

I. Introduction

- A. My friend's eyes grew wide, he shook his head, and laughed at the gift I'd just given him.
- B. He said, "Bill, that's the biggest book I've ever seen."
- C. His name was Josh, and I had just given him a Bible. Josh had just received Christ as his Savior, and wanted to know what was next. So I gave him a Bible.
- D. It freaked him out.
- E. Then Josh shook his head again and looked up at me. "Bill, I've never even read one book, and this is the biggest book I've ever seen."
- F. That freaked me out. I was an avid reader, and couldn't imagine making it to my twenties without ever having read a single book.
- G. But his point was an eye-opener for me, a young pastor.
- H. The Bible really is an imposing book. It's the biggest book most people have ever seen. Being given a Bible feels like being given a box full of jumbled up parts for a rocket ship, with orders to put the thing together and fly to Mars, without instructions.
- I. My job, week after week, is to break it down. To make it intelligible. And to give you the tools to understand what you're reading.
- J. Welcome to Neighborhood, and to part two of *Christus Victor*. We're rebuilding the foundations of our faith this year. Back to the basics. Back to the foundations. And for us, the foundation is Christ. Who he is - the Person of Christ. What he did - the Work of Christ. And when you add together the Person and Work of Christ, and survey all that from the Bible, you get something called Christology.
- K. *Christology is the organized summary of all the Bible says about the Person and Work of Christ.*
- L. Let me put on my professor hat long enough to mention that theology is your friend. Theology is the way we organize everything the Bible teaches on key subjects.
 - 1. Who is God and what is he like? That's the theology of God, called theology proper.
 - 2. What is salvation and how do we receive it? The theology of salvation is called soteriology.
 - 3. What will happen at the end of time? That is called eschatology.
 - 4. What is human nature? Who are we? What are we? How were we made, and what is our place in the cosmos? That is called anthropology.
 - a) All of these big questions of life, meaning, God, and us... the Bible talks about all these things. And what the Bible says is consistent, understandable, and beautiful.
 - b) Theology is an organized summary of everything the Bible says on each of these big life questions.
 - 5. So, we're breaking down the key events in the life of Christ. For some, this is new. For some, this is review. It's always good to look at Christ.
- M. And it's extra good to see him as *Christus Victor*, the Champion you need in the Battle for your life.
- N. Last month, we looked at his birth.
- O. Last weekend, we looked at his childhood.
- P. Today, let's look at his baptism.

II. *Christ's Baptism*

- A. *Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17, NKJV).*
- B. First the location:
 - 1. Jesus came from Galilee, which is the region where he lived. He came to the Jordan River. That's the location.
- C. Second the baptizer:
 - 1. That would be John, the Baptist, who was a cousin of Jesus. John was the forerunner of Jesus. He paved the way for Christ. It was John's mission to prepare hearts for the coming of the world's Savior. And that's what he did. John was rough and gruff and tough. He lived in the wilderness. He wore rough, coarse clothing. He got in people's faces with the truth. When he confronted the rulers for their evil, he was ultimately thrown in prison and killed. Jesus called John a shining lamp (John 5:35) and a new prophet Elijah (the greatest prophet of history, Matthew 17:12).
 - 2. So Jesus comes to John at the Jordan and says, John, baptize me.
- D. Third, the baptism:
 - 1. To baptize means to dip in water. Some churches sprinkle. Some churches pour. Some churches dip (called immersion). We dip, because that's how they most likely did it in Bible days.
 - 2. But what did the dipping mean?
 - 3. Well, it meant different things to different people.
 - a) *If you were a gentile, non-Jew*, and practiced one of the many religions of the day, it would also mean washing and cleansing before you worshipped the deity of the day.
 - (1) The priests of Egypt bathed twice in the day and twice in the night.
 - (2) The Greeks and Romans had to bathe before a sacrifice and before prayer.
 - (3) In the mystery religions of that day, on the second day of a big festival, the followers went in solemn procession to the sea-coast, where they were buried by bathing.
 - (4) When any unclean thing touched you in any way, you had to be purified by water before you could do any worship.
 - (a) (Smith's Bible Dictionary)
 - (b) Even unsaved non-Jews had something come to mind when they thought of baptism.
 - b) *If you were an everyday follower of Judaism*, it also meant cleansing.

