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**Something in the Water**

**Part 1 – Why Should I be Baptized**

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We are doing a two-part series that we’ve been planning for a few months and here’s why. If you remember back in April we talked about the Lord’s Supper. A lot of questions came up about the Lord’s Supper and how it relates to salvation and why it’s an ordinance of the church, so we tried to unpack that for a full morning. And we were going to do a whole message on baptism. Then, as the questions came in, we realized we need more than a Sunday.

Today, we are going to talk about why baptism. Next week, we’re going to answer the question: “Does baptism save you?” It’s a great Sunday to bring your Church of Christ friends to Woodland Hills Family Church because we are going to answer that question with a big fat no. So, there; we don’t even need that message now.

We’re doing this series because of the questions, misconceptions, and country music as it relates to baptism. You’re never going to find a bigger fan of country music than me. I love country music, but a lot of times, the lyrics in country music can take us to a place, theologically, that is far from the scripture when it comes to this subject especially. There are a lot of songs written about heaven and a lot of the lyrics that Christians just kind of adapt and run with… You have to remind them those are country music lyrics, not bible verses.

And then when this song came out: *Something in the Water*. I loved this song. It’s a great song and a great testimony, but we want people to clearly understand it is the resurrection power of Jesus that saves you, not water. The water symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and it’s in that power by which you are saved, not found in the water. The water is a symbol. For two Sundays, we’re going to talk about this ordinance of the church, this act of baptism, what we would call the first step of obedience.

We’re going to answer the question: “Why should I be baptized?” Lots of questions. When I put this out on social media for the last couple of months, a lot of you didn’t feel very comfortable putting your question out there so you sent them in an email or private message. We’ve taken all of those and we hope to be able to answer all of those over the next two weeks. But, if you have any questions after today, email hotline@woodhills.org. We want to work them in. We’re going to try to make sure we get it all covered.

Wwe used to cover this topic in 101. Think about this. Fifteen years ago, when we started our church and for the first few years of our church, our membership class was about 13 or 14 hours. It was a long

class. It was 101, 201, 301, 401… Now we’ve condensed all that material down to about 45 minutes. It’s not that we got rid of stuff we didn’t need to say anymore; we just said we’ll cover that other ways. Baptism is one of those messages and topics that we used to give a good hour to in our membership class.

Why do we have a membership class? I want you to clearly know this about Woodland Hills, if you’re brand new to this church. What we offer around here is not for us; it is for you. The reason you meet with an elder before a baptism is because we want to answer your questions, we want to see where you are with your faith and in your journey. We’re not meeting with an elder for the elder; we’re meeting with the elder for you.

This week, I made kind of mistake. I went online to listen to a preacher that I knew years and years ago. His name just popped up and I thought I would try to find him. I dialed into a Wednesday night service… so, you know he’s Baptist. He made this statement… and I heard this statement a lot growing up. It’s a terrible statement. It’s a sad statement. It’s s statement that breaks my heart. He was talking about needing to have a family meeting with the church. He said, “Some of you may be thinking right now, *but not everybody is here.”* It was a Wednesday night service at a church. He responded with “Those who matter are here.” I have to buy a new computer because I threw my computer against the wall, I was so irate at that statement.

I want you to know that if you’re here today, you matter. Those who are not here today, they matter. Those who are one denomination, they matter. Those of another denomination, they matter. Those who are lost matter. Those who are saved matter. We want to make sure, as we go through this, that we are answering the questions. We want you to know that we take those questions seriously. But, what we are doing here today is for you because you matter, not for us. We’re not doing this because we joined this club and if you do our 90-minute tour and sign up and give your tithe, we’ll give you a t-shirt and we’ll make you pay dues for the next 25 years… we’re not doing any of that.

Some of you may think I’m going after your profession. Listen, we are an equal opportunity offending church; we offend everybody in this church. We offend liberal, conservative, democrat, republican. But, we want you to be a part of this series because this series is for you. We want you to be encouraged. We want you to be informed. We want you to be inspired. We want you to experience life change.

