

Now maybe you are thinking to yourself, why is this necessary? Do I really need to be baptized? I don't like getting up in front of people. What's the big deal about baptism anyway? Well, I have some notes on that. In fact, would you look at that, I have an entire sermon on that.

I'm actually not joking. We looked at this baptism coming up and realized that we have never really preached a message on baptism and so today we are going to take advantage of our summer break from 1 Corinthians to look at what the Bible says about baptism and why it's important. And the goal of this message is for you to understand why God loves baptism and why you should to.

So if you have your Bibles turn to Colossians 2. Now as you turn, I want you to think about the physical act of baptism. You have to admit that it is very, very strange. Why are we pushing people under the water? Without any context or understanding, we may as well be anointing people with yogurt. The symbol itself comes with no explanation. We have to go to the Bible to answer the question, what in the world does it mean?

Because without that, it just lands in the same pile as all the other quirky things that make their way into culture without a lick of explanation.

- Why does the bride toss the bouquet at a wedding? That's weird. Where did that come from? - Why do we say trick or treat and then get handed candy? That's weird.

- Why do we make our warm weather travel plans based on whether or not a groundhog sees it's shadow? - Is baptism just a religious version of groundhogs day, something that crept into our traditions long ago and we just kind of do it? What possible value can that have? Why don't we just do away with it? Why do we keep

encouraging this?

Now the Bible has an answer to this but in order to understand the Bible's explanation of baptism, we need to first wrap our minds around a key piece of theology.

And let me ask you a question which will force you to think about this key piece of theology. What is the difference between a person who is not a Christian but who tries to follow Jesus' example and a person who is a Christian and tries to follow Jesus' example.

They are both trying to follow Jesus' example but one is a Christian and the other is not. What's the difference? Well, intuitively you know that being a Christian is more than just imitation of Christ. It's not less than that but it's certainly more than that. It's more than just trying to behave morally. Many unbelievers admire Jesus and try to follow him in one way or another. So what makes a Christian a Christian. Here it is:

Being a Christian means that your moral behavior comes from a new source. Being a Christian as one theologian puts it, "is the present experience of the risen Christ indwelling our hearts by the Spirit." That means that new behavior is springing forth from a new heart. Remember Jeremiah talks about the heart of stone being replaced with a heart of flesh. That soft new heart that God gives you is producing new fruit, new behavior.

And as Christians we have come up with language to describe that heart transformation. Maybe the most common way of describing to someone what happens at conversion is saying something like, "I asked Jesus to come into my heart." Or you might say, "When I became a Christian God gave me a new heart." The heart of stone

being replaced with the heart of flesh, a new motive engine. Asking Jesus to give you a new heart.

But here's the deal, the focus of the Bible is actually the reverse of that. Being saved is not so much having Jesus enter into us, it's having us enter into Jesus.

Theologians call this - union with Christ. Being united with Christ in such a way that it is his life that works itself out in you not your own life. It's having his identity given to you. It's having his righteousness given you. And having received a righteousness that is not your own, you then are transformed and live in a new way.

Now remember we started with the question, "What is the difference between a person who is not a Christian but who tries to follow Jesus' example and a person who is a Christian and tries to follow Jesus example."

Watch how Paul answers this question in Colossians 2. Now in Colossians 2 Paul is going to talk about people who look very religious. He's going to talk about people who on the outside, seem to practice very disciplined religious routines but Paul says they have NO VALUE.

Colossians 2:20-23, If **with Christ** you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations-"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things that all perish as they are used)-according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Colossians 3:1-3, If then you have been raised **with Christ**, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden **with Christ** in God.

Now focus on the phrase hidden with Christ.

Being a Christian means that when God looks at you, because you are hidden in Christ, he actually doesn't see you [THAT'S WHAT THE WORD HIDDEN MEANS]; he's looking for you but can't ever

find you because you are hidden in Christ. He sees Christ instead and treats you AS IF YOU WERE CHRIST.

Because you are hidden in an identity that is not your own, everything that is due the person in whose identity you are hidden becomes yours. And that gracious gift of receiving a righteousness that is not your own changes you to the core.

Let me try to bring this concept down to earth. My father-in-law took my family to Disneyland this last year (thank you!) and if you've ever been you know there's a ride there called Pirates of the Caribbean patterned after the movie. And as part of the over-the-top Disney production, there was this guy there who dressed up like, the pirate in the movie, Jack Sparrow. His clothes were identical, somehow his facial features were identical. He looked just like him. I thought, this has got to be Johnny Depp.