- (1) Long before Jesus came, the Bible describes many times when people cleansed themselves with water before they could worship God well. They cleansed their hands, their garments, their feet, their heads, their whole lives, depending on the situation. These were called purification rites. By the days of Jesus, there were large bath houses, or pools, used for rites of purification (John 5:2).
 - (2) So this dipping had meaning to Gentiles.
 - (3) It had meaning to Jews.
 - (4) It also had meaning to priests.
 - c) *If you were a Jewish priest*, you were cleansed when you first became a priest, and then over and over when you did your priestly duties.
 - (1) The priests had to be brought to the door of the worship space, and were washed with water when they began their priesthood (Exodus 5:29).
 - (2) Every time they entered the worship space, they had to wash their hands and feet (Exodus 30:20).
 - (3) When the High Priest became High Priest, they consecrated him with three actions: they washed him, anointed him, and offered a sacrifice.
 - d) So to non-Jews, to Jews, and to priests, this dipping meant something. It meant the cleansing they needed to approach their God.
4. John's baptism
- a) Now, along comes this rough guy, John.
 - b) He comes to speak to the Jews. And his mission is to prepare them for the Savior who is soon going to appear. He's totally hard nosed. All hellfire and brimstone.
 - c) Why?
 - d) Because when you want people to receive salvation, sometimes the first thing you have to do is convince them why they need saving. And that means taking basically narcissistic people, and people who are so full of themselves, and showing them how far short they fall of God's standards, and how deeply dangerous it would be to stand before an infinitely holy God in their current situation.
 - (1) No, in heaven's estimation you're not a special snowflake, and you don't smell good, and you don't measure up, and you're not as hot as you think you are... which means you will be hotter than you want to be if you don't receive salvation.
 - e) So John is the bad cop. He's telling religious people their religion is not enough.
 - (1) They did sacrifices. They did offerings. They did holy days and feasts. They did circumcision.
 - (2) But John says, "Not good enough."
 - (a) *and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2, NKJV).*
 - (b) *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:11, 12, NKJV).*
 - (3) I told you, hellfire and brimstone.
 - (4) Here's the summary of John's baptism:
 - (a) *And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, (Luke 3:3, NKJV).*
 - (5) So John is preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission (forgiveness) of sins.
 - (6) And Jesus comes and says, Baptize me.
 - (a) Does he have sins to be forgiven? NO.
 - (b) Does he have any repentance he needs to do? NO.
 - (7) So why does he ask John to baptize him?
 - (a) Let's break it down.

III. Christ's Baptism

- A. *1. Repentance: repentance does not mean to change your ways as much as it means to change your mind.*
 1. Here were people who were already religious. Already good. Already compliant with the standards. I mean, they were circumcised. How much more can you give?
 2. Most people, when they hear the word repentance, they think of improving their lives.
 3. It's like a cook has dinner on the stove, but they need to turn up the heat. Repent! Turn up your spirituality. Be a better person.
 4. That's not what repentance means.
 5. Repentance means changing your whole way of thinking, your whole outlook.
 6. Going back to the cooking analogy, it means going from wood heat to propane heat, or from electric to gas.
 7. It's swapping out the whole system for a new one.
 8. John was not telling them to turn up the heat; he was telling them they needed a whole new heat source altogether.
 9. Repent.
 - a) Repentance is that eye-opening moment of realization in which you finally get what a dummy you've been, trying to work your way to God's favor instead of receiving a gift purchased by the blood of Christ.
 - b) It is the stark realization of the stench rising up from your sins, and an urgent turning and returning unto the sufficiency of Christ's blood to wash you white as snow.
 - c) It's not just adding an app, it's switching operating systems. You go from PC to Mac. Repent.
 - d) Repentance is epic.

