

The New Creation (Day 2):

Rising out of the Waters

John 1:29-34

- ²⁹ **The next day** he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"
- ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'
- ³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."
- ³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.
- ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'
- ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

BAPTISM IS ONE OF THOSE FOUNDATIONAL doctrines of the Christian faith. Hebrews calls it one of the “**elementary instructions about Christ**” (**Heb 6:1-2**).¹ It made it into creeds so early that they are preserved in the NT. Paul

¹ The word used in 6:2 is *baptismos*, translated sometimes as “baptisms” and sometimes as “washings.” Whether OT or NT is in view, clearly the idea of a ritual in water is in mind.

says, “There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:4-5). Following this, we say in the Nicene Creed, “We believe in one baptism for the remission of sins.” Does this refer to water baptism? It doesn’t specify. But Peter says, “Baptism, which corresponds to (is the antitype of) [the Flood], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). So Wayne Grudem rightly paraphrases it, “Baptism now saves you—not the outward physical ceremony of baptism, but the inward spiritual reality which baptism represents.”²

There may be no doctrine as badly misunderstood in the church as baptism. Some say it is a memorial. Others call it a sacrament. People differ on what it would mean if it were a sacrament. Some believe it saves. Some believe it is necessary to be saved. Some believe non-saving grace is involved. Some believe you shouldn’t do it at all. Some say it needs to be done in the name of each person of the Trinity. Some says only in the name of Christ. Some say you should be dunked. Some say the dunking needs to be done three times. Others say pouring is acceptable. Others

² Wayne A. Grudem, vol. 17, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 171.

say sprinkling is the right mode. Some say it has to be in living water. Others find any water acceptable. Some say only the elect should be baptized. Others say it should be those who profess Christ. Still others say infants of believers should also be baptized. Baptism has even been forced on complete pagans against their will. Basically, if you can find a place where baptism can be argued about, it has been found by someone in Christian history.

Can we solve all of these disagreements here? Not possible! So why bring it up? Today we are in **John 1:29-34**. This is John's brief account of the baptism of Jesus. One would think that if we are going to have any hope at all of coming to understand baptism, this would be a rather good place to start. But first, I wanted you to see how much confusion there exists on such a profoundly important topic as this.

HOW TO DISAGREE BIBLICALLY

Since there really isn't much law in this passage, I thought I would **use these disagreements to make an ethical point**, before moving on to consider the meaning of Jesus' baptism and the function it serves in John's Gospel. **How**

should Christians deal with theological differences? It depends on the difference. Even with baptism, there are various levels of disagreement. Some of these disagreements are of an **essential** nature. How can you tell if something is of an essential nature? I think it has to do with whether the doctrine has eternal ramification. But how do you know that? It has to do with whether the Bible says you must believe this to be saved or whether someone else says that about any given doctrine. In other words, someone is saying that if you believe this you will go to heaven, and if you don't you will go to hell. That seems to me to make it essential to get right.

If you think that baptism in water saves, then you and I have an essential point of disagreement. Of course, only one of us can be right. I can show you plenty of people in the Bible who were never baptized and yet were saved (starting with the thief on the cross), and apparently some who were baptized and not saved. I can give you other arguments as well, like how the Bible says we are saved by faith alone. So, when I hear someone teach that baptism is necessary for salvation, I make this a hill to die on. This kind of legalism and misunderstanding is deadly to the core of biblical salvation. It adds to salvation, just like

circumcision did in the minds of many NT Jews (it is at least interesting how in some circles where baptism is said to save, they also teach that baptism is the new circumcision).

But there are plenty of areas with regard to baptism that are **important, yet not essential**. That is, they greatly impact our belief system which in turn impacts our maturity and growth as Christians as well as unity public unity we have among other believers. But they do not impact how a person is saved. **Calvin** shows a kind of charity that I desire to have when he says about the **mode of baptism**, “But whether the person being baptized should be wholly immersed, and whether thrice or once, whether he should only be sprinkled with poured water – these details are of no importance, but ought to be optional to churches according to the diversity of countries” (Calvin, *Institutes* 4.15.19).

