

As we've been understanding FOREVER, and learning what the Bible says is going to take place at and beyond the second coming of Jesus Christ, I know that a number of you have started to ask yourself some pretty important questions.

As we learned about the metal image in Daniel 2, and the prophecy about the coming kingdom of Christ you may have been asking, "How can I be part of that kingdom?"

As we learned that everything is decided at His coming and that there are no second chances, some of you began asking "How can I know for sure that I will be ready when he comes?"

As we looked at what happens to the righteous and the unrighteous during the thousand years, again some of you were asking "How can I be among those who go to heaven with him, and are part of the New Jerusalem, those who live on the earth made new?"

I'm guessing that if you're like the rest of us, the problem as you see it is that you're not sure if you're good enough for God to save. Perhaps your past is just too bad for God to take you home with Him.

Others will be saying "I haven't the slightest clue how to be part of God's kingdom, but the more I learn about FOREVER the more I need to know.

Well it would be amiss of me not to share the answers to these important questions with you. To tell you what's coming, but keep you in the dark as to how to do anything about it would be totally irresponsible of me. In fact it would be totally wrong. So tonight we're going to talk about FOREVER from where you sit right now. In fact as you think about it, what could be more important?

Well there is some good news for us in this lesson. In fact it's the best news! What we share here is the central story of the Bible. A story that when we're done you will be left in no doubt as to how you can be part of God's kingdom if that is your desire.

Because the good news is that the Kingdom is OPEN, and it's available to everyone, regardless of your past! Are you ready for this important topic?

OK – I'm going to shock you a little bit because as you know, whenever there is good news, there is also – bad news! And before you can understand the best news of the Bible, it's important that you understand the bad news.

Romans 3:10,11,18 *We are all alike under sin. There is no one righteous, not even one; There is no one who seeks after God. All have turned away. There is no fear of God before their eyes. '*

Romans 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

A few verses earlier in v 19

Therefore we know that whatever the law says it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

1 John 5:19 says it like this

"...the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one."

Now you would think that was bad news enough – that **everyone** – the whole world has sinned and has fallen short of the Glory of God, but in fact it gets worse. And in case you were thinking you were the only one that God cannot save, rest assured we are all in this together. The Bible is clear that **ALL** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God!

Romans 6:23 (first part) *For the wages of sin is death*

Hang on a minute I hear you say. You're telling me that the whole world deserves the wages of sin. The death penalty? Including me, even before I was born? How can it say that the whole world is held accountable to God? That's unfair on me. I hadn't even sinned when all of this was decided!

Let's take a moment to explain. You remember that in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were given total freedom with one small exception. God had said to them they could eat of any fruit of any tree, except for the one tree. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He said to them that in the day they ate of it they would surely die. Now most of you will know the story of how Eve took the fruit and then offered it to Adam. When Adam ate the fruit, it forever changed our eternal destiny. Instead of enjoying eternal life with God, our race fell into sin, and was separated from him.

Look at what the Bible says here in Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men because all sinned.

The truth is that when Adam sinned, you and I sinned – because we were where? In Adam. And here it helps for us to understand something.

The Bible says that when God made Adam, he formed him out of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul. We looked at this in the study on "what happens when we die". Adam in Hebrew means mankind. When God made Adam he made all of mankind in one. Notice that when he made Eve he took her from where? Out of Adam. So when Eve sinned, she was condemned to die, but when Adam sinned, the whole world was condemned to die. So you were in Adam when he sinned.

Let me ask you this way, “if your great great grandfather had died at the age of 3, where would you be?” No where! Why? You were in him when he died. In a similar way the Bible teaches us that when Adam sinned and was condemned to death, so the whole world sinned and was condemned to die.

Now knowing what you now know about what happens to the unrighteous at the end of the thousand years, can you tell me which death that is referring to? – yes – the **Second death** from which there is no coming back. The wages of sin is the second death – the lake of fire – the Bible says that because of our sin the penalty that awaits us is that we will be destroyed and never live again! It’s bad news!