- (1) By it, you switch from works to faith.
 - (2) From earning it to receiving it.
 - (3) From sweating over it to resting in it.
 - (4) From earning a paycheck to accepting a gift.
 - (5) From your efforts to Christ's efforts.
 - (6) From your dedication to Christ's dedication.
 - (7) From your sacrifice to Christ's sacrifice.
 - (8) From religion to relationship.
 - (9) From fear to faith.
 - (10) From hell to heaven.
 - (11) And from self to God.
- e) Scripture does not preach that you should take what you're already doing and just turn up the heat a little. No. You're using the wrong stove. You need a new one.
- (1) A whole new operating system.
 - (2) Not be a better person, but believe on a better person. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. That is the gospel. That is the forgiveness of sins. That is the repentance that changes your life.
- f) John and Jesus preached the same gospel, they just came at it from different angles (Acts 19:4). There's only one gospel. Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, Moses, Isaiah, all the writers of Scripture are singing the same tune. You just have to dig a little to see it.
10. So John is preaching a baptism of repentance, salvation's new operating system.
11. And along comes Jesus and says, Baptize me.
12. And John says, "No way! Because a), you don't need repentance, and b) you don't need forgiveness.
13. But Jesus says, "*Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*"
- B. 2. *Christ's Baptism: the free will choice to fully enter into his truest calling and life.*
1. I've wrestled with this baptism all week. There are so many views, and the commentaries are all over the place. I believe the Bible is absolutely clear when it wants to be, and is absolutely satisfied to shroud a few things in mystery. And this is one of those things shrouded in mystery.
 - a) Later, when Jesus talked of his baptism, he meant his death and what would come after. The whole journey. (Mark 10:38)
 - b) After him, when Paul talked of baptism, he meant being so joined to Christ that his death counted for you, and his life counted for you too. (Romans 6:1-4).
 2. But if you strip it all back, this baptism is the first thing Jesus does in the Bible since his childhood.
 3. When he was twelve, he had that meeting in the temple with the Rabbis.
 4. Now, in the next scene in his life, he is thirty, and he starts with baptism.
 5. He made the free will, human choice to fully embrace his life, his path, his mission, and his destiny — and all the sufferings that went with that — and baptism was the first step down that road.
 6. We took our family years ago to Six Flags. There's a ride there, I forget what it's called — I think I've blocked it out of my memory. But you strap into a seat, and then you get lifted and spun around and twisted sixteen different directions at once, till your stomach is a quivering mass of goo.
 7. I was wrecked for the rest of the day.
 8. The funny thing is, I waited in line for that ride. At any point, I could have bailed out. But once I sat in that seat, and they pulled that harness over me, that was it. I was in for the whole ride. No turning back.
 9. That's what the baptism meant to Jesus.
 10. Thirty years, he has waited in line. Never bailed out. No second thoughts.
 11. Thirty years, in obscurity. No fan base. No followers. He was found in appearance as a man. He looked like a regular guy.
 - a) *Philippians 2:8 says "he was found in appearance as a man."*
 12. If you saw him, he didn't glow. He didn't have a halo. He didn't look impressive. He looked like a carpenter.
 13. All that glory, that power, that awesomeness was all hidden, and nobody saw it. He never blew anybody away with his own divine power. He hid it and kept it in a box.
 14. And now, he's thirty years old. He's at a crossroads. Jesus Christ has every opportunity opened to him. Every path. He could play it safe. He could keep a low profile. He could, conceivably, unveil his glory and shock the world's system. He could call off the whole deal.
 15. But what did he do?
 16. He went down the path of our salvation, and baptism was the signal event of that cataclysmic choice.
 17. This was Jesus strapping himself into the seat. It was the first step on the most difficult road any human would ever travel.
 - a) *For Jesus, baptism was the free will choice to lock himself humanly into the path he had divinely pre-determined to follow.*
 18. The salvation planned from eternity past would actually come to pass on earth, now that the man, Christ Jesus, took this step.
 - a) John sees him coming. He can't believe his own eyes.
 - b) Baptize me, John, says Jesus.
 - c) No, says John. I know who you are and what you mean and what you're here to do. You don't need this and I'm not worthy.
 - d) Yes, said Jesus. It's time. I need to launch this eternal plan of salvation. I need to make it happen. Baptize me John, and He strapped himself in, and the horrible ride took off. No turning back.
 19. So without fanfare, without angels singing or paparazzi snapping pictures, John and Jesus go down into the Jordan river. And John baptizes him, just like he was baptizing all those sinners.
 20. And Jesus came up from the water. And what happened next?

