

## 1 Sermon, January 8, 2012

Texts: 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, Romans 6:1-8, Joshua 3:7-17

Title: "Promises – Baptism is God's Promise"

Intro - God's promises to us

1. Rescue from ourselves
2. LIFE (Romans)
3. A promised land/a covenant people (Joshua)

Intro - God's promises to us

Today you have an opportunity to renew your baptismal vows. And you might think of it as renewing the promise that you made or was made for you when you were baptized.

But ... everything we do, God first gave to us to be able to do, and that's true with baptism, too.

Baptism is first a promise of *God to us*, and *then* our promise to God.

You may have been baptized long ago, but God's promises still hold true.

### 1. Rescue from ourselves (1 Corinthians 10)

First Corinthians tells us that Baptism is like a rescue: the Israelites were pursued, and God rescued them from the Egyptians; they would have lost their way, but were led by God through cloud and fire; they might have died of thirst, but God rescued them by causing water to spring forth from the rock.

Eugene Peterson translates the 1 Corinthians passage as God bringing us "from enslaving death to salvation life."

What are we rescued from? The usual answer is sin – but you could also say God rescues us from ourselves.

God rescues us from our stupidity, when otherwise we'd be wandering around.

God rescues us from our grumbling and complaining, and gives us water in the desert.

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God rescues us from all the boneheaded and wrong things that we wind up wanting to do or actually doing.

If you turn to the "sermon worksheet" in your bulletin, you can see a list of four temptations mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10:

- Idolatry (devoting ourselves to something other than God)
- Lust (gratifying the desires of the flesh in ways that do not give life)
- Complaint (being dissatisfied with what God has given; or doing nothing to change things that are wrong)
- Putting Christ to the test (Demanding that God do things your way)

Which is a bigger temptation for you?

Baptism is a promise that God can rescue you from these things.

### 2. LIFE (Romans)

The second promise of baptism is found in today's Romans reading. It's a promise of LIFE (in all capital letters).

Romans says Baptism is like dying and being buried with Christ.

I tried to list out some ways God's promise of LIFE happens:

Freedom to love God, love others, which makes us more free (Mark 12:28-34)

I remember reading an O.Henry story about a man who didn't want to get married because he would miss out on the adventure in life. So he told the woman that he was dating that he couldn't marry her right then.

While he was out adventuring, he got a letter from a good friend who told him about the tremendous adventure he was involved in – the adventure of marriage, full of surprises, excitement and challenges.

He had married the adventurer's girlfriend.

The point is that when we love God and people, it does tie us down, but in the long run it makes us more free.

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The next item on the worksheet is "Freedom from self-imposed guilt" (Acts 10:44, Galatians 3:10-29)

I remember when I was a child at my aunt and uncle's cabin for the day, when I opened the door to the outhouse to do my thing and was surprised by an older man sitting on the throne who yelled at me.

I lived in fear and guilt for much of the rest of the day, even though I wondered why he hadn't hooked the door closed.

We can live in guilt that becomes paralyzing, even over small things. We can feel guilty about things that aren't sinful. So it's not just sin that Christ frees us from.

Baptism is the sign that Christ has set us free from guilt, to live life anew.

The next promise of LIFE on your sheet is "*Confidence that all things are possible with God*" (Philippians 4:13, Mark 10:27)

That confidence is probably what made me want to try out for volleyball in junior high school. I knew I was asthmatic, I knew it would be hard, but I wanted to try. I didn't make the team, because running was part of the try-out. It was disappointing.

But I succeeded in the *spiritual* task of trying something new. I have found that by worldly standards I may not always succeed, but spiritually I am able to learn, pray and love more than I've imagined. That's a gift of the Holy Spirit.

The last promise on your sheet of the LIFE that is possible through God is just as simple-sounding as the others: "*Seeing oneself and others through the eyes of love and hope*" (2 Corinthians 3:12-18, Colossians 3:8-11).

Sometimes, in counseling, I am able to help people see how capable and full of grace that they are. I recently helped a woman see all the resources she had brought to bear on her problem, and suddenly she saw that she was more than a woman coping with a problem. She was a woman who was using *many resources* to *overcome* a problem.

I also recently talked to a man about how we're all broken in some way or another, and yet the Lord blesses us and uses us as imperfect as we are. In fact, the Lord does amazing things through us imperfect humans. I think he came to see himself a little more like God sees him; as capable and lovable and filled with possibilities.

In baptism, God promises us rescue from ourselves.

In baptism, God promises LIFE (in all capital letters)

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##### 3. A promised land/a covenant people (Joshua)

(Hebrews 8:6-13), Body of Christ (Romans 12:1-21), Friends (John 15:13-15)

And as you can see from the sheet in your bulletin, God also promises a promised land.