I read one commentary this week over this question and this one simple sentence, this one statement I think starts us well, leads us in a good direction. He says, *“Over the centuries, Christians have debated what baptism accomplishes…”* So, we’re going to look at baptismal regeneration next week as some of you may be part of denomination that teaches it’s not about belief, then baptism; it’s belief and baptism that saves you. We don’t believe that here. So, that’s what it accomplishes.

*“…to whom it should be administered…”* So, some of you come from churches that baptize infants. We don’t baptize infants at Woodland Hills. We’ll talk about that a little bit more in a second. *“…and how much water should be used.”* I love that. So, we’re even going to hit the Presbyterians in here a little bit today. This is why we are discussing it because when you take all that’s been taught in tradition, not just scripture, but as tradition has interpreted the scripture over the last 2,000 years, you take that, combined with country music, we’ve got to clear some things up and get back to the scripture.

**Why should you be baptized?** We’re going to give you three main points and unpack this a little bit this morning.

**1. Jesus modeled it**. The reason you are baptized is because you are following the example set by Jesus Christ. If you say I am a follower of Jesus, here is where it begins. We read this in Mark 1***: 9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water…*** Let me say that again for my Presbyterian friends.  ***Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him…*** This is key here, please hear this. ***…like a dove.*** I want to clear this up because some of you may have just heard bits and pieces in church your whole life. The Holy Spirit is not a bird. Let’s be very clear about this. When you see a dove, the Holy Spirt it not a bird. I’m sorry to my Methodist friends. I know that’s a symbol in your denomination as well. But the key here is like a dove.

I’ve been off for a month so it’s not going to get any better than what you’ve experienced in the first five minutes. I mean I’ve got so much ready to fire off at you as we go, so let’s get going. ***11 And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”*** First and foremost, we are baptized because of the example that was set by Jesus. He modeled it.

**2. Jesus commanded it**. In Matthew 28: 19-20, Jesus said, ***“Go then to all the people everywhere and make them my disciples. Teach them how to follow me.***” Where does that begin? Baptize them… And you hear me say this into your ear when you’re being baptized or whoever is baptizing here at woodland hills. As you go into the water, you hear me say, “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” ***“…teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”***

Jesus set the example for us in his baptism. He commanded us, the church; we are called to go out to make disciples. We teach people. We proclaim the gospel of Jesus, people place faith in Jesus, and then we baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. “What does your baptism accomplish?” “Why should I be baptized?”

**3. Your baptism points people to Jesus**. When you step into this water, you’re pointing to Jesus and saying, “Look at what he has done in my life.” You’re not just saying “Look at what he’s done in my life,” but with this baptism, you are going to get a picture of the gospel of Jesus. If you grew up in a Baptist church, you hear this right as the baptism was taking place. “Buried with him in the likeness of his death, raised to walk in newness of life.” With your life, you are being used as an example of the gospel of Jesus.

We read this in Romans 6: 4. By our baptism, ***By our baptism then, we were therefore buried with him…*** Through baptism. …***and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead…*** Through the glory of the Father. ***…we too may live a new life.***

You are pointing people to Jesus. When you step into the water after you’ve placed faith in Jesus and you have become a Christian. It’s an act of obedience because you are following the example set by Jesus, your obeying the command of Jesus to be baptized, and now you’re pointing people to Jesus. Here is what you are saying when you step into that water. **“He died for me and he died for you.”** You’re also saying, **“He saved me and he can save you.”** Your baptism is a powerful point of evangelism. Your baptism is a way to share your faith.

Research tells us that in the church over 90% of Christians have a very difficult time sharing their faith, so they don’t. They don’t ever talk about the Lord. I’m one pastor who does not have the gift of evangelism. For me, evangelizing is an act of Christian service. It’s not something that flows out of me like it does other members of our church. It’s a challenge.

We were just on a long vacation with family and, at the end of our trip, we ended up in Copenhagen Demark. We were going to get something to eat in New Haven. I was picking up the language pretty well. I was just over emphasizing English words. It seems to work in most countries, especially England.