- C. *The Father's Affirmation: The Trinity showed up.*
1. *When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*
 2. You have the whole Trinity in action at the same time. The Son has just been baptized. The Spirit has come down upon him like a dove. The Father is speaking from heaven.
 3. This picture is the kiss of death to any teaching that says the Trinity is just three modes of how God operates... he appears as Father, and then runs and changes capes to appear as Son, and then changes capes to appear as Spirit... in succession, one after the other.
 4. No.
 5. All three Persons at once in the Godhead - the one, united, undivided God.
 6. And Jesus, God the Son and the Son of Man.
 7. I don't know what messages your father gave you. I don't know what gaps are left in your emotions, your heart, your soul. I was in my twenties, had been a pastor for many years, before I heard my father say he was proud of me. And I had to ask him.
 - a) Some time ago, Harvard did a study on males in business with MBA's. They were successful businessmen. They'd each spent at least ten years in the business world. Highly educated, highly driven, highly successful men.
 - b) The researchers dug into the men's motivation.
 - c) Do you know what they were looking for? Their father's respect. The researcher wrote, "The interviews I have had with men in their thirties and forties convince me that the psychological or physical absence of fathers from their families is one of the great underestimated tragedies of our times." (citation in Hicks, *Uneasy Manhood*, p. 24).
 8. That does something to your heart to hear those words. It's human nature.
 9. And when Jesus comes up out of the water, the Father speaks his approval of his son, his promotion of his son, his respect for his son, his affirmation of his son, and his protection of his son.
 10. And the Holy Spirit comes down with fresh power, so that the divine power of Jesus while he lived on earth is the power of the Spirit—the same power we can all have today.
 11. Sometimes the path you dread the most is where the glory lies. It's the path of life, of energy, of victory, of making a difference, and finding yourself. Stepping into who you really are in your core identity.
 12. So that's the baptism of Jesus. And I want to ask...

IV. *So What?*

- A. *1. The Baptism of Christ is not a lesson about baptism.*
1. I do not think the baptism of Christ is a lesson about baptism. I know that sounds odd. But his baptism was too different, and too unique and custom to be a model of baptism for the rest of us.
- B. *2. The Baptism of Christ reminds us that the entire path of the Christian has been walked, mapped out, empowered, tested, and approved.*
1. Jesus lived as a man, as a human, with the same limitations you have, and the same powers you have.
 2. He strapped himself into the same world you live in.
 3. He used the same resources God gives you.
 4. And he proved they work.
 - a) Life pressured him, but he didn't crush.
 - b) The world shoved him, but he didn't wimp out.
 - c) The devil tempted him, but he didn't give in.
 5. Whatever you're going through, God has strength for you, resources for you, blessings for you, tools for you. It's the exact same toolbox Jesus used. No difference.
 6. It worked for Jesus. It will work for you.
- C. *2. The Baptism of Christ is a lesson about choosing your path, and freely embracing your truest life in Christ.*
1. For some here, that might actually mean baptism. You've been saved, but you need to fully embrace that path, and go public and tell the world.
 2. For some here, that path might be getting saved. I was baptized as a baby, and I had to get saved, and then I chose to get baptized again.
 3. For some, it might mean Celebrate Recovery, or small groups, or going on a missions trip. What have you been avoiding?
 - a) Your greatest life is often hidden behind your greatest fear.
 4. For some here, that path might mean breaking off a relationship you know is toxic, or starting one you're afraid of, or trying to have kids or to adopt, or fixing a relationship that's broken. It might mean changing careers. Or launching a business. Or taking a class. Or getting out of a class.
 5. Whatever it is that has kept you locked in the routine, safe, predictable, holding pattern—it's time to shake it up. No excuses. No more procrastination. No more waiting. It's time.
 - a) The title is *Christus Victor*.
 - b) And the subtitle is *The Champion You Need in the Battle for Your Life*.
 6. But that assumes something. It assumes you've engaged the battle. You're pressing in. You're not content with status quo. You're finding your purpose, your pulse, and your passion.
 7. And you're pressing in, come hell or high water. Because if you move out in faith, God moves in with power.
 8. And that is what it means to follow Jesus in baptism.
 9. Get in gear, and punch the gas.
- D. *4. The Baptism of Christ reminds us again that all of heaven cheers the roar of a man or woman fully themselves, and fully alive to God.*