



Session 2

Start As You Mean To Go On

The way we start things is important. If we start well, we will probably continue well. If we start slowly or reluctantly we will probably always drag our feet in that area of life!

God understands this principle and so asks every new Christian to make a strong start to their Christian life and then to continue with the same strength and enthusiasm. So how you start really matters. It sends a signal to God, your fellow Christians and most importantly to yourself, that you mean business with God and are determined to have a strong start.

Start right

As we saw in Lesson 1, the Christian life starts with a decision to repent and put your faith in Jesus. In that simple act of faith, Jesus takes all our sin from us and gives to us the righteousness of Christ. It is the great exchange: our sin for Christ's life. The Bible says:

'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'
(2 Corinthians 5:21)

Having put your faith in God, what comes next? Well, the Bible teaches that a strong Christian life is built on a very clear foundation. That foundation is that we repent, put our faith in Jesus and then do something to demonstrate we have done so. That 'something' is to be baptised.

When Peter preached in the Bible he said:

'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'
(Acts 2:38)

This shows just how closely baptism is related to your decision to repent. God expects all new Christians to be baptised as part of their initial commitment to Christ. In fact baptism is the proper response to believing in Christ (as opposed to putting your hand up in the meeting, which may have been your first step towards it). And baptism is part of the salvation process. So much so that in another part of the Bible Paul told his listeners to *'be baptised and have your sins washed away'* (Acts 22:16).

Why baptism?

Why, then, do we get baptised as Christians? Simply, because God tells us to!

When we give our lives to Christ, we make him 'Lord' or boss of our lives. In fact the Bible teaches us that the essence of giving your life to Christ is to say 'Jesus is Lord':

*'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.
(Romans 10:9-10)*

Making Jesus 'Lord' is what saves you. It is your personal acknowledgement that he can run your life better than you! He is your creator, the one who knows how to live life best. He is your saviour too, the one who provided a way for you to be reconciled to God. So from now on, the best way to live is to do what God says. Our obedience to God shows we are truly his follower.

The first command Jesus gave to his new followers was to 'be baptised' (*Acts 3:38*). He sent out his followers to tell others the good news saying:

*'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'.
(Matthew 28:19-20)*

Baptism is, therefore, seen by God as the normal and appropriate way to announce your new Christian faith. It is the first step of obedience we make in response to his commands.

The more we look at what the Bible teaches about baptism, the more we realise it is not just a piece of theatre! It carries with it some very real spiritual blessings which we take hold of by faith at the time of our baptism.

Life-changing drama

Baptism literally means 'to dip' or immerse. This becomes important when we understand what that 'dipping' represents.

Being put underwater for a few seconds is a picture, a drama that illustrates what is going on in the believing heart. The Bible puts it this way:

*'All of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.'
(Romans 6:3-8)*

When we are baptised, we identify with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. He died and was buried, and by faith we have died to our old way of life and we are burying it in the water (drowning the old you!). Jesus then rose from the dead, and we come up out of the water as a symbol that we are starting a 'resurrection life', a brand new life as a Christian. The old you figuratively goes down the plug hole or is washed down the river (depending on where you were baptised!) and the new you climbs out to live a new life with Christ.

This is a powerful act of drama, filled with promise, and when done in true faith it releases a deep conviction in the new Christian's heart that '*The old has gone and the new has come*' (2 Corinthians 5:17) as we saw in lesson 1.

If you haven't been baptised in water yet, you need to be! It is a life-changing experience, a once-for-all statement to everyone that you are serious about your decision to be a Christian.

As you can see, biblical baptism is nothing to do with the practice of christening babies found in some churches today. This is purely a church tradition done in the hope that in adult life the child will make a decision to follow Christ. But it is not the believer's baptism as we are describing here. So, even if you were baptised or christened as a baby, you should still be baptised in water by immersion once you become a Christian.

Let's get practical

What happens at a water baptism?

Much depends on the church community you are a part of. There are no fixed rules or formulas beyond the simple steps given in the Bible. What really matters is what goes on in the person's heart but in most churches today something like this will happen:

- You will be **dipped under water** by some fellow Christians. It may be in a tank in your church building, a river, the sea or even in someone's bath! Anywhere deep enough to immerse you.
- It will be **done in public** and is a great opportunity to demonstrate your new-found faith to friends and family if it can be arranged for them to attend.
- Just before being baptised you will be **asked to confirm that you have put your faith in Jesus**. You are then baptised in response to that declaration of faith. The person baptising you will say something like 'I baptise you in the name of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit' being the words Jesus gave to his disciples in Matthew 28:21.
- In some churches you are given special robes to wear. It doesn't really matter what you wear but do bear in mind that white clothes in particular become see-through when wet.

Next steps

Find out when your church is holding its next water baptism and get your name on the list.

By so doing, you are ratifying your faith in Christ, taking a step of obedience to your new Lord and giving your Christian life a proper start. You are starting as you mean to go on!