Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 2:36-41; Concerning Baptism I. The Meaning of Baptism II. The Recipient of Baptism III. The Consequence of Baptism

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this morning we have witnessed a wonderful event where a child was washed with water. Now what is so special about this water that we would take up time during a worship service to perform this washing? Parents wash their babies all the time! I am certain that the Griffins have already washed little Lorraine many times- and often she had to be washed more than once a day! So this is not her first washing- and yet baptism is a special event! But what makes baptism unique- and why do we perform this washing in the church? A few days ago, I was asked by a member of the church about current challenges that the church faces. The question was- what is one major theological issue that your church is facing. Or what is one doctrinal issue that needs to be addressed in the churches today? After some thought, my answer was this- the doctrine of Covenant Theology is under threat today. Understanding the covenant and how it relates to our identity is no longer held in high regard. Some who have been raised in a Reformed church not only no longer see the baptism of their children as important- but some have even wandered away from the church as a whole! So the main issue is this- what does baptism say? What are we saying about ourselves and what are we saying about God when we come to the baptismal fount? Is baptism a work of man or a work of God? Is what we plan to do as parents the foundation of baptism- or is what God has promised the basis. So this morning we consider this theme: Jesus Christ gives baptism to His people as a sign and seal of His work.

**I. The Meaning of Baptism**

In our first point, we consider the meaning of baptism. Who is dirty and how can they be made clean? What does it mean when we took little Lorraine and sprinkled water on her head? Well, baptism is a sign. It is a picture of some deep truth. The fact is, people are dirty and need to cleansed. There is something wrong with people- some dirt that is covering them- some filth- that needs to be dealt with. What is this filth? Well, it is sin. Sin, depravity, wickedness, iniquity- whatever you call it- is a dirt that covers people. People do wicked things- they act poorly- they hurt others- and this action makes them unclean. We use this phrase- that their hands are covered in blood. It means that a person is guilty- they have broken the laws, and their actions have found them out. So our starting position is that people are dirty and need to be clean. As a picture, baptism points out this truth. Just as water is used to cleanse the body- we use soap and water to get the dirt and grime off our hands- so surely do we need to be cleansed. But what can wash away the dirt of our sins? There is no water on earth that can do this. No earthly water can wash sins from our souls! No- we are sinners that need to be forgiven. But water cannot secure this necessary forgiveness! No, the water of baptism is a picture of Jesus’ blood. Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came into this world for us. He laid down His life- He suffered and died on the cross. It was this shed blood that secures the cleansing that we need! Forgiveness of our sins is the benefit that His shed blood provides. So the water of baptism is symbol of Jesus blood- and it is this blood that makes us clean. Though our sins are like scarlet- thou our hands are covered in filth of rebellion- we shall be made as white as snow as Isaiah 1 puts it! So the meaning of baptism is rather simple and clear. Sin makes people dirty- polluted- covered in grime. In order to be clean, you have to be washed. Jesus blood makes us clean! In order to be forgiven, you have to have the blood of Jesus cover you. So baptism is not just a pastor putting some water on person- rather it is sign of Jesus washing His people with His blood! In baptism it is God who speaks- God who needs to do the washing- He needs to cleanse my soul from every wickedness and stain! Water is the cleansing agent of the body- Jesus’ blood is the cleansing agent of the soul!

