

Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:37-41; LD 27; Baptism and Faith I. The Way of Salvation II. The Mark of the Church

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we continue to look at baptism this morning we consider the use and power of the sacrament. As we have been seeing over recent weeks, it is only those who have faith in Jesus Christ that are saved. Why is baptism so important than? Last week we began to consider baptism with the crossing of Israel through the Red Sea. But who was baptized into Moses- was it just the men- or just the mature people- or do we find in I Cor. 10 that the entire nation- all of God's covenant people were together baptized. The old and the young were united to Moses as they received the sign of baptism through the water. Today we are going to see how baptism must be understood rightly and used properly. There are two other views of baptism that our catechism is guarding against- first the view of the Roman Church which teaches that baptism by the very act gives grace. The Roman church teaches that blessings are received- a person is justified as soon as they are externally baptized. Faith is not necessarily needed. The second teaching rejected is that of the Anabaptist- those who do not see the children of believers as members of the church and the covenant. These teach that first you must profess your faith before you can be a member of the church. You have to choose God before you can receive the sign of baptism. But today we will see that Baptism is a sign and seal of God's promises made to believers and their children. As a congregation we have been blessed with children- little ones on the knee; but we have also been blessed with mature members who believe and profess. It is important for us to know how God sees these children and what promises they and we have received- but we also need to teach these little ones that they need to grow up spiritually and one day profess their faith as well.

I. The Way of Salvation

We begin by considering the use or benefit of the water that is used in the sacrament of baptism. What is the way of salvation? What is the connection between baptism and faith? The Catechism asks in QA 72- does water by itself wash away sins? Are we able to simply sprinkle a little water on the head of someone- and by that very action can we as men forgive sins and wash away all spiritual filth? The answer to that question is no- water alone cannot wash away sins. The water that we use in the rite of baptism is just that- water- it is no different than the water that is used in your home. It is normal, clean water alone. It is not magic water. As the Israelites found out- receiving the external sign does not mean that you receive the internal truth- what is needed is the internal; the spiritual cleansing by Jesus' blood and Spirit. As we saw illustrated last week from I Cor. 10- that generation died in the wilderness because they did not embrace Christ the Spiritual Rock- God was not pleased with them because they rested in the external signs and not in faith. Just as Paul would find from the Jews. In Romans 3 he taught that the circumcised would be justified by faith,

not by works. Their external circumcision was not sufficient- they needed to be circumcised in the heart as Deuteronomy and Romans says. What is necessary then, is faith! Since as QA 72 says, only Jesus blood and Spirit can cleanse- how do we receive His blood and Spirit? We are united to Jesus by faith! Faith is the instrument by which we are joined to Him- and it is by our union with Christ we are washed in His blood and cleansed by His Spirit. The contrast given in Mt. 16 is between baptism and faith on one side- and unbelief on the other. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Or as Rom. 10 says, believe in your heart and profess with your mouth and you will be saved. And as the fruit of this faith mature, it will be made visible. This true faith will be made evident in what you profess and how you live. Your eternity is not linked to your external baptism, but have you repented and believed? A spiritual circumcision and baptism. We need that internal work to receive the benefits that baptism points to. Baptism alone as a sign does not save- having water sprinkled on their heads does not give them a new heart! Only those united to Christ by faith- only those with a new heart by the Spirit- these will be saved! When we are saved by grace through faith- baptism comes to its proper end- and by the Spirit our faith is strengthened! As I John 1:7 says, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

Although the external washing of baptism is not sufficient to save- it does have a proper use. Baptism is not some empty ritual- it does mean something and by the Spirit something does change in us when we see and remember our baptism with a heart of faith. Baptism in itself does not prove our salvation. Remember baptism is a sign- a picture that points to something true. Baptism reminds us of the Spirit work of Christ- thus baptism is not some empty ritual. Baptism is a great benefit and blessing because it points us and our children to Christ! As QA 73 continues, we see the benefit- the good end of baptism when it is used properly. To use baptism wrongly would be like trying to use a mirror to create light. In a dark room with no windows- a mirror will not produce light! The mirror is good- but it has to be used rightly. For you to see you need a source of light! So it is with baptism- when used rightly this sacrament teaches us. The first proper use is that it is a sign- it shows us what Christ does by His blood and spirit. Have you ever washed your hands- have you ever seen dirt washed away by water? Then you understand what baptism is pointing to- just as water washes away dirt from our body so surely does Christ blood wash away our sins! Baptism is a visible sermon pointing to Christ- it is not to replace Christ! As a mirror is used to reflect light- not create it! Baptism reflects Christ! As I Cor. 6:11 says, you were washed, sanctified, justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God! Baptism is also as seal- the second proper use of baptism is to assure us and remind us of God's promises. The Father has promised to wash us through the Son's blood by the Spirit. Baptism jogs our memory- we are reminded what

God has pledged to do! God has said- I will wash you! I will forgive your sins and make you clean! At baptism God speaks of His spiritual work- as Gal. 3:27 says- for as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ! Baptism points to the Work of God and His powerful oath. He will be our God- and we will be His people!