Now that Old testament promise of a land became something different in the New Testament. It became a covenant people.

You can see how it would happen. When you use the word "home," are you referring to a place, or to people? Probably both.

So you can see how, with Jesus, a promise of a land became the people in the land, and then all people who love God.

It's interesting that Jesus used the plural "you" half again as many times as he used the singular third person "thou."

So, most of the time, Jesus was telling things and promising things to *groups* of people.

And in the book of Joshua you see a baptismal promise.

The story of Joshua and the crossing through the river Jordan into the promised land is not as familiar as the story of Moses leading the people through the reed sea. It is not quite so dramatic, without Egyptian chariots to chase.

Joshua, a soldier and a spy, number 2 under Moses, becomes the leader. God speaks to him and gives him specific orders, to tell the priests to take the ark of the covenant and step into the water. The priests do this, and while they are holding the ark in the middle of the river, the whole nation of Israel walks by them through the river into the promised land.

Through the water, God reconstitutes his people. Bringing them together. Baptism is the same: even though one is baptized, the whole community is brought closer to God, to a new and better place.

So the promise from God is: You are not alone, you are part of a people. And the people will be saved together. Even heaven is not something we achieve by ourselves, but by the grace of God and through the help of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

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The last question on the sheet asks what the church is. You could add a lot more options:

Church is the place where the promises of God are made real.

Church is the community of faith where we encourage each other to become whole, healed and forgiven people.

Baptism is full of these promises:

Rescue from ourselves

LIFE (in all capital letters)

A covenant people

Thanks be to God!

**1** Friends, I want to remind you that all of our ancestors walked under the cloud and went through the sea. **2** This was like being baptized and becoming followers of Moses. **3** All of them also ate the same spiritual food **4** and drank the same spiritual drink, which flowed from the spiritual rock that followed them. That rock was Christ. (**1 Corinthians 10:1-4** CEV)

**1** What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? **2** By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? **3** Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4** 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.

**5** For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6** For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, **[α]** that we should no longer be slaves to sin— **7** because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

**8** Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

**Romans 6:1-8** (NIV)

**7** The LORD told Joshua, " Beginning today I will show the people that you are their leader, and they will know that I am helping

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you as I helped Moses. **8**Now, tell the priests who are carrying the chest to go a little way into the river and stand there."

**9**Joshua spoke to the people:

Come here and listen to what the LORD our God said he will do!

**10**The Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites control the land on the other side of the river. But the living God will be with you and will force them out of the land when you attack. And now, God is going to prove that he's powerful enough to force them out. **11-13**Just watch the sacred chest that belongs to the LORD, the ruler of the whole earth. As soon as the priests carrying the chest step into the Jordan, the water will stop flowing and pile up as if someone had built a dam across the river.

The LORD has also said that each of the twelve tribes should choose one man to represent it.

**14**The Israelites packed up and left camp. The priests carrying the chest walked in front, **15**until they came to the Jordan River. The water in the river had risen over its banks, as it often does in springtime. **[a]** But as soon as the feet of the priests touched the water, **16-17**the river stopped flowing, and the water started piling up at the town of Adam near Zarethan. No water flowed toward the Dead Sea, and the priests stood in the middle of the dry riverbed near Jericho while everyone else crossed over.

**Joshua 3:7-17** (CEV)

**16**John said, "I am just baptizing with water. But someone more powerful is going to come, and I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. **[t]** He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. **17**His threshing fork **[g]** is in his hand, and he is ready to separate the wheat from the husks. He will store the wheat in his barn and burn the husks with a fire that never goes out." (Luke 3:16-71 CEV)

### Watermarks - by Billy Crockett

I must go down in the river to drown,  
To be buried with Christ,  
To be raised up to life and carry his watermark.

I see Peter, stepping out of the boat,  
He is walking, he is sinking, he is calling.  
I see Jesus bending down low,  
He is washing the feet of the faithless.

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They have watermarks.

I must go down in the river to drown,  
To be buried with Christ,  
To be raised up to life and carry his watermark.

I see Noah, on the 39th day,  
He is waiting, but the sun is not breaking.  
I see Rachel, she will not be consoled,  
She is weeping for her children, weeping!  
She has watermarks.

Let the heart be blessed in its brokenness, rejoicing  
All is stripped away, there's another day beginning

I see Jonah washed up on the shore  
he is kneeling, he is open, he is ready now  
There's a blind man with mud in his eyes  
he is washing, he is seeing, splashing.

I must go down in the river to drown,  
To be buried with Christ,  
To be raised up to life and carry his watermark.

Baptism shows us who God is. Nothing magic about baptism; it's not a preventative to hell; but it is a way God blesses, and a way that we see God's power in blessing.

"And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." John 17:3, NRSV.

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*." 1 Peter 5:10, KJV.