**II. The Recipient of Baptism**

Okay- so I understand that dirty people need to be made clean. No one likes to live in squalor. And I understand that baptism is a sign of this cleansing. So sins make people dirty- and Jesus alone can make them clean. How does this truth apply to me? But how many people are dirty in their sins? Who is dirty? To what extent has this pollution spread among humanity? To ask another way, who should be baptized? Well, who needs to be cleansed? The answer is- those who are dirty are the ones that need to be cleansed. Just as those who are sick are the ones that need a doctor. Who needs to be forgiven from their sins? The answer is clear- those who commit sins! It is a sinner who needs to be forgiven of that sin. Most people think that they are pretty good as a whole. Most people believe that they are not that bad. But is this true? Are most people good? Putting these points together we find- it is a sinner who needs to be baptized. But who is a sinner? Where would we find someone who commits sin? Building upon what we learned a few weeks ago, a sin is anything that goes against God’s Law. Sin comes in many forms- lying, stealing, cheating. Getting drunk, committing adultery, lusting, looking at pornography. I could go on, but the point it clear. Sin is all around us- because we are all sinners! We all have done things that are bad, evil and malicious. Even little children’s actions like shouting in anger, hitting, biting, kicking. Added to this- our very nature- our very desires are fallen. The Bible stays that even little children are born in sin as Psalm 51 puts it. So everyone that needs to be forgiven needs to be washed. Who is baptism for? Sinners who need to be forgiven. The truth will set you free! Even little Lorraine needs this cleansing- that is why she too was washed with this water. The recipient of baptism is simply this- a sinner who stands in need of forgiveness. But not only does baptism say that you are a sinner, it also reveals that you belong to the household of God! The recipient of baptism is not just a sinner, they are also someone who has been brought into the family of Christ! We would say that they are members of the Covenant! As we read in Matthew 28- the apostles were to make disciples of all nations. And baptism was the sign or mark that would set these disciples of Christ apart! To say this another way, baptism is a sign that reveals who is a member of God’s people. We find this throughout the book of Acts, that those who were added as a member of the church were marked with this washing. They were baptized into the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So who was baptized in the book of Acts? Well, the first converts in Act 2:38- as we read- received the word and were baptized. So 3 thousand were added to the church and their inclusion in this assembly was made evident by their being baptized! To say this another way, baptism is a mark that makes it known- this one belongs to God and is part of His family. This one belongs to me- the LORD says. So the Ethiopian Eunuch would be baptized in Acts 8. And after his conversion, Saul would be baptized in Acts 9. Cornelius and many other Gentiles in his house would be baptized in Acts 10. Lydia and her household and the Philippian jailer and his household in Acts 16 all would be welcomed into the assembly of God’s people and marked by this washing with water. And that is why little Lorraine has not been baptized along with her parents- because the promise of forgiveness of sins and the inclusion within the assembly of God’s people belongs to her as well!

**III. The Consequence of Baptism**

Now that we understand the meaning behind baptism and we understand who should be baptized, in our last point we consider the consequence of baptism. What does baptism really do, then? What changes when you are baptized? Well, as we have seen, baptism is a sign. It is a mark of initiation if you will- this one is a member of Christ and His people. This one is a child of the covenant- believers and their children are holy and as such they should receive the sign of belonging. But the water of baptism by itself does not wash away sins- it is sign that encourages, teaches and instructs. This washing signifies union with Christ and His people! The sign is also meant to be a means of grace. Those who see the sign can learn about Jesus and the forgiveness that He grants. But baptism is not just a sign, it is a seal and promise as well. The promise is this- as surely as dirt is washed away from our bodies by water, so surely will the blood of Jesus cleanse us from all our sins. As a pledge, Baptism reminds us of the efficacy of Jesus’ one sacrifice. Do you doubt that Jesus can forgive you? Do you question if His sacrifice can help your cause? Perhaps you think that your sin is so bad that Jesus can’t help you! The fact is, there are some stains that water cannot get out. I was working on my car last week, and after I replaced a brake hose line, I tried to wash my hands. The emphasis is on the word- tried. The grease, oil and grime remained firmly in the grooves of my hands. I needed something more than just water and hand soap. But although there are certain kinds of dirt and grime that water cannot remove, there is no sin and no stain so great that Jesus’ blood cannot remove! His blood is so strong that it cancels every debt! His sacrifice so great that it removes every wicked and worthless thought, word or deed that we have done. Baptism is a means to strengthen your faith- even if there are somethings that water cannot remove from your body there is nothing that Jesus’ blood cannot remove from your soul! We need to believe this truth- believe what Acts 22:16 says. Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of Jesus! Or as we read in Acts 2:38 puts it, repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. This promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off. So then the promise is clear- if you repent from your sins and trust in Jesus, you will be forgiven! Baptism is a picture and a promise of this blessed truth! So then, do you see your need? Do you know that you are dirty in your sins? If so, repent from those sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ! Trust in the shed blood of Jesus to wash you and make you clean!

To conclude, understanding the sign and seal of baptism helps us appreciate what Jesus came to do. He came to secure the complete forgiveness of all our sin! Baptism teaches that we are dirty in our sins and we need the blood of Jesus to cleanse us- which He does when we believe in Him! As our theme states: Jesus Christ gives baptism to His people as a sign and seal of His work. So may we rejoice in the cleansing provide- that this fountain flows from His side and washes away all my guilty stains.