Can it be? Compare this verse with the most famous verse in Scripture:

John 3:16

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him **shall not perish*** (there it is again!)

Friends if the Bible left it there we might as well not be here. We might as well go out and live to get every last thing we can out of this life because when it’s gone, that’s it. And when you think about it isn’t that what a lot of people are doing? They have no hope beyond the grave. They believe that what they see is all there is to life, so they’re living life as though it were a sponge and they’re trying to squeeze every last drop out of it before it’s gone?

But the good news is that the Bible doesn’t leave it there. Let’s read these couple of verses through again and see that God never shares only the bad news, rather He is doing everything He can to have us understand that He has made a way out.

Let’s go back to Romans 3. We read v19-20, but let’s now add to it v21.

Romans 3:21 *But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law has been made known, to which the law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference.*

We read v23 which says *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, now let’s add to it v24 – and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

I want to take a moment to clear some things up with you tonight. It occurs to me that there are a number of myths that people believe about how we are to enter the Kingdom of God.

MYTH #1: God doesn’t really want me to enter the Kingdom.

This kind of thinking is about as opposed to the Bible as you can get. It’s a lie from the enemy – A person who has fallen totally for this believes that God is doing everything He possibly can to keep me out of the kingdom. In a milder form it says “Maybe God loves me, but I don’t think He likes me.”

Look with me at John 3:16 again:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish (that's the Second death) *but have everlasting life.* (that's eternity with Christ).

Now why did God do that? Because he loves you! *God so loved the world* – For God so loved **YOU** – the reason God sent his son Jesus Christ into the world is because he loved you so much He cant bear to think of FOREVER without you. He loves you. He really does!

MYTH #2: I have to be good enough for God and earn it. Some people think that if they are good people, and do good things, and speak nicely of others, and sponsor a few children through World Vision, and support their local school that God has to save them. But let me ask you point blank, “can you earn it?” No. Why not? Because you've sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and no amount of doing good things can ever bridge that gap! The Bible says that even the best behaviour you can produce is like filthy rags when compared to the perfect life of Christ. It's not your goodness that can save you, no, only the perfect life, death, burial and resurrection of Christ is able to save you. In fact it's God's gift to you. **So here the good news keeps getting better – because not only can we cross over and be reconciled with God here and now!**

Look now at the last part of Romans 6:23

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Friends eternal life is a gift from God for you to receive freely. “You mean I don't have to earn it?” That's right! You can't earn it, you can only receive it.

Look at Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.

MYTH #3: If my family are Christians, or I learn enough about the Bible, or I marry a Christian, I will automatically enter the kingdom.

Look with me at John 1:10 speaking of Jesus Christ,

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of a human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God.

So God loves me and wants to save me for eternity. I can't enter the kingdom by being good, or by being born into a Christian family, or by knowing enough about the Bible, or by hanging around with other Christians, and yet I must receive him, so the question is: **“How do I receive him?”**

Mark 1:14-15 *After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come he said. The Kingdom of God is near, Repent and believe the good news!"*

Acts 16:30 *A man fell at Paul and Silas' feet and asked "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household."*

So three things we need to do:

REPENT – turn away from our old life of sin (put it to death)

BELIEVE – that Christ has paid the penalty for your sin and that your past no longer matters

INVITE – Jesus Christ into your life as leader and Lord of your life.

Let me show it to you this gift/ this grace of God in picture form – **THE BRIDGE ILLUSTRATION**

There is a God and he's perfect and holy and just

He made us to enjoy a special relationship with himself forever

Our sin destroyed that relationship and opened up a gap between us and God that we cannot bridge across.

The bad news is that the wages of this sin and separation from God is that we will die the eternal/ second death.

Even our best efforts fall short of the glory of God.