But, we were trying to find a place to eat. Everything was packed. We came upon a place that wasn’t. It was an Irish pub. According to ancestry.com, I’m 16.7% Irish. I just made that up. I just threw it out there because that’s what ancestry.com does. Anyway… I’m just drawn to Irish pubs for some reason. We went into this empty pub to get bangers and mash. I absolutely love that stuff. No one is there except one lady probably in her late 50s. She’s had a few Coronas, a lot of Coronas. You don’t typically see Coronas in an Irish pub. I’m still trying to figure that one out.

She directs us inside. She was outside smoking and drinking her Corona. I could tell she was a super nice lady. She reminded me of many members of my Irish family. We walked in and we sat down and ordered our food. She came over and started talking to us.

She got right in my wife’s face. She goes, “I’ve been listening to your family…” My accent is going to go from Boston to Ireland. It’ll end up in Australia and then somewhere with JFK. I can’t really control where it all goes.

She walks over and she goes, “I’ve been listening to your family and you’ve got a good family, but you know what you need?” She used some colorful language. I wish I could use it because it makes a much better story. If you would allow me to use her language, you would be there with us in the bar.

She said, “These two are going to leave you one day. And you know what?” She was talking to Corynn and Carson. I’m trying to figure out if I can say what she said. “You need to tell them to bleep off.”

Corynn and Carson are like, *Alright, bleep off!* She was right in Amy’s face and she was doing all the talking because that’s what Irish people do when they’re drunk; they do all the talking.

She’s just going at it. “You two, do you have a good marriage?”

I’m like “Well, you’re catching us at the end of a long family vacation; now is not a good time to ask that question, but get us next week after a little bit of rest from our vacation and it’s going to be awesome.

She goes, “You need a strong marriage because these little bleepers right here are going to run off on you one day.” I still got it. I was practicing that all week and it kept coming out like JFK. “These bleepers are going to leave you one day and you’ll have nothing!”

She talked to us for about 15 minutes and then went away. My kids are like, *wow, what was that?* I’m like, “Listen, you little bleepers; that woman spoke truth.” See, I’m getting to Scotland there. There was a little Braveheart in that one. I’m not making any of this up.

She came walking back to our table with four Coronas in her hands, lime wedge and all. She says, “I’d like to buy your family a beer.”

Now I’m going to say the same thing to you that I said to her. “Oh, man, I don’t drink beer and neither does my 11-year-old. I know you Irish people put it in the sippy cups, but we’ve got to back this off.” You could tell that was kind of the answer she was hoping for because she just took them back over to her table and sat them down.

That wasn’t enough. She came back over and started the conversation again. I said this is of the Lord. We hadn’t done a lot of ministry. We had done a lot of eating and a lot of sleeping up to that point, but Amy and I both looked at each other and said, “This is of the Lord.” I’m just going to say, follower of Jesus, you need to be spending more time bars because I saw Jesus in that bar. That’s exactly where he would be because that’s the type of woman he came to seek and to save.

Now I don’t know how effective evangelism or salvation can come upon an intoxicated person, but I’m like *here we go*. It was my wife who really started to take over because the lady started to share her story. It doesn’t take long to get into somebody’s story to realize… Her mom died in February. She left her husband about a month after that. She left her business of 30 years. She was just going to travel around Europe. She was wearing her mom’s coat. She had nowhere to go, nothing to do, and she said these words. These are the words you’re waiting for when you are ready to proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When someone says, “I have nothing…” Listen, if you walk away from that, you’ve missed it. You don’t get a clearer opportunity from the Lord than that right there.

She goes, “I have nothing.” Then she followed up by saying, “I’ve lost it all. I have nothing. My son is traveling with me, but the reason I’m hear is because he needs the room right now.” You can explain that to your kids later.

Amy simply asked her, “Do you believe you were created for a purpose?” That didn’t stop this Irish woman from talking. She kept going. “Do you believe there is something greater for you upon this earth?”