Again, this isn't to say that mode is unimportant. Mode conveys meaning, and meaning helps in understanding. But it is not a matter of salvation, at least as far as I'm concerned. I believe in baptism by immersion, yet I also believe that many who were sprinkled and never

immersed who will be in heaven.³ On such matters, as Paul says, “each person should be firmly convinced in his own mind” (Rom 14:5). The reason is, you don’t want to go against your conscience and thus fall into sin. Yet, you ought to display a charitable kindness and willingness to fellowship broadly with those who differ on unessential matters. This is a tightrope that is very difficult to walk. Who but our Lord has been perfect here? Falling off the left you have a liberal attitude that refuses to acknowledge any essential matters. Falling off the right is a reactionary attitude that refuses to acknowledge any non-essential matters.

How do you find yourself treating others, not only in the area of baptism, but in all sorts of theological disagreements that you have? It is imperative that you act like Christians. Are you kind? We should always be kind, even in essential matters. Are you wishy-washy on unessential matters? You don’t have to be so to still be kind and longsuffering with those who will still disagree with you? In fact, holding firmly to a belief actually

³ This is because both sprinkling and immersion are biblical forms of baptism in the OT. If someone tried to say that the mode of baptizing could be hitting a person on the head with a block of ice, I know of no one who would say that the person was really baptized, because there is no biblical precedent for it. In my understanding, sprinkling baptisms were fulfilled in Christ’s death and the Holy Spirit’s subsequent baptism of believers in the same way that circumcision is fulfilled in the circumcision of the heart.

engenders respect from those who disagree, especially when you do so in a manner pleasing to Christ. Reformed Christians often have an especially difficult time with this, because we hold to our convictions so firmly. We can often be belligerent and sinfully argumentative, unwilling to budge on anything, allowing others no level of charity. As people who know the grace we've been given, we ought to be the first people to show it to others. I've been guilty of this. Is how you act in your disagreement just as important to you as what you disagree about? I am convinced that how we act in our differences has perhaps more to say about our true beliefs than what we say outwardly we believe. God cares about how we treat our neighbors, for he made them in his image. This is the second table of the law.

JESUS' BAPTISM

Water Baptism Does Not Save

That said, I believe it is possible to come to some strong convictions about the biblical teaching of baptism. The key is to start with what is clear. The baptism of Jesus has

some very clear things to teach us about the doctrine as a whole. Its position in the Gospel of John has some unique contributions to the subject that are hinted at in other places as well, especially in its framework that I mentioned last week and will talk about shortly. Here is what the text says unequivocally.

First, when John saw Jesus coming to the water where he was baptizing he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). This bold statement was John’s confession, his witness on this second day of the narrative. Right here we learn that it is Christ who takes away sin, not water baptism. Christ, and Christ alone takes away sin. Now, someone might say that Christ uses baptism to take away sin. By this they mean that the sacrament of water baptism is the instrument or means God uses to wash someone’s sins away. Yet, our passage speaks directly to this issue as well.

Vs 33 says, “... he who sent me to baptize with water said to me ... this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” This verse clearly distinguishes two kinds of baptism. There is a baptism in water which is not meant for salvation, and then there is a baptism with the Holy Spirit which is. The one is not the other. Of course, the baptism

of the Holy Spirit has been just as misunderstood as baptism in water (it is part of the larger doctrine of baptism after all), but at least we can see from the verse that there are two kinds of baptism here. Water baptism is not Spirit baptism. It is interesting in this regard to note a comment John makes in **John 4:2** that “**Jesus was not baptizing.**” From what we know, Jesus never baptized anyone in water. Water baptism just doesn’t seem to have been of an essential nature to the LORD, though it was obviously very important.

Rather, he baptized people another way, with the Holy Spirit. His Baptism with the Spirit does not refer to a “second blessing” after salvation, but to the act of the Spirit baptizing us into one body of Christ (**1 Cor 12:13**). Everyone who is saved has been baptized by the Holy Spirit. Thus, we can know with certainty from this passage that water baptism does not save, that Christ alone does, not through water baptism, but through the baptism with his Holy Spirit. Therefore, you must put your trust in Christ, and not in your water baptism if you want to see the Father in heaven. This is usually a warning that infant Baptists need, though there is more than one group of Baptists out there who teach that water baptism saves. If

you look to Christ, he will baptize you by giving you the Spirit, and you will be saved. We are saved by Christ alone.