But the good news is that God loves us so much that he was not willing that anyone should perish, so he made a bridge across the gap to us.

He did this by sending his son Jesus Christ to take our sin upon himself and to die the death penalty upon himself.

So that now anyone who wants to cross over from death to life can, and the way we do this involves three things:

1. REPENT – we must decide that we are ready to leave our way behind. Repent simply means to turn away from.

2. BELIEVE – that Jesus paid for all my sins, past, present and future, and that my past no longer matters because it was nailed to the cross with Jesus, and it is now dead!

3. INVITE – Jesus Christ to come into your life tonight and by his Holy Spirit to lead you from now on.

And the Bible says that when a person does this sincerely, they are now in Christ, and they have eternal life. They are literally FOREVER changed!

Their filthy rags of sin have been covered with the spotless robes of Christ's perfect righteousness, so that now when God looks at you he doesn't see your sin, he sees the spotless robes of Christ.

In Galatians 3:27 it says when we are baptised we "put on Christ."

²⁷for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

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

Now some of you may be asking what does baptism have to do with being saved? Maybe you've never been baptised and are wondering if you need to be, or maybe you've read about it in the Bible and are wondering what it has to do with being saved. Well, let's answer this together from the Bible. Take a look with me at Mark 16:16 *“He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”*

John 3:3 Jesus speaking to Nicodemus, a teacher of the law who had come to him at night to ask him a few questions..

John 3:3 *In reply Jesus declared, I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*

How can a man be born again when he is old? Nicodemus asked. Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!

*Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, **no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again of water and of the Spirit.***

Here Jesus makes it clear that when a person surrenders themselves to the Spirit of God and is born again of the Spirit, in other words, they have learned of Jesus Christ and have made the decision to invite him into their life as Leader and Lord, then baptism is the next natural step.

I had a friend once who decided that they wanted to accept Christ as their Saviour, but didn't want to be baptised. But the Bible never teaches about being saved and then choosing not to be baptised. Sure there are exceptions to the rule like the thief on the cross who simply could not be baptised, but the Bible only ever teaches about the two going together. People who have decided to follow Christ need to be baptised.

Let's look in Matthew 28 at the great commission that Jesus gave his disciples shortly before leaving them to return to heaven. Matthew 28:29-30

*Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** And surely I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.*

1. First they were to make disciples, that is, to teach people of the grace of God, that Jesus had paid for their sins, and that their past no longer matters. All that matters now is their response to God's gift of eternal life.

2. Once a person made their decision to follow Jesus, to invite Him into their life as leader and Lord, then they should be baptised. They don't need to make their lives perfect before they can be baptised.

3. Finally, as a baptised believer, a new journey has begun, and it is important to keep learning and growing in Christ. In much the same way as a newly wed couple start learning and growing together.

A person mustn't try and wait till they've become perfect until they get baptised – no! Baptism is your acceptance of Christ as your Saviour, not of you as your Saviour. He says come to me now and let me make the changes in you.

My wife Christia can tell you that if she had waited till I was perfect it before we got married, she would have had to wait until just recently!! I'm just kidding about me being perfect – the fact is I'll never be perfect, but we are growing together every day. You're not perfect before you get baptised, and you won't be perfect afterwards. But you begin a new relationship with God that grows as you learn and love Him. Sure enough, that's just what the disciples did, let's turn to Acts 2:37- 38

Acts 2:37 ³⁷*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"* ³⁸*Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, 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.*

Let's look at another text in Romans 6:3-4 to discover why baptism is so important:

Romans 6:3-5

*"Or don't you know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ were also baptised into his **death**? Therefore we were **buried** with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was **raised** from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

*If we have been **united with him** like this **in his death**, we will certainly also be **united with him in his resurrection**.*

Now I want you to do something. I want you to look at this text and see if together we can answer a couple of questions that naturally arise when we talk of baptism.