She went back to “Well, do you two have each other?”

“Yeah, we’ve got each other, that’s true, but we’ve got something better than each other.” I was trying to get a word in edgewise and then I finally… It just came in the moment. Let me tell you, the power in the name of Jesus… It’s not the power in you or your words. This is where I think so many Christians shy away from evangelism because they think they don’t have the right words. The name is Jesus. You watch what the name of Jesus does in any conversation.

A few months ago, I was standing face to face with a demon possessed woman. There are times when we like to think we are standing face to face with someone who has a mental health issue. I get mental health issues; I’ve studied it, I have friends that are clinicians that are fantastic with ministering to them. We’ve got to stop labeling everything mental health because sometimes it’s not mental health; sometimes it is a demon. As I’m face to face with this woman…

I’m starting to sound like Alex Himaya here. This is what happens when you get out of Branson. When you get out of Branson, you realize there is a big world out there with a lot of losses. And the big world is in need of Jesus.

This lady I was face to face with a few months back, just mentioning the name of Jesus brought out the “F” word. Every time Jesus was brought up, it was the “F” word. It’s not me. Just say the name. The power in the name, the authority in the name, the name at which every knee will one day bow and confess.

Now I’m back in the bar with the Irish lady, away from the demon possessed woman and back to the Irish lady. I just simply looked at her and said, “Ma’am, one day, if the Lord doesn’t return, one of us will die first. I know you left your husband, but there are a lot of ways to leave a spouse and sometimes you leave a spouse in death and I may leave.”

That kind of changed the tone. I don’t think she thought about that. I said, “Let me tell you something, I love this woman, but this woman is not my source of life.” Now, this woman was talking and talking and dropping the words, but when I mentioned the name of Jesus… I said, “Ma’am, Jesus is your source of life, not your mom, not your son, not your business, not your husband. Jesus is your true and only source of life.” And with that… I love mentioning the name of Jesus because people who are just talking up a storm, when you say Jesus, they stop talking.

I was with a pastor when another demon possessed woman walked down to him and just started in on him. I’ll never forget standing next to him. He looked at her and as calm as could be, he simply said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, shut your mouth.” She immediately shut her mouth.

Now husbands, that’s not a line for you to be using. That’s an entirely different situation. But, with the mention of the name of Jesus, this Irish lady broke. She grabbed my hand and kissed me. I don’t let women kiss me typically, but in front of my wife and I this situation, it was a good moment.

She goes, “You’re so right.”

As we had just proclaimed the gospel to her, I said, “Ma’am, where do your journeys take you next?” She said she was going to Amsterdam. We had just come from Amsterdam. I said, “I have some friends in Amsterdam; would you look them up when you get there?”

She said, “Sure!” She had a journal and she opened the journal. She had been taking notes of where she had been. She had just started her journey. I wrote down my name and our church phone number, I wrote down Mike McMurdo’s email. I said, “When you get to Amsterdam, will you promise me you will go to Hillsong Amsterdam?” It was the only one I could think of.

She goes, “What denomination are they?”

Okay, here we go. I go, “They’re not. You’re not going to hear that.”

“Are they Lutheran?”

I go, “No, they’re not Lutheran.”

“Are they Catholic?”

‘No, they’re not Catholic. You’re only going to hear one name mentioned at this church and it’s the name of Jesus. And, ma’am, there is great purpose for your life, but it’s only found in that name.”

With that, she was hugging us. I feel like we have a friend. I hope she’s watching and I hope the sensitivity to… I love you, I care for you. Poking fun of you drinking the Coronas… I hope you realize that you can drink 10 or 20 or 30 and you’re not going to find what you’re looking for. Carrying your mom’s coat was a testimony to us and a blessing to us, but I want to tell you of a name that is stronger and above every name and it is the name of Jesus at whom the demons tremble.

