

THE FIRST STEP OF OBEDIENCE
July 24, 2016 morning service
Acts 2:37-41

Well that's a good way to begin worship today. Amen. Somebody say Amen. Yeah. Well today's a day – we baptize every Sunday here but today is a special day. We've been preaching about that. These 19 that we started this service with and many others that will come in the second service. We'll baptize them. Some of you sit in this service right now and you've never been baptized. You ought to do it. Not to get saved. You need to ask Christ to come into your life, forgive your sin, and save you. Then your first step of obedience is to walk into water and then at the hand of another to be lowered into that water symbolizing the death of Christ and coming out of that water to symbolize the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you've got your Bible, take it and go to Acts chapter 2 this morning and for just a few moments I want us to look together at the word of God and then after we look at these scriptures, I'm going to invite you to get out of your seat, walk down here to the front where some of our staffers and others are going to be standing. You say, "Pastor, I think I want to be baptized. I want to do it this morning." Great. I'm going to be waiting on you. You're going to come, make your profession of faith, and make your declaration. They'll take you around to the back, give you everything you need. We've got whatever you need to be baptized today and then I'll be waiting for you right here to conclude this service. After we have some worship songs and after we take an offering, we'll come back and baptize those that are waiting today to do just that.

Just to give us a biblical basis for what we need to do – I remember my first church. I pastored at New Lebanon Baptist Church. I've shared with many of you before. We didn't have one of these. This is a beautiful thing. I remember building this. It leaked when we first put it in because it's way up here on the second floor and we had a problem. We had to take it out and rebuild it because the water was heavier than we thought. Some architect didn't realize. If they'd let me be the architect we would have probably been alright with that as we talked about a couple of weeks ago. We had a little leak.

In the first church I pastored we didn't do this. We walked out in a lake called Sportsman's Lake and there we would baptize people. You see, it doesn't matter if you're in a fount like this or a creek up a holler as we heard our good friend, Jason Lovins, talk about a couple of weeks back. Whether you were in a lake or the ocean, the question is not where you were, the question is where Christ was. If Christ is in you then you need to walk into water and be baptized.

Hear the word of the Lord in Acts chapter 2. We begin reading this morning in verse 37 where the Bible says: *Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ*

for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” [There’s an exclamation point there. Peter’s calling out. Be saved. Come apart. Be different. Be redeemed.] So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.¹

How’d you like to have been in that baptismal service? I bet they had multiple elders and pastors baptizing that day. I’ve never baptized 3,000 at one time. I’ve baptized a lot of folks, this many and more at one setting. Thank God for one that comes because that’s how you come is one at a time when you say yes to Christ. Then you come into this water. Why in the world do we do that? Well Peter said to repent and be baptized for – the little Greek preposition there is *eis*, E-I-S. We can say because of your forgiveness. For *eis* also a way but you repent and you’re baptized because of the forgiveness of your sin. You’re not baptized to get it. It’s because you’ve received it that then you walk into this water. Death to myself, raised to newness, Christ dying, being alive and in resurrection. Martin Luther said in an Easter sermon on April 13, 1533, the old reformer said, “You can never proclaim enough the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” You simply cannot talk about His coming alive enough. Every time someone’s baptized, we are proclaiming the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, it’s in this baptismal fount where your faith goes public. You begin with private faith. It’s a one on one with the Lord where you ask Him to save you and that’s very private but when you walk in here, your faith is no longer private. Your faith goes public when you are in the baptistery. Your faith is invisible when you first get saved. No one sees it. You don’t jump up and holler about it. It’s invisible but it’s here that your faith no longer is private. It is public. It is no longer invisible. It is visible. It is here that you first show up on the world’s radar that you have proclaimed faith in Jesus Christ. It’s a covenant oath.

