

Baptism

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Watermark. That was good, that was good. We're awake this morning. It's great to see you guys here today. I'm going to grab a stool so I can put my water on it.

You know, some of you I know really well. Some of you today is my first time ever seeing your face. But regardless of who you are, I know something about you.

I know that you want somewhere to belong in life. And I know that because that's very basic to what it means to be a human. We want somewhere to belong. And that desire drives so much of what we do in life.

It's why a five-year-old cuddles up against her father on the couch because she knows that with her father in her family is a place where she belongs. It's why a 15-year-old starts to rebel against their parents because they know I want somewhere new to belong and I need to create separation between the place I've always belonged and myself so that I can begin to belong somewhere else. It's why we work crazy long hours at the workplace because we need to prove to our boss that they made the right choice in hiring us and that we belong here. It's why people get married because there's this promise that there's this one person and for the rest of your lives you are going to have at least one person that you will belong with forever.

[1 : 20] However, this desire to belong is basic to what it means to be a human. Old or young, rich or poor, all of us have this desire to belong somewhere. And today, we're here to celebrate belonging.

When we celebrate baptism, we are celebrating the fact that we belong. We're celebrating the fact that we belong in a relationship with God and we're celebrating the fact that we belong in a relationship with each other.

So first, we're celebrating the fact that we belong in a relationship with God. Now, in today's passage, in verse 6, Paul talks about how there's one God and Father of all.

That when you have a father, you belong in the family. Baptism is about the fact that we belong in God's family. And if you're not a regular in church, that might seem weird.

Like, doesn't God just love everyone? Doesn't everyone sort of belong with him? Isn't he a father to everyone? Well, yes and no. Yes, in the sense that God created us in his image.

[2 : 24] God made us for a relationship with himself. That God created us all to know him. So in that sense, yes. However, as the creator, as the one who made everything, we owe God total allegiance and obedience in everything in life.

And you and I, again and again and again and again, fail to give God the allegiance and obedience that we owe him. Silly illustration of what this looks like in my life.

God says don't lie. In my early days in Watermark, I believed that my job security and my ability to belong here at the church depended on how many teenagers I could get to show up at events.

And so we would have an event, and the turnout would maybe be a little lower than I was hoping for. And I'd go in for a meeting with my boss, and he would say how many kids turned up the other night.

And I had counted while the kids were there and knew that the number was, say, 13. And I would always round up. I would say, you know, we had about 15 to 20.

[3 : 37] And I would justify it to myself by being like, yeah, 13 is about 15 to 20. You know, technically I'm not lying. But what was I doing? I was skewing the truth and misrepresenting it so that I could make myself look better than I was because I wanted to belong.

I wanted him to know that he had made the right choice in hiring me. And so I misrepresented the facts to make myself look better than I was. And here's what happened when I chose to lie.

I was looking at this situation, and I was saying, you know, God says not to lie, but I know better than God. I know better than God what's good for me, what's best for me. I don't want God to tell me what to do.

I can handle this myself. I make a better God of my life than the God of the universe does. And so I'm going to live by my way. And this attitude of saying, I know better than God.

I'm going to do what I want is what the Bible calls sin. It's this attitude that tries to replace God and set myself up as God rather than worship the God of the universe. And it's not just lying.

[4 : 39] He also says things like, don't steal. Don't get angry at other people. Children, he says, don't disobey your parents. Over and over and over again, each of us has this response of sin towards God, this response of saying, don't tell me how to live my life.

Let me be God. You just stay out of my way. And every day, each one of us puts these barriers in the way of our relationship with God, so much so that in Ephesians chapter two, verse one, Paul says that we were children of wrath, that we were dead in our trespasses and sins, that we were completely separated from God.

We were hopeless. And so what happens? How do we get from there to chapter four, verse six, where it says that God is our father? Well, some people think the right response of God to our sin is for him to just ignore it, overlook it.

You know, if he really loves me, then he won't get upset at me for doing things that are wrong. But that doesn't work. Because my sin impacts other people who God loves.