II. The Mark of the Church

So we start by putting baptism in its proper place- the sign itself is limited to its designed function. The sign does not replace faith or even produced faith- but it does have a purpose to build and strengthen that faith. Now that we know what baptism is- that it is a sign and a seal- a picture and a promise of Christ's work by the Spirit- the next question we consider is- who should receive it? Who is this sacrament designed for? Baptism is the mark of the covenant- as QA 74 says- it is the mark of the church- of God's covenant people. Remember who God has covenanted with? In the OT, believers and their seed were included in the covenant of God and therefore the children of God's people were to be circumcised- although this applied only to the males. God has in the past- and does today- chose to include families in His covenant. He is pleased to use believing parents to teach and train the next generation. In baptism, we find the promises of God recorded. But who has received those promises today? Who has received the promise of forgiveness of sins and the promise of the Holy Spirit? As Isaiah 44:3 says- I will pour out my Spirit upon your offspring and my blessing upon your descendants. Or as we saw in Acts 2, this promise of forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit is for you- believers- and for your children too! Yes, when an adult person is born again and grafted into the church they are to be baptized. Yes- adults who come to faith must receive the sign. But their little children come alone too! If the Holy Spirit is the one who produces faith in our hearts- and if the promise of the Spirit and the forgiveness of sins is for our children- the children of the believers- why would we withhold the sign of this promise from them? Indeed, as we see in the early church believers and their whole household were baptized in Acts 16. The question is- how does God view our children? Listen to the words of I Cor. 7:14; as it is, the children of believers are holy! The little ones of those who are united to Christ in faith are called holy by God! The Father says over our children- these are mine! These are separate- set apart- dedicated to God and devoted to Him! Since they belong to God- they should receive the sign of those who belong to God. Yes, it is possible to be saved without being baptized as the thief on the cross proves. But since God has given this sign to distinguish God's people from the world, why would we withhold it from our children. Baptism is for the whole church- old and young. All who belong to the church in this world must receive this sign.

Therefore believers- and their children should have the sign of the covenant applied to them. Remember- this does not mean that every single one who is baptized will be saved- not all Israel is of Israel- there are covenant breakers. We can think of Ishmael and Esau- raised by believers and recipients of the signs and the promises- yet they rejected and rebelled against God and were cast out. But receiving the sign does mean that the children of believers do come under the influence of Godly parents. Children of believers need to be raised to know God's Word- taught to fear the LORD and obey Him. Baptism need to be built upon- the covenant promises and obligations impressed upon the little ones. They need to be brought to church and instructed in the home- because they belong to the LORD! Little Amy needs to be instructed in the way- and by God's grace she will some day stand before the church as Katie just did- saying that I believe in Jesus and I embrace the promises made to me at baptism! But Amy is already a member of this church and as such she has the promises of God spoken to her! Repent and believe, and you will be saved! The Father says over our children- these are mine! I have placed my Triune name on them- I have given them the promises and the sign of my covenant! Baptism is personal- I too have received these promises- I too belong to the LORD! It is a necessary and good development when the one baptized says- as Isaiah 44:5 says- I am the LORDS! Such are the blessings that God gives to His people- these are the promises made to believers and their children! He will be their God- they will be His people!

To conclude, baptism is a sign and seal of God's promises made to believers and their children. We rest on these promises and respond with faith. We can draw great comfort from the fact that God has embraced these children- and He has promised to work in their heart! As we instruct and train our children- we must show them and remind them that God has placed His claim upon them! And for you, children- baptism means something for you as well! You have been baptized- which makes you different from others! God has claimed you- you are His! His sacrament distinguishes you from the children of unbelievers- you are not like the world! Your life belongs to Him! You also belong to this church- and you are a member of it Remember your identity- God's name is on you and His promises are yours! Respond to His promises by embracing them and professing your dependence on Christ! Take God's promises and make them your own- say Amen when God tells you- you are His! As Jesus said, let the little children come to me and hinder them not for to such belongs the kingdom of God! Baptism is a sign and seal of God's promises made to believers and their children- so let us embrace these promises and live in the comfort of His covenant grace!