Baptism Reveals that Jesus is the Son of God

We can also discern **the reason why Jesus was baptized**, or at least **one of them**, and it is directly related to the previous point. Jesus was baptized in order **to reveal to the world that he is the Son of God**. His baptism points us to Christ, not to the baptism itself. Since he is the Son of God, he alone is able to save. Here is how this works.

First, John the Baptist tells us that he did not know who the Messiah was until after the baptism of Jesus. This is what **vv. 32-33** explain. If you notice carefully, our Gospel does not actually record Jesus' baptism, but only the baptism after-the-fact. In the past tense the Baptist says, "**I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him,**" but then he heard the voice of the Father and knew it was Jesus. It is possible that this baptism of Christ actually took place the previous day. This is how the other Gospel accounts seem to read. They lead you to believe that Jesus was baptized

the same day that John confronted the Pharisees, perhaps before they arrived.⁴

The point is, it is this “next day” (day “two”) that the Baptist proclaims, “Behold, the Lamb of God” (John 1:29). He then explains that this is the one who he told them “ranked before him, because he was before him” (vs. 30). John did not know him (vs. 31) as Messiah, but “for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel” (vs. 31). It is interesting that John was baptizing others for the repentance of sins, but he says his real objective was to reveal the Messiah through baptism.

This occurred, in our Gospel, in a very dramatic way. “The Spirit descended from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him” (vs. 32). Furthermore, he heard the voice of the Father says, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (vs. 33). We learn in the other Gospels that he also heard the voice of the Father say, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). It is for this reason that the Baptist knows in our passage that “I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).

⁴ This is not certain, but see Matt 3 and Luke 3.

Jesus is not merely “a” son of God, but “the” Son of God. The sons of God in the OT are heavenly beings placed over the nations to rule them (**Deut 32:8; 4:19-20; 29:26**). The son of God placed over Israel is the Angel of the LORD, and he bears the very name of God: Yahweh (**Deut 32:9**). He is not merely placed over Israel, to guard and save her—though he came to Israel and was revealed to Israel in the OT. Rather, he is given to the whole world, as the OT predicted (see **Ps 2:8; 82:8**). There is not a tongue or tribe under heaven that will not experience the divine deliverance at some point in time of The Son of God. This is proven true even this day, as many here are evidence that Christ is the **Saviour of the world**. Thus, if you are not saved today and you know it, believe upon Christ, who has proven himself strong and mighty to save people from every tribe under heaven. Look to him and to no other son of God for deliverance.

A lot of people think Jesus was baptized into the water in our place, perhaps to identify himself with sinners. The idea is that John was baptizing for repentance (**Matt 3:11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3**). Therefore, Jesus’ baptism must be related to this.⁵ The problem with this is that when Jesus

⁵ For a list of reasons for the baptism of Jesus see Doug Van Dorn, *Waters of Creation*, 3 n. 8.

comes to John, we are told that he was indignant, “I need to be baptized by you” (Matt 3:14) because I’m the unworthy one here. The Baptist later understands that Jesus is not here for the same reason as others. And this is what the Gospel of John reports. Jesus’ baptism reveals Jesus to the public, eventually allowing him to take away sins through his death on the cross. This is why John calls Jesus “the Lamb that takes away sin.” This refers to Christ’s death on the cross, his sacrifice as the Lamb of God.

Baptized into the Priesthood to become the Sacrificer

How would Jesus water baptism allow him to go to the cross? What connection is there between the water baptism and his bloody baptism at the cross? Well, at the cross, Jesus is not only the lamb, but also the priest. To put it another way, he is both the sacrifice, and the sacrificer. He is both the offering and the one offering up the offering to the Father. In order for Jesus to do this legally (remember, Jesus was born under the law and performed all things according to the Law of God), he had to be a priest according to the law.