That’s a name you need to share. Let me tell you that by your baptism when you step in the water, you are pointing people to that name, the powerful name of Jesus. Your saying, “He saved me and he can save you.” Your saying, “He changed my life and he can change yours.” You’re proclaiming a lot when you step into the waters. “I am part of God’s family and you are invited to be a part of his family too.”

The question we often get asked when we get to this point is “Do I need to be baptized in front of a large crowd?” I’ve been asked this a lot over the years. The size of the crowd doesn’t matter. Even the word *crowd* is probably not a great word, but a private baptism is not what we’re going for because it is a public profession of faith. You want everyone here to know. You want your family and friends to know, “He saved me and I am stepping to this water as a symbol of my salvation, being buried with him in the likeness of his death and being raised to walk in newness of life.” More than just telling people what you did and how your life has been changed and how you’re living life now, baptism tells people what Jesus did for you and what Jesus did for them.

“Who should be baptized?” This is the next question. In Acts 2: 41, we read ***Those who believed and accepted his message where baptized.***  We believe those who make a profession of faith… It is faith alone is Christ alone that saves you. It is the resurrection power of Jesus that raises your dead soul.

This is why we do not do infant baptisms. When you read in Acts 8… I love this story Simon the sorcerer. ***9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.” 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. 12 But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women***. It is for those who have made a decision. It is not for infants.

I like what the scripture goes on to say in Verse 13. ***Simon himself believed and was baptized.*** So, theologically, we don’t baptize children. It’s actually a tradition that started hundreds of years after the church was started. It’s not something we find in the scripture.

I also went online this week and found a video. I have a theological and biblical reason why we don’t baptize infants, but now I have a practical reason why we don’t baptize infants. [video plays] That was a great place to stop it there, Corey. I think they call that waterboarding. I’m not sure if I would call that baptism, but I love this screen shot right here. The differences of men and women… Look at mom’s face; she looks horrified and dad’s like “Can we do that again? That was awesome!” Even better than that is baby’s face. “Come on! What are you people doing!” This is part of tradition, but it’s not found in the scripture. Baptism is for those who have professed faith in Christ. So, here’s a question you have to answer and I want to be respectful in this way.

“If I was baptized as a child, should I be rebaptized as an adult? The answer is “yes” because have you placed faith in Jesus? You hear us say it all the time around here. Salvation is not brought to you because you had Christian parents. Salvation is not brought to you because you go to church. Salvation is not brought to you because you started doing a bunch of good stuff. It’s not brought to you because you stopped doing a bunch of bad stuff. We don’t believe in salvation by addition or subtraction or family tradition. We believe salvation comes through the name of Jesus Christ. Faith alone in Christ alone. If you’ve made that decision, yes, you follow up that decision with a step of obedience, following the example of Jesus, the command of Jesus, pointing people to Jesus.

“To honor my parents, I don’t want to be baptized.” “I don’t want to be baptized because of what it would say to them.” I would say just the opposite. Be baptized because of what it says to them, pointing your parents to Jesus.

Jesus said this in Matthew 10. ***34 “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—36  a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.”***

Jesus here is not breaking the commandment, he’s not teaching you to break the commandment of honoring you father and your mother. He’s not teaching you to be disrespectful to your parents. This text is speaking clearly to when you profess faith in Jesus, that is an undivided allegiance to Jesus and that is your priority relationship above every earthly relationship. And that’s why the sword comes to relationships.

He goes on to say, ***37 “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me***. There are many adults in here… I have to be honest with you; you need to hear this for the very first time somebody is going to share this. It is time for you to start leading your parents. It is time for you to start being an example to your parents. Yes, honor them, love them, care for them, provide for them in their old age, but when it comes to your faith in Jesus, it is time for you to demonstrated and clearly proclaim this to them.

**“When should I be baptized?”** Let’s go back to Acts 2: 41 for just a second. Those who believed took a membership class, wrote out their testimony, met with an elder, scheduled their baptism, invited family and friend, and then they were baptized.

That’s not the bible; I just made that up. But, here’s what it actually says. ***Those who believed were baptized and about 3,000 were added to their number that day.*** There was a step of obedience that was immediate.