Now I don't know who that guy was. His real name is probably Mark Smith and his real job is probably trash collection, but for those few hours that he is out there, he is no longer Mark Smith. He is hidden in Johnny Depp. His real identity is taken from him, nobody knows who he is. 50,000 people will pass by him that day and not a single person would be able to identify him. The only person they see is Johnny Depp. And they will address him by that name and treat him as though he were Johnny Depp. We could even take it a step further. Let's say that Mark Smith was not a trash collector but a convicted felon. Again, for those few hours out there it's all erased; instead he's a famous actor.

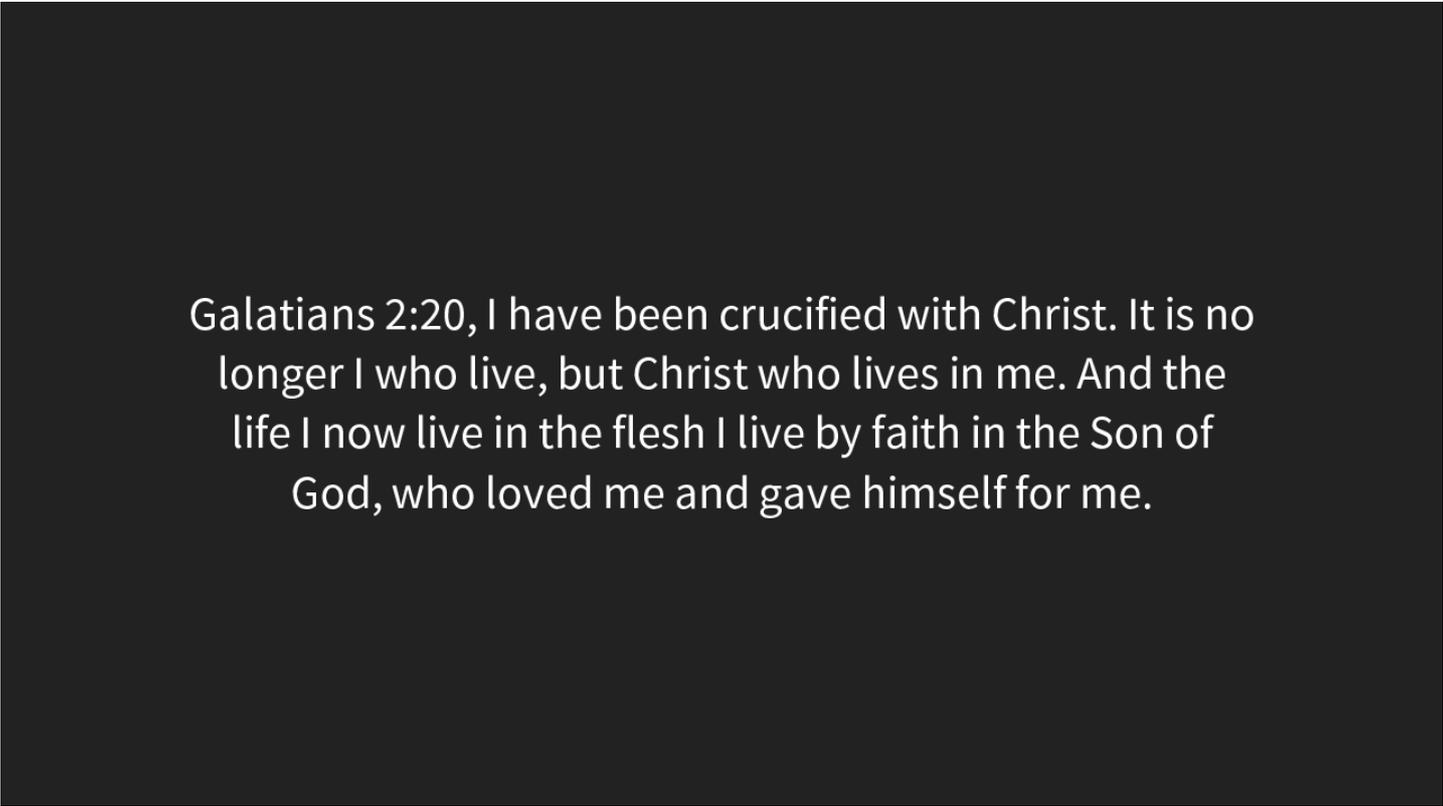
That's what it means to be hidden in someone. It's like wearing the clothes and skin of someone else. Being a Christian means your taking the clothes and skin of Jesus so that when God looks at you

he treats you as if you were Jesus.