John's Gospel does not really get into this, though other NT books explain it. I'll briefly explain by having you think about the book of Hebrews. Hebrews tells us that Christ is superior to several beings: to angels, to Moses, to Joshua, and to Aaron.⁶ But have you ever thought it strange that we would be told in the same book that Jesus is superior to Aaron when he is actually a priest "in the order of Melchizedek?" Most people will say to me that Jesus didn't have to obey any priestly laws because he was in the order of Melchizedek, as if the reason we are told about Melchizedek is to let us know that all of that Aaronic priestly stuff was irrelevant to Jesus. Actually, Melchizedek is put here because the book is telling us that Jesus *is* obeying all of this Aaronic priestly stuff, but he isn't a Levite! That appears to make no sense? Why would he do that? So we are told that Jesus was acting as a priest, a priest that was even greater than Levi (**Heb 7:9**), the priest of (Jeru)Salem.

You see, Jesus was not born a priest anymore than any other priest was born a priest. **A priest is a position, not a birthright.** That position has to be attained and certain requirements must first be met. They had to be physically

⁶ This is how Arthur Pink lays out his book *An Exposition of Hebrews*.

unblemished, male, Jewish, at they could not begin their service even after all of this until they reached age 30 and were washed in water publically by a priest. Jesus met all of these requirements and was baptized into the priesthood at age 30 ([Luke 3:23](#)), just like the priest ([Ex 29:4](#)). So, Jesus' baptism brings his priestly work for the next three years to a [legal fulfillment](#) according to the law, and it allows for Jesus to be revealed very publically to Israel (as the Baptist says) for the next 3 -3½ years. Most people have never connected these dots and so the purpose of water baptism has remained a mystery to many.

But it need not remain a mystery to you. Scripture is pretty clear about this actually, if we will just see. This has implications for you as Christians. For, if as I have said water baptism does not save you, then what does it do for you? [It sacramentally unites you to Christ's heavenly priesthood](#), and allows you to serve as a priesthood of believers around his holy temple, just as the Levites serviced Aaron and the priests. This is what Isaiah predicted after all when he said, I will take from among the nations Gentiles to be for me Levites and priests ([Isa 66:21](#)). When you are baptized in water, God looks upon you as now being fit to serve in the NT temple—in the church

and in your body—in a holy manner for holy work as holy people. He sees that you have reached the age to serve (infants can't serve as priests) and that your profession allows others to see that the invisible reality of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which alone cleanses you of sin, is what you confess as true for you. Therefore, all Christians are to be baptized and are to understand the profound statement their baptism makes: That they now desire to serve God in his holy NT temple. Have you professed Christ to others, telling them that Jesus has saved you, and that you trust him by faith alone? Then be baptized. The NT examples show that 30 is no longer an age requirement, only that you are able to profess your allegiance and fealty to the Jesus. Have you been baptized? Then make every effort to purify the temple and keep sin away from it. This is your holy calling. This is your duty. This is what you have been created to do.

Water Baptism as the Sign of the New Creation

With that, there is one other thing I want to tell you about Jesus' baptism from the Gospel of John. This seems to be unique to John's telling of the story. Last time I

explained that John has a framework for the first chapter of his gospel. This framework is **creation**. This is why the first few verses remind us so much of Genesis 1. The framework

Jesus' baptism tells us something more *about Jesus*. It does this in a remarkable way. To see it, we want to use a little biblical theology. **Biblical theology seeks to understand the progressive history of God**. So, it often compares similarities and differences in stories. I want to compare several stories for you so that you can see how the final story is the climax and fulfillment of the rest. I'm going to take creation, the flood, the exodus, and Jesus' baptism. Four stories. I actually have a chart doing this in my book *Waters of Creation* (p. 174).

I'll start my comparison by noting that the creation of the earth arises out of a formless **void** (*tohu vabohu*). **Deuteronomy 32:10** says that God found Israel in a similar condition, in a howling **waste** (*tohu*), in a desert land. The Gospels all tell us that John the Baptist was baptizing in the **desert**. At the beginning of creation, the waters **covered** all things. After the flood, the waters covered all things. After Israel crossed through the sea, the waters covered the Egyptians. In baptism, waters cover the person. Out of

the waters of creation, land emerges, and then Adam is created from that land. Through the waters, Noah emerges, Moses emerges, and Jesus emerges.