In the Old Testament there were covenants. You remember when Abraham cut all of those animals in half? If you remember your Old Testament, He laid one half over here and one half over there and he took the bulls and the doves and He cut them in half and then he walked through the middle of those blood sacrifices. It was a covenant oath. When people in the Old Testament came to circumcision it was that taking of an oath that they said yes to Christ. In the New Testament the oath is taken right here. This is where you take your oath.

Friday I went down to the Saenger Theatre. Two of our members along with 180 others coming from 56 nations around the world took an oath of citizenship. They learned the language, they answered the questions, and then every one of them stood, raised their right hand, and they pledged an oath of faithfulness to our country, they

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promised to protect and defend the Constitution, and at the end – it's almost you can't believe it. They're in a court, a courtroom, and what were those last words they said? "So help me God." Yes, sir. They took an oath and they asked God, "Help me." That's the motto of our country. In God we trust. E Pluribus Unum is the motto that was put on the great seal of America. It is the motto on our money but the motto in 1956 congressionally approved as a law of the land is in God we trust. That's why we asked this marine when he signed up, he said, "So help me God." That's why when a President's elected they'll say, "So help me God." That's why they said in that oath of naturalization Friday, "So help me God."

When you walk in this baptistery you're saying, "I've given my life to Christ, He saved me, and I pledge to live for Him, so help me Lord Jesus Christ. Help me, Father God. I can't do it on my own. Help me."

All through scripture after we see in Acts we find people making their public declaration. In Acts chapter 8 and verse number 12 we see that men and women did it. Look at the word of God. But when they believed – Philip preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ and they were baptized, men and women alike. There's some ladies in here today and you need to come say yes to Christ and be baptized. Come. Some man is here. You need to come in this invitation in a moment and say yes to Christ and be baptized. Male and female, Jesus died for us all and you need to come and be baptized.

He didn't just die for people that are like us. He died for the people of all the world. Everyone, no matter the corner of the globe where you are, we find that in Acts 8 and verse 38 – we talked about this last Sunday when the Ethiopian eunuch had been from Ethiopia to Jerusalem he'd gotten a copy of the word of God. We know he had Isaiah 53 with him because he's reading it and Philip went and attached himself and he said, "What are you reading?" He said, "Well I'm reading here out of Isaiah." He said, "Do you understand?" He said, "I can't understand without a preacher." Philip said, "I've arrived at the right place." The Bible says he preached to him there Christ from Isaiah 53, the great suffering servant passage. That day as the Ethiopian was writing he said, "Hark, look, here's water. What hinders me from being baptized?" In chapter 8 and verse 38 we find the word of God says, "And he ordered the chariot to stop." The Ethiopian did and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch. And he, Philip, baptized him there. He went into the water and baptized him.

Some of you need to walk into this water with me as an agent of the gospel for the church. We will baptize you and we'll do it this very morning. You see, Jesus says He died for every man, every woman. It doesn't matter your gender. He died for people around the globe. The Ethiopian, he came a long way but He didn't just die for every man and woman, He didn't just die for people from every country, He died for every wicked person on the face of the earth.

Now before you begin to swell up with pride, we're all wicked but some do a better job of it than others. There's some that are just mired in the wickedness of sin.

That's what happened to the apostle Paul when we find him in chapter 9 and verses 17 and 18 in your Bible in Acts 9. You know Saul. He's going to later be Paul and he's going to write most of the New Testament. Saul had been killing Christians. He was a murderer. He stood when Stephen was stoned and watched that and held the garments. Saul stood there and he's walking up the road and the angel blinds him and he cries out and God saves him. Then in chapter 9 we find in the word of God in verse 17 after Ananias had come to his house and Ananias departed, entered into the house and after laying his hands on him, that is on Saul, he said, *"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."* And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up [he arose and the first step he took] and was baptized.

Now we don't know how that happened. We don't know if they went down to a river. We're not certain but we know because of New Testament baptism they found water and there Ananias placed Saul, who would later be Paul, under that water as I have these this morning. They have professed faith in Christ. Buried with Christ and they rose to walk in newness of life.