Today, what we are going to offer for you and for the next two Sundays is an opportunity that if you’ve placed faith in Jesus and you’re ready to be baptized, we’re ready for you. We have shirts in the back. We have shorts in the back in all sizes, and a towel. You can leave here dry today. At the end here, we’re going to have baptisms. We call these spontaneous baptisms. If you placed faith in Jesus and today you are ready to point people to Jesus with your baptism… You’re ready to follow him. You’ve made that decision, so you want to follow the example set by Jesus. You want to obey the command given by Jesus and you want to point your family and friends and this congregation back to Jesus.

If this is you, I’m going to invite you, when we begin playing in just a moment to just come on down. Walk right on through here and go out that back door. They are going to be ready for you. They are going to type your name in and give you what you need and we will baptize you. I’ll ask you some questions in the baptismal. If you’re over at the chapel, scoot on over. If you’re at home watching and you want to be baptized, you’ve got about two hours before we do this again. Come to the second service and be ready to go. We want to baptize you, so you can say. “It was that day. I placed faith in Jesus. I proclaim the name of Jesus, faith alone in Christ alone, and on the same day, I was baptized.” Baptism is a symbol, an outward expression of the inward decision that you have made.

We got this next question from several people from Woodland Hills. **“Should I wait until I’m ready?”** I’m just going to say ready for what? This is what we know. The only biblical condition for baptism is belief. Not spiritual maturity. You’re like “Well I’m really dealing with this…” Have you professed faith in Jesus? I can tell you there are a lot of people in here right now that would say they are not ready… No, baptism is not for an elite class of Christians, those who have arrived, those who no longer drink the Coronas. No. Have you placed faith alone in Christ alone? If you have, we invite you today to be baptized. Not to seal your salvation, not to make your salvation complete, but as one who is saying “I am going to follow the example set by Jesus. I’m going to obey the command given by Jesus. I’m going to point people to Jesus.”

Pastor Rick Warren… We taught this in 101 for years. I’ve been teaching this same line for twenty years. Here’s what Rick Warren says, “Baptism declares your faith. It shares Christ’s burial and resurrection. It symbolizes your death to your old self. It announces your new life in Christ and celebrates your inclusion in God’s family.” And all God’s people said… Amen.

I’m going to ask you to bow with me. We’re going to pray. As I’m done praying, the band is going to lead us and the worship team is going to lead us in worship. For those who are scheduled to be baptized, I invite you to the back. For those who say, “Today is the day I am going to be baptized and I’m stepping up,” if you have family and friends with you, just grab them by the hand and bring them with you. It’s not that you’re making them get baptized, but they can stand with you.

For those of you who have asked me in the last couple of months and you say, “I’m not ready, I’m not ready…” Every single one who has asked that question is a follower of Jesus and your faith in Jesus makes you ready. It’s not waiting for another milestone in your life. Your salvation is the milestone. Your decision to follow Jesus is the decision and we would love to celebrate with you today that step of obedience, that following the example set by Jesus and pointing other people to Jesus.

Let’s pray. Father, I am praying today for many who will step up and be bold in their faith and proclaim it to this church family and online and to family and friends. “I have decided to follow Jesus and today I’m going to follow his example and obey his command and I’m going to point others to him and I am going to be baptized.” I pray, as we worship together, they will step out, step forward, walk on this stage to be taken down into the water, buried with him in the likeness of his death, and raised to walk in the newness of life.

As we close out this time, if you’ve never placed faith in Jesus and this is the day for you; you want to follow Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I’m going to invite you to take a moment to do business with the Lord. The Holy Spirit has called you by name. Ask Jesus to be your Savior, believe in your heart that he’s been raised from the dead, confess with your mouth the powerful name of Jesus. Jesus is Lord. Declare him Lord of your life. If today is the day of your salvation and you have just become a Christian, we say welcome and we invite you, on this very same day, to take this first step of obedience in your new life in Christ. We invite you to come and be baptized.

And it’s in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said… Amen.