That is crazy. The ought to make you feel very uncomfortable. Why? Because you don't deserve it. And it is this receiving of undeserved grace that transforms your heart and then your behavior.

That is what makes a Christian a Christian.

Let's let the Bible speak. We could literally turn to a hundred in the Bible that talk about this concept.



Galatians 2:20, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

You could say, the life I now live in the flesh, I live in the clothes and skin of Jesus. Do you hear that concept? Because I am united with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. Over and over again in the Bible this concept is referenced with the simple phrase "in Christ."

Again, get the direction right. We are not welcoming Christ in us;

Christ is welcoming us in him. Let me give you another analogy of what it means to be in Christ.

I don't like to run at all, but I do occasionally. But let's just say by some miracle I could pull off an 8:00/mile. So it would be right to say, Jason Wolin can move at the rate of 8/mile. But with some help I can move a lot faster than that.

Now in March of 2019 Lisa and I and possibly a few others will be getting in a plane and returning to Bangalore, India to help out with pastor Tia and the seminary there. And when I get in that plane, there is a transformation that takes place in terms of what I am able to do.

- By nature of the fact that I am in that airplane, I will be moving not at the rate of 8 miles per hour but at the rate of 550 miles per hour.
- By nature of the fact that I am in that plane, my experience of movement will change. The amount of effort it takes me to travel at that superhuman speed is virtually zero. Instead of dying of thirst I will be given a drink.
- By nature of the fact that I am in that plane, my entire perspective on what I can see will change. I will no longer see trees as I run, but tops of trees and tops of houses and the entire city laid out beneath me, oceans lakes, cars and freeways.

All my weaknesses, all my limitations, all my perspectives gaps change when I get in that plane.

In that exact same way, being in Christ changes us:

It changes our ability to do things, it changes our allegiance and affections, it changes our perspective on suffering and evil.

We are talking about this fundamental shift in changing who we are because of who we are in. So often Christian will rightly, "I can't do it on my own." And that's correct. In Christ, we can do it.

This idea of being in Christ is everywhere in the Scriptures. It's one of the most fundamental concepts about being a Christian. That phrase "In Christ" is used 87 times in the NT. 87 times Paul says that what makes you a believer is that you are "in Christ." This union in Christ transforms you.

## **Back to Baptism**

So, if you want a single idea to tie to the concept of baptism, that's it. Union with Christ. Baptism represents us dying with Christ, that's why we go under the water and then being raised with Christ, resurrection.

And the entire act is to remind us that through union with Christ, even though that work was accomplished by Jesus, by nature of the fact that we are hidden in Christ, the credit for that work is given to us. We are to remember that through this union what happened to Christ, happened to me. So that as we read the historical narrative of Jesus, we are not only reading what happened to him; we are reading what happened to us.

- When Jesus was tried before Annas and Herod and Pilate, through union with Christ, that was us being tried.
- When he was mocked, scourged, when he bore his cross through the street of Jerusalem, through union with Christ, that was us.
- When he was laid down on that beam of wood and the nails pierced his hands and feet, through union with Christ, that was us on the cross.
- When Jesus was being tortured and suffering and when the father

turned his back on him, that was us.

This is the symbolism of baptism. When he was buried in that grave, that was us being buried. So when you go underwater that represents you, united with Jesus Christ in his death. And the symbolism is so rich. Think about what happens in baptism which is really a physical reenactment of dying:

Who is with you in death. Answer is nobody. There are people around you. But you leave everyone and go into death alone.

- That's why we baptize one at a time. Everyone is there on the banks of the river but you alone go under water.
- And death is always that way. You always die alone. Nobody can die with you.
- And when you die, the second you die, all the sounds of the world disappear. So when you go under that water listen. All the normal sounds are gone. You hear no voices, you hear no wind or trees or any sign of life.
- And then of course you can't breathe. I always think that a really good baptism ought to keep you under water for about minute.
- The second you die, you lose your vision. You can't see anymore.

The water is a grave to you. You died in Christ.