And if God cares about these other people who my sin affects, then he has to do something to me because of that. Think of it this way. I'm married.

[5 : 56] I'm walking down the street with my wife. Some guy walks up to her and starts saying just horribly offensive things to her and shoving her. And I just stand back and I'm watching. And finally, after a few minutes of this, the guy walks away and my wife comes over to me and she's like, what were you doing?

I'm like, well, you know, I was just watching. She's like, why didn't you stand up for me? This did not happen in real life, by the way. This is just an illustration, an example. She comes up and she's like, why didn't you defend me?

And I say to her, well, you know, I wanted to. I just, I really love those guys who are picking on you so much. I didn't want to do anything to hurt them. Now, what should her response be in that situation?

No, I'm not showing love for them. I'm showing apathy for her when I do that, right? If I say, I just really love those guys so much, I didn't want to do anything to hurt them.

Her response should be, your love for me should lead you to defend me in this situation, right? And in the same way, if God looks at all the things that we do that hurt the people that he loves and he ignores it and says, well, I love you too much to do anything about it, then what he's really saying is not, I love you.

[7 : 14] What he's really saying is, I don't care about them. He's saying, they're not worthy of my love. And so I'm not going to defend them. I'm not going to protect them. I'm not going to take care of them.

And so because of that, God, if he truly loves humanity, he has to defend us and stand up for justice against those who hurt us and attack us.

But here's the problem. We're the ones who hurt us and attack us, right? When I tell a lie or when I steal or when I get angry, I'm not doing those things in a vacuum.

I'm lying to people that God loves, typically with the goal of harming them or at least getting myself an advantage at their expense. When I steal, I'm stealing from people who God loves.

When I get angry, I'm getting angry at people who God loves, which means that if God truly loves them, if God truly cares about them and cares about justice, his love for them requires him to respond against me with justice.

[8 : 18] And that means that every single one of us is in a terrible, terrible situation because God can't just look past our sin and say, oh, well, don't worry about it.

But God loves us. He loves us and he doesn't want to destroy us, even though that's what we deserve. And so what does he do? He comes up with a solution. He sends his son to the earth who lives a perfect life that we could never live and is murdered for it.

And here's the great irony of what happened in the trial of Jesus. See, every time I do something wrong, it's typically with the goal of belonging. I lie because I think the truth will make me not belong, so I tell a lie.

I get angry because someone mistreated me and made me feel like I don't belong. And so now I want to either do something to them to get them to change their mind or do something to them to get them to feel the same way that they made me feel.

And what happens with Jesus is he steps into this picture. He lives this perfect life. He gets arrested and put on this trial that just made a mockery of the judicial system of his day.

[9 : 30] And at his trial, every single person there except for him is acting in terrible, terrible ways because they want to belong. They bring in these witnesses who tell lies about what they've seen him do and heard him say.

And they tell these lies because they want the crowds to like them. They have these crowds of people shouting out, crucify him, crucify him, kill him. And these exact same crowds a week before were standing in the city welcoming him, saying, save us.

What happens to change you from shouting out, save us one week to shouting out, kill him the next week? You have a desire to belong and realize that you have to change your tune if you want to belong.

Pilate, the guy who was in charge of giving the sentence for Jesus and making a judgment about whether he was innocent or guilty, he stood up in front of the entire crowd and he said, I find no guilt in this man.

He's innocent. He should go free. And then someone reminds him, you know, if you have that type of attitude, you might not belong in government too much more. Your boss might take you out of power.

[10 : 38] And so Pilate says, fine, you do what you want. My hands are clean, but you do what you want. And they took him away to kill him. And it's not just people who are against Jesus. Peter, one of his best friends, he's there watching this whole trial.

And he lies about the fact that he's ever even met Jesus because he doesn't want to stick out from a crowd in a way that's going to get him hurt or maybe even killed. And in all of this, everyone is doing these things to try and get themselves to belong with the crowd around them.