The flood is called a baptism by Peter (1 Pet 3:20-21). The Red Sea is called a baptism by Paul (1 Cor 10:2). Jesus' immersion was obviously a baptism. And original creation was thought of as a baptism by the Jews and early church, and even uses the Jewish equivalent of our word baptism: *mikveh* (Gen 1:10). Adam is called the “son of God.” Noah, likewise is the son of God. Israel is called God's firstborn son. And as he came up out of the waters, Jesus the voice from heaven says, “This is my beloved Son.” Are you starting to see any patterns?

Prior to the first day, the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Gen 1:2). God says that he was doing the same thing, hovering over Israel like an Eagle when he took him out of Egypt, using the same language of hovering used in Gen 1:2. The hovering of the Spirit like a bird over the water is also imaged in the flood, when Noah sends out a dove over the waters. When we come to Jesus' baptism we see the Spirit of God descending like a dove over him. All four Gospels record this monumental event. What is the meaning of this image of the Spirit?

It is not an image of repentance or of forgiveness, for Jesus needed none of that. Rather, if the stories are really to be related to each other, each of them is a kind of new creation. The hovering of the Spirit signals that God is about to perform **a new creation**. Out of the old formless void, he makes something new. Out of a world completely corrupted by sin, God makes something new. Out of Egypt, God brings forth a new people. At Jesus' baptism, God is bringing to a climax all of the hopes and patterns of the OT. The final and eternal new creation will now begin. It will manifest itself most fully when Christ is raised from the dead, pictured for us in his coming up out of the waters at his baptism.

This is where the framework of the first week of Jesus' ministry becomes so important. As I said, on day two (which is what we are looking at today), John is remembering a prior event. Jesus was baptized before this day, most likely the day before. Thus, the Spirit was hovering over Jesus on day one! Now we come to day two, and the waters become prominent in the story of Jesus' first week. This is a framework by which you can see the new creation through subtle literary genius. God doesn't make everything explicit for us, and sometimes

there is greater pleasure and reward in pondering the subtle things.

It was on day two of creation that God separated heaven and earth, waters from waters. The Baptist is signaling to the Pharisees and anyone else that will listen that God is not bridging the gap between heaven and earth, through the Son of God who has come up out of the waters. He keeps calling Jesus the Son of God. This is his heavenly title. Son of man is his earthly title. Here, at his baptism, the whole world is going to begin to see that heaven has truly come down to earth. Here, at his baptism, God is telling us that the one coming up out of the waters like dry land in Genesis 1 is the lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. The baptism not only tells us what Jesus was doing, it tells us who he is and what he would do. He would live forever for he is The Son of God.

This continues the Gospel's early interest in testifying to the identity of Jesus Christ. He is the Word of creation, the light from heaven, the Name of God, the Glory of God, the Son of God. He is the stage upon which a new creation will be played out. He is heaven come down to

the land. He is the living water. He is the *mikveh*, the hope of Israel.

Mikveh is that Jewish word that is equivalent to our English word “baptism.” The word *mikveh* is used in **Genesis 1:10**, “God called the dry land earth, and the gathering (*mikveh*) of the waters he called seas.” In the OT (**Ex 7:19**; **Isa 22:11**), *mikveh* becomes a collection of fresh water in a reservoir. Thus, the Jewish Mikveh’s are ritual baths in living water and the practice is ancient in both Israel and throughout the world.

I want to end this sermon with a word on the *mikveh*, the baptism of God from the prophet Jeremiah. **Jeremiah 17:13** says, “O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away on earth will be written down, because they have forsaken the fountain of living water, even the LORD.” The word “hope” is the word “mikveh.” It can mean “hope” or “baptism.” Thus, the word play with God as being the living water. This, ultimately is what the baptism of Christ is all about, as he will later tell the woman at the well.

To any who are thirsty, he gives living water from the River of Life. This is our only hope, our baptism *into Christ* that is granted as a gift through the Holy Spirit. It

can be the start of a new creation for you. And if it happened long ago for you, it can be a way of thinking again at those early days of your salvation, when everything seemed new and exciting. Reflect upon your conversion and your water baptism often. The later is given to you as a sacrament whereby faith is increased as you believe by faith that God has been pleased to install you as one of his priests, serving the body of Christ so that (as our Confession says, you may conduct yourselves “in newness of life,” as new creations in the priesthood of believers. This is a great hope, because God our Hope is our fountain of living water.