But that's not where baptism ends, thankfully for everyone involved. Marvelously, when he rose, we rose. When Easter rolls around April 21st this next year, we remember Christ rising from the dead, what do we do? We celebrate. It's Easter. It's resurrection Sunday. We sing Oh, Happy Day!

And that's exactly what happens when you come out of the water. What happens? What always happens? Huge smiles. You can't honestly contain yourself. It's my favorite thing to see. Just giant

smiles. And on the bank what do we hear? Clapping. Whistling. Party streamers go pop. I always wish we had fireworks to go along with baptisms. Celebration of resurrection life. You died with Christ. But you are also raised with Christ.

And why again, did we need to die? Because of our sin problem. You see it was the death of Christ that enabled us to be hid in him and if we are not hid in Christ, then that means all he sees is us. And as Hebrews 12:21 says, "It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of a living God."

But if we are in Christ it is a different story.

2 Corinthians 5:21, For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Do you see that exchange? There is a trading of skins. On the cross, Jesus is wearing the skin and clothes of you and I. He made him to be sin who knew no sin. That is language of taking the skin of sinful men. And God treats Jesus on the cross as though he committed all the sins of every person who would ever believe. We trade skin. On the other hand, we are wearing the clothes and skin

of Christ so that when God looks at us, he sees Jesus and his perfect righteousness. "In him we might become the righteousness of God." We receive this free gift of undeserved righteousness. But there's no such thing as something that is truly free. Free means that someone, somewhere had to give something.

The exchange is what is necessary for us to be saved, but in order for that exchange to take place, the veil of his flesh had to be torn open. In baptism, union with Christ is the most important theological concept to understand.

Now any teaching on baptism would be incomplete without reading Romans 6 so turn their if you would. And hopefully really understanding this concept of union with Christ will open up this passage for you in a new way.

Now Paul in Romans has been unpacking the nature of the gospel. He's saying the gospel is completely free and no matter what you do, no matter what you've done, complete forgiveness is available to you at any time.

Any complete understanding of the gospel will always, 100 percent of the time lead you to this question. Do you mean to tell me that I am forgiven no matter what? You are telling me that no matter how bad I sin, no matter if I'm a murderer or a medic that I will be given the righteousness of Christ? So why shouldn't I just sin my guts out knowing that I'll be forgive no matter what? Paul answers that question by appealing to union with Christ in baptism.

Romans 6:1-12, What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

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 Paul is arguing that the motive force behind your previous sinful action has been put to death. Before you were a slave to sin. Now you are free. As we receive undeserved grace, our motive engine is transformed.

For if we have been united **with him** in a death like his, we shall certainly be united **with him** in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified **with him** in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

You have been given a new identity. It used to be case that you were a slave of sin. Now you are righteous in Christ. And as a result of being treated righteous, you become righteous.

## **Practical Implications**

Now I want to talk about the massive practical implications of being hidden in Christ, of being given a new identity. Now there is are some huge, massive practical implications to this. What do we mean when we talk about identity and being given a new identity. Our search for identity causes us to ask the question,

- Who am I?

Creatures that are made to need identity ask this question. I don't think cows ask this question. If you told them they wouldn't care. No that's an identity question. Questions like:

- What makes me special?

- What makes me significant?
- What gives me value?

We all seek an identity. We are hard-wired (meaning cannot be programmed out). Hard wired by our maker to thirst after an identity. Why? Why did he do that? In a loving attempt to show us that the only identity that will mark us that cannot be taken away from us is the identity of being in Jesus Christ.

And I cannot describe to you how absolutely transformational this is. If your identity is in Christ it will absolutely transform you because it means your identity is secure. Every other identity you can build your life upon is based on something you do or something that can be taken away from you.

For example, let's say your identity your whole life is in how you look. You were always the cutest in class. From the time you were little, everybody told you how cute you were. The guys always gave you attention because why? Because you were cute.

Here's the problem with building your identity on that. For a while, sure, it works. You are super secure because you know you are the cutest thing in the room. Nobody is even a close second. And that's where you get your identity - I have value because of the way I look. You don't even realize that this is what you've built your life on. Until one day it is either slowly or violently taken away from you and then your world comes crashing down.

Last week when we were on vacation I got into some poison ivy. And it was deep into my neck and my eye was swollen shut. And if you've ever gotten into that stuff you know that it causes the blisters and yellow, leaking open sores. It's super nasty. Most people learn

right away, but I've gotten it like 10 times. I was going to show you a picture of it, but Lisa told me that the sight of it might scar some of the young children in the room.