And in the process is murdering God. And in the midst of this whole thing, Jesus is the only one who's focused on belonging with God, not the crowd.

And he gets killed for it. But what the Bible tells us is that in that process, Jesus was rejected on our behalf. All of the rejection, all of the alienation that we have deserved for everything we've ever done wrong, he took on himself in that moment.

And to prove that that's true, God raised him from the dead three days later so that we can have forgiveness, so that we can have a place to belong with God forever. And so Jesus purchases our belonging with God despite everything we've ever done to alienate ourselves from him.

[11 : 57] And the Bible says that this forgiveness from God is available to all of us who believe in him. In this passage in Ephesians chapter four, when it says there's one faith, what that's saying is, the one thing that all Christians have in common is our belief, our faith that Jesus rescues us, that Jesus forgives us, and he gives us a place to belong with God.

And so if you're here today, God is offering you a chance to belong with him. And that's what we're celebrating in the baptism of these seven people today, is the fact that God has given them a place to belong with him forever.

And that is worth celebrating. So that's the first thing we're celebrating in baptism, the fact that they have a place to belong with God forever. But it's not just celebrating that they have a place to belong with God.

It's also celebrating that they have a place to belong with God's people. See, this passage in Ephesians four, it's all about interpersonal relationships.

He talks about how we're supposed to bear with one another in love, maintain unity, how there's one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, one Father of all.

[13 : 10] He's talking about unity. He's talking about connection between us and one another. And that connection is something that is purchased for us by Jesus on the cross. And this connection that Jesus offers us is very different than any type of connection or belonging that we typically get in the world, which is really good news for us.

Because typically in the world, if I want to belong somewhere, I have to prove that I belong there. So in high school, I wanted to belong on the baseball team. And what it took to belong on the baseball team is you have to go to tryouts, you have to play really hard, and you have to convince the coach that you're one of the 15 or 20 best players there. And then he'll tell you you belong. So I wanted to belong on the baseball team. I went to the tryouts, and the coach said, Eric, you don't belong. And that's what it takes to belong in our world. You have to prove yourself. We want to belong in a workplace. So we build up our CV for our entire career so we can prove that we belong. We go in and we spend the interview convincing the boss that we're brilliant so we can prove that we belong. And then we get hired, and we can't sit back and relax. We have to prove day in, day out, every single moment that we continue to belong because we've achieved it, because we've put in the effort, and we've made it work.

[14 : 25] And here's the thing about belonging with God's people. There's nothing we can do to achieve it. The standard is perfection. We all fall short of that.

What we deserve is separation, alienation, exile. And yet God looks down at us, he loves us, he rescues us, and he gives us a place to belong with his people forever. Not because of anything that we've achieved, but because of what Jesus has accomplished for us on the cross. The fact that he purchased for us belonging with God and with his people. And so we don't belong in the church because we've passed this moral achievement test. We don't belong in the church because we got an A in Sunday school. No, actually, to belong in the church requires us to admit that we're broken and messed up people. But we're broken and messed up people who have received an incredible love and been given a place to belong by God. And the fact that we're broken and messed up people means that we're going to make mistakes a lot. But the fact that we're here because we've been rescued by a God who loved us when we didn't deserve it means that we now have power and strength to love one another and forgive one another and walk with one another when the people around us also don't deserve it.

[15 : 44] That's the nature of what this family is that God has brought us into and given us a place to belong in. So today we're celebrating the fact that these baptism candidates have a place to belong with God.

We're celebrating that they have a place to belong with us. And I want to give a couple challenges here in closing to some different groups of people that we have with us today. First off, if you're one of the people getting baptized today, my challenge to you, celebrate this day.

This is an awesome day. We're celebrating the fact that you've gone from being alienated from God to belonging with God, from being alienated from God's people to belonging with God's people. And it's not because you've done anything great, but because God looked at you and he loved you and he rescued you and he did something great for you.

That deserves to be celebrated. So celebrate that today. Next up, if you're here today and you're a Christian and you've been baptized already, my challenge for you, celebrate this day.