What is baptism so important? BAPTISM UNITES US WITH CHRIST

Why is that significant? AS HE WAS RAISED, SO WE WILL RISE

We need to acknowledge that there are many different ways that churches teach baptism. But tonight, we want to know what true Bible baptism is.

Ephesians 4:4 ⁵*One Lord, one faith, one baptism,*

And if baptism is so important, the Bible ought to be clear on just how a person should be baptised. So before we go on, from this text alone what can you tell me about how should a person be baptised? By sprinkling or by immersion?

Death, burial, resurrection – fitting symbols of the baptism we find in the Bible. United with Christ in his death – buried with Christ in the tomb – and no matter how

long the pastor wants to keep you under, he has to bring you up – why? Because through baptism you are united with him in his resurrection! It's fantastic news!

Tell me was Christ baptised? Because I can't think of a better place to look for how a person should be baptised than to look at Jesus.

Matthew 3:13- 17, ¹³*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the **Jordan** to be baptised by John. ¹⁴But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. ¹⁶As soon as Jesus was baptised, **he went up out of the water.** At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

Jesus was baptized at the Jordan river, and after his baptism he "went up **out of the water.**" that's baptism by immersion!."

Let's get another text...

John 3:23 ²³*Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, **because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.***

There was "plenty of water." Why was John baptizing people at this spot? Because baptism requires a lot of water!

Let's get another one. Later in the New Testament we have the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch.

Acts 8:36- 39, ³⁶*As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptised?" ³⁸And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. ³⁹**When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.***

They went down "both into the water" and came up out of the water. **Again that's immersion!**

What does the word Baptism Mean?

Perhaps the most irrefutable proof of baptism is in the word itself. As I said to you the original word in the Greek is "baptizo," a word used in the textile industry. All material came out a dull gray & had to be dyed.

So they put the material in a big tub of dye, and with a stick pushed it under the water. They called this "baptizo."

The Greek Dictionary says it means "to dip under water, to submerge."
That means when you are baptised you are buried!

One question still remains. "Where did the other forms of baptism come from?" Believe it or not, sprinkling did not enter the Christian Church until A.D. 1311 in the Council of Ravenna. For more than 1,200 years after Christ, the entire Christian Church practiced Bible baptism by immersion.

Sprinkling came in for two major reasons. One for convenience. The clergy in their heavy robes didn't like to get wet in the baptistry. The other reason was a false teaching that emerged in the early Catholic church about how a person should be saved. That it was not a free gift of God, but rather something that had to be earned, suffered for, and in some cases purchased through penance.

The church of the day began to teach that babies should be baptised to erase the sin that they inherited from Adam (original sin). IF this failed to happen, then should the baby die, it's eternal future could involve torment in hell. So infant baptism came in. You couldn't very well dunk a new born baby, so sprinkling was introduced.

But can a baby make a decision to follow Christ and become a disciple? No. In fact no where in Scripture do we ever find babies being baptised. Instead we are encouraged to dedicate our children to God, just as Jesus was dedicated (Luke 2:22, 27- 28).

In this simple ceremony, the child is dedicated to God, and the parents pledge to raise the child to love and fear God. Then as the child grows, it can make its own decision to publicly follow God in baptism.

Unfortunately the rest of the false teaching about salvation that goes with infant baptism leads many to confusion about their acceptance with God.

You see, having been baptised as a baby and grown old enough, many young people are taught they must be confirmed and take first communion. Then throughout their life they are told that they need to be sanctified by participation in the sacraments, Communion and Holy water etc. Their sins are forgiven only by confession to a priest, and their meeting certain requirements to pray certain prayers, and to do certain things.

But one of the problems with all of this is that you will never know when you have done enough to be saved. Instead of the joy of a new life with Christ, you're left continually hoping that your life is pleasing to God and while you live with the nagging uncertainty that you may still be unsaved. In fact if you don't quite make it the church has teachings about a place called Purgatory and holds mass for the dead to help them make it to heaven.

