace, the baby’s role is passive (as it is in physical birth as well) and it is at the receiving end of blessings. In adult baptism, likewise we have no control over what God does. God is in charge!

## NEW LIFE:

The new life that God gives us as **a free gift** is not something that we can ever bring about for ourselves. The initiative lies with God and remains there.

## **NEW BIRTH:**

The **parents have an ongoing responsibility** for the physical, emotional and mental life of the child – and for its spiritual life.

In baptism the parents undertake to focus on the child's spiritual growth and development. They affirm to make it their priority in life **to see the child grow in faith** until it makes its own vows to God.

Parents need to be very clear that their **responsibility in baptism only really starts once the baptism service is over**. God will hold them accountable for what they do for their child **after baptism**. This is a serious thing to promise God! It is so very easy after baptism to pretend nothing happened and to live for ourselves apart from God again.

## **GODPARENTS' ONGOING RESPONSIBILITIES:**

The **godparents have promised God to be an active part** in this spiritual formation. They have sponsored the child in the face of the local church; they have guaranteed what will happen to honour God and that they won't fail the child in this regard or in its physical needs. They also promise to support the child every day by praying for it. There is much by way of guidance and care that godparents can do to help their godchild grow up into Jesus. Most of these things will be rooted in a relationship with the godchild which demands time. Without a commitment to these elements, the role of godparent is largely devalued.

## **PARENTS / GODPARENTS:**

Parents and godparents need to be clear about the **importance of their roles** in the life of the child. This is not simply "something everybody does".

**There is years' of hard work, prayer and guidance involved.**

If this is not what you understand by baptism, it is better and more honourable to wait until you can make these enormous promises to God in front of a church full of people who know you.

**Faith** is really **caught by children from their parents** – just as they learn to speak and behave by observing their parents. The parents' role in teaching and modelling Christian behaviour is crucial.

## **JESUS ACCEPTED NICODEMUS:**

Jesus accepted Nicodemus because he wasn't playing games with God to get something he wanted by pretending to be something he was not. Jesus both respected that and met Nicodemus there – He will do the same with us. **We relate to a God who loves us and longs to bless us and our children**, but God remains in charge and the new life happens on God's terms, not ours.

## **GOD IS BEYOND COMPREHENSION:**

The God we believe and trust in is utterly beyond our imagining, yet we can know God's love and care here and now and so **we trust God and follow where God leads.**