This is awesome. We have new people coming into our family. This is, if there's ever a reason to celebrate, this is it. God has rescued them. God has made them our brothers and sisters. God has brought us together and given us all a place to belong with him.

[17 : 01] And today is an awesome opportunity for you to remember your baptism, to remember what God did in your life, how he rescued you, how he brought you in. And made you part of his people as well.

Baptism isn't just something we should do once and then forget about it. It's something we should remind ourselves of again and again and again and celebrate what God has done for us. And today is an awesome day for you to do that.

Third up, if you're here today and you're not a Christian, I don't know why you came here today. I don't know whether you got dragged along by someone, whether you got invited for the baptism, whether you just rolled out of bed and we're like, I wonder what church is like.

I guess I'll go check it out today. But I believe that God has you here because he wants you to hear about what he has done for you and about the acceptance that he is offering to you today.

You know, as you hear about this, this opportunity to belong with God and his people and about baptism and the celebration, I don't know what your response is. I think a common response in our culture is like, oh, that's nice for you, but it's not really my thing.

[18 : 08] That's a terrible response. And here's why. Because if what we're talking about here is anything less than absolutely true, you should not be celebrating or cheering these other people on as they get baptized.

You should be pitying them and trying to convince them to stop. Because what they're doing is they're throwing away their lives, chasing after a lie. And you should not celebrate that. However, if this message is absolutely true, then there's no room for you to stand on the sideline as a bystander. The only appropriate response, if this is true, is for you to join, to become a Christian, to commit your life to following Jesus as well.

There's a man named C.S. Lewis. You probably have heard of the Chronicles of Narnia series. He said, Christianity, if false, is of no importance. And if true, of infinite importance.

The only thing it cannot be is moderately important. So my challenge for you is this. Examine the claims of Christianity. Examine Jesus. Look at who he is.

[19 : 14] Look at what he claimed to be. And when you discover that it's true, yes, I said when, because I'm very confident that if you take the time to look, you will find that it's true. Commit your life to following him.

And the final group I want to challenge today is if you're here today and you say that you're a Christian but you haven't been baptized yet, I want to challenge you to get baptized.

Because baptism is the way that we say to ourselves, to the world, to God, that we belong in his family. Baptism is an awesome privilege that God gives to his people.

And if you're saying that you belong to God's people but you don't want to acknowledge that publicly, I think you have to ask yourself why. You know, being baptized doesn't make you a Christian, but if you're not willing to get baptized, you should really take a step back and examine whether you are a Christian.

At the very least, if you're not willing to get baptized, you shouldn't be taking communion. I heard a story recently about this guy. He'd been dating a girl for several months. And there were some issues in the relationship, but he said the thing that happened that was like the last straw is there was a picture of the two of them.

[20 : 28] He wanted her to put it online so everyone could see that they were together and they were happy and she didn't want to put it online. She didn't actually want any evidence online of the fact that the two of them were together. She said, I'm happy to be in a relationship with you, but I don't want the world to know about it.

And do you know how he responded? He broke up with her. Guys, don't be like that girl in your relationship with Jesus. If this is something that you say is important enough that you're going to trust in him, then it's something that's important enough that you should be willing to let others know that you're trusting in him as well.

So if you haven't been baptized yet, my challenge to you is get baptized. I know it's a big commitment. I know that it may cost you, but guys, it costs God his life. To give you an opportunity to belong with him.

Any sacrifice we have to make in comparison is going to be small. And it's going to be absolutely worth it. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your love.

We thank you that you are a God who looks at us when we are at our worst and doesn't wait for us to change, doesn't wait for us to prove ourselves, doesn't wait for us to earn your love, but who reaches out to us in love and rescues us despite everything we've done wrong.

[21 : 43] God, we thank you for giving us a place to belong with you and with your people. We pray that today would be an awesome day to celebrate what you have done, to celebrate the new life that you've given to these people.

We pray that we would be a supportive community, a loving community, a community that points each other towards you. In Jesus' name, Amen.