You may have started your study of this lesson believing that this is how you were to be saved by God. I don't know how else to tell you this, but the other problem this kind of teaching has is that it is simply not taught in the Bible. As we saw earlier.

Salvation is his gift of grace to us in his Son. We receive it by faith, not by anything (no matter how good it may seem) that we do or have done.

Ephesians 2:8-10 *"For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through **faith** – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – **not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**"*

How are we saved? By GRACE, through FAITH! Not by works, lest anyone should boast. Friends when we find ourselves in the new Jerusalem, not one of us will be able to boast that it somehow had something to do with how good we were on earth. The Bible says that everyone there, is there by the grace of God. You know it never ceases to amaze me how some people can know all of this, and even believe it, but just will not bring themselves to act on their faith and be baptized! You'd think it was just too important to ignore.

But there are in fact plenty of people about who think that so long as they believe in Christ it doesn't matter whether or not they respond to him and are baptised, or for that matter whether they live a new life with him as their Lord. I met a guy recently who described himself as a Christian, just not a practicing one! The Bible says there are no such things as non-practising Christians! You either follow Christ and are a Christian, or you don't and you're not!

You see the Bible teaches that we are saved by Grace through faith. And for faith to be real it must result in action. If your faith in Christ doesn't bring about a response there's something wrong it wouldn't you agree – in fact the Bible says that faith without works is dead! We need to be united with Christ that our sins may be covered and so that he can lead us to live a new life. Genuine faith always results in action.

It's like sitting in a row boat with two oars. The one oar is Faith and the other oar is obedience. Now some people say all you need is faith, But if you row with faith alone, where do you go? Circles. Likewise if you grab the oar of works and you row without faith, what happens? Circles. Friends, it takes both oars in the water. Faith, and a willing response that is born of faith.

Lets finish this study with a story from 2 Kings 5. Read for yourself the **Story of Naaman**. Naaman went to see Elisha who received a message from God for Naaman, told him to wash in the river 7 times and he would be cured. Naaman felt insulted at first, but humbled himself and went to wash. Only as he acted on his faith was he healed. Friends, Naaman was blessed because he had faith AND he obeyed the Word of the God. There is no substitute for receiving God's cleansing and forgiveness and receiving a new life in him. Look at what a baptised believer now has in Christ:

Cleansing of the past – it no longer matters –

There is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!

A new identity - 2 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."

A new Father and family – 1 John 3:1

Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us – that we should be called children of God!

A new hope, A new future, A new purpose

The promise of transformation as he sets you free from sin and it's effects, and shows you a new way to live. The one thing I wish I could tell every person on the North Shore tonight is that FOREVER is free. God loves you so much that he gave his Son as a free gift to you to pay the penalty of sin that stood between you and God. Now, the good news is that anyone who receives that gift, and responds to Jesus Christ, will not perish but have everlasting life!

I told you earlier it would be amiss of me to teach about FOREVER without offering the opportunity for each and every one of you to be part of it today. So as we close this lesson, I have a special gift I want to give to each of you – an invitation. Would you like to be part of FOREVER with Jesus? If so, simply invite God into your life right now by praying this prayer to him.

Dear God,

Thank you for your love for me. Thank you for sending your Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for me – so that I wouldn't have to die. I accept by faith the forgiveness you freely offer me right now, and I ask You to come into heart and be the Lord of my life from this moment on. Thank you for saving me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

If you pray this prayer sincerely, you will cross over from death to Life. From hopelessness, to FOREVER with Jesus Christ. The Bible says there is more rejoicing among the angels over one person who repents, than over 99 who had no need of repentance. May God richly bless you as you begin your new life in Him. Can I encourage you to share your decision with one of the Pastoral team so that they can celebrate with you and encourage you as you have begun the most exciting adventure of your life!

Next Lesson #13 "Health and Wellbeing"