Some of you sit here and say, "Preacher, I'm so bad God couldn't save me." Let me tell you, if He can save Saul He can save you. You say, "Well, I come from a background." I'm telling you, I don't care where you're from, if you're from Ethiopia today, God'll save you. If you're from Escambia County, He'll save you. If you're from New York City He'll save you. He'll have to reach deep but I'm telling you, He'll save you today. It matters not your background but God loves you and He gave His Son for you. Jesus died for you and arose for you. Some of you say, "Preacher, I'm just sitting here. This is the first time I've ever been here."

Hey, I've got some good news for you. Would you just lift your eyes to these video screens? I want you to take two minutes. I want you to listen to a dear friend of mine share his testimony and then I want to come back and after this testimony I'm going to give an appeal. I'm going to ask you to get out of your seat in that balcony around, on this ground floor, up these wings. I'm going to ask you to come and take Jon Dubois by the hand and say, "I need to be baptized." Some of you say, "Preacher, I don't know if I want to do it right now." How about the second service when we give you time to get ready? Or you can do it right now. We want you to do it. Every one of these, when they believed, they arose, and they were baptized. Listen to the Newtons share their story with you right now.

[video clip]

Amen. It's hard for me to believe these many years later, that dear family still here. It's hard for me to believe Lisa is a grandmother when you look at that picture. Unbelievable. Yet there are children married, now growing those grandchildren up. John and Charlie's greatgrandchildren. Thank God for a preacher that preached the gospel, for a faithful pastor. Dr. Passmore went by and knocked on a door. Thank God

for a man that got honest sitting in a service like this and said, "I need the Jesus that evangelist is preaching about." Old Johnny got up. He got up out of his seat and had to walk to the front. I'm telling you, it was a long walk. It wasn't as long physically to come because we were over in the other building not as large but let me tell you, it can be a long walk. That first step is the most important one. Johnny asked the Lord to save him, reached over to get Charlotte's hand and here they came making their profession. As you heard the pastor going by and talking with them, they nailed that down and then the very next week walking into water like this.

Some of you sit here today and you've never asked Jesus to save you. Well today's your day. Today's the day of salvation. Now is the accepted time. You need to cry out and say, "Lord, be merciful to me and save me today." When you ask Him, He'll do it and then the first step of obedience, the very first thing you do is you make that confession public and this baptismal fount is the place where you do that. So you're sitting here today and you're saying, "Pastor, it's what I need to do." It's what I want to do. God's pricked my heart today and it's what I want to do. Then after I pray I'm going to ask you, don't even hesitate, just get up out of your seat, and walk down here to the front. One of our gentlemen standing, one of our great staffers, there'll be three of them there. You come and take them by the hand and say, "I'm ready." They'll get you with an encourager, go right out the side door, and they'll help you. We've got clothes. You can dress. We'll baptize you here and it'll be a great day of the first step of obedience that you need to take. I'm going to end this service like this for all that want to come and trust the Lord and be baptized.

Some of you say, "Well, pastor, you know, I've been saved, I've been baptized. I just want to put my membership in this church. Do I have to be baptized again?" No. If you've trusted Christ and been baptized by immersion we'll receive you and you come today. Come and move your membership here. You say, "That's the kind of church I want to be a part of. I want to come and be a part of this church. It's preaching the gospel and winning souls and making disciples." Then you come. It's a great day to make your commitment. Baptismal Sunday. A good day to be right here.

I'm going to pray. When I pray and say Amen we'll all stand and when we stand, Jon will begin to sing and when he sings, you step out and you come, you come, you come.

Father, I ask you in Jesus' name that you'll add to the church today. I pray people will come and say yes to you this day. I thank you for these 19 that have already done it and I pray, God, that others will follow in their footsteps this very morning. God, have your way now. Give us courage and help us do that that You've called us to do in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're on our feet all over this room. We're on our feet standing, singing. God's calling and you come, you come, you come just now.