Here's what's interesting, as I would go about my day, I realized that people were treating me quite a bit differently than normal. I saw people trying to avoid me and when I bought something at the store, they avoided eye contact with me when normally they would engage me.

And I didn't like that feeling. I realized that some of my worth was being derived from my normal appearance.

What happens when your beauty is taken from you either slowly by age or quickly by an accident?

What will happen to you is 100 percent entirely determined by where you have built your identity. We call it a mid-life crisis, but it's more accurate that in most cases it's an identity crisis. My athleticism has been stripped from me and I'm vacant, my health is taken away from me, I have no reason to live? I have retired from my job that defined me and I'm lost, my kids have moved away and now I'm struggling. I no longer know who I am?

What makes me valuable? You see being in Christ means that your value is derived from something that can never be taken away from you.

I am his. I am loved by him. All the I am's of Scripture. Who cares what the world says you are. Who cares! What does God say you are. You are his child. You are redeemed. You are being completed, even in this sermon, God is completing you because faithful is he

to complete the work he started in you. Soak in those statements where God tells you who you are.

You can take criticism from this platform.

- Someone can approach you and say hey, you really messed up and hurt some people.
- Your wife or husband can approach you and say, "I have a bone to pick with you."
- Your kids can approach you and say, "You are not being fair."
- Your boss can say, "You aren't measuring up"

If your identity is built on your performance, you can't handle that. Because if you admit it, then your performance identity will be shattered and that will ruin you so you can't admit it. So you get defensive, you rationalize your behavior, you justify a scenario where this unflattering thing doesn't undo your self-image.

But if your identity is in Jesus Christ and someone criticizes you, you can so easily say, Wow, you are right, and you don't know the half of it. Everything you are saying is true. And it's not snarky or contrived. It's genuine. I really am as bad as you think I am plus a lot more. It's not flippant. It's genuine. And you listen and you want to change. And the only reason you can say that is because you are secure. You are loved by someone who has already seen you all the way down to the bitter depths of who you are, has loved you and has died for that sin he sees. Is that not absolutely amazing?

Now one final thought. I want to point out something very important. This doctrine of identity in Christ and all its associated power that is available for you to experience is only possible if you are willing to make an exchange.

Here's what I mean by that. Perhaps you are feeling very uninspired by this doctrine. I see what you are saying, I guess, but it really doesn't motivate me. Can I ever be free from caring about what people think about me? Can I ever really just be free about my bosses opinion of me? My kids opinion? My wife or husbands opinion? That just doesn't sound very realistic.

Here's something to think about. Nobody can ever have this power over you unless you give it to them. If you say, "I want to be respected by this person." In saying that, you give them power over you. Because if they don't respect you it destroys you.

In order for this doctrine to work, you have to care about Jesus opinion over the world's opinion. You have to give Jesus the power over your identity, not someone else. And the equation is setup such that it is one or the other. You cannot live your life in such a way that you simultaneously are loved by the world and are loved by God.

Imagine walking into a room with a powerful executive and in order to get his approval you have to act in such a way that you abandon your closest friends. Or in order to have the approval of your closest friends you have to act in such a way that will never garner the attention of the powerful executive.

Well the gospel is all about trade. YOu have to trade it. And when you release yourself from the opinion of man, when you release your care over your appearance or ability, or performance or worldly titles or worldly accomplishments and you finally say, "The only thing I care about it being found in Christ, and I have the one thing I care about."

Then and only then will you experience true freedom. And I promise

you, if you do that, you will finally be free.

Read John 8 which culminates in verse 36, "if the son sets you free, you are free indeed!"

## **Q&A**

Let me close with a few practical remarks. This sermon wasn't intended to be a fully built out theology of baptism. There are undoubtedly questions you might have about it. We never really talked about mode of baptism.

1. What if I was sprinkled as a child? Does that count? Why do people even practice pseudobaptism or infant baptism?
2. Are there age restrictions?
3. Who can perform Baptism?
4. Where do we baptize?

We've written a paper on this subject that explains our understanding of what the Scriptures teach and answers some FAQs. If you have some questions on this we'd encourage you to read these papers and we'd of course the elders would be willing to answer any questions you might have. We will link it in the newsletter this week.

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