

The Baptised Bride

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[0 : 00] Well, we can turn back together to Ephesians 5, although we'll also be looking at Ezekiel 16.

But let me read the words of verses 25 to 27 in Ephesians 5 as we turn to this passage. Again, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour without spot or wrinkle or any such thing that she might be holy and without blemish.

My computer's just gone off, so I'm just going to put it back on very quickly, which hopefully will work in a second. Great, there we go, that's what I'm looking for.

Tonight we are going to be sharing the Lord's Supper together, so we are looking forward to that very much. For as we do so, I want to do something just a little bit different. I want us to, as we approach the Lord's Supper, I want us to think about baptism.

Now, that's not something that we tend to do when we have the Lord's Supper, that's what we tend to focus on. And baptism is something that we often only think about at a service when we're baptising somebody.

[1 : 23] But if you think about it, everybody who sits at the Lord's table and who has the Lord's Supper, the one thing they have to be is baptised. So your baptism is something that has to happen first before you sit at the Lord's table.

So it's actually a very appropriate thing for us to think about because in many ways the two need to go hand in hand. And if we only ever think about baptism when we're having a baptism service, then it's what it's not great because it means we don't tend to think about baptism very much at all. And that's a mistake because there is a huge amount to be gained from thinking about baptism and especially from thinking about baptism as we approach the Lord's Supper.

Now, the two of course go together. Baptism and the Lord's Supper go together because they are the two sacraments that Jesus instituted. They are the two sacraments that we recognise in the Reformed Church.

And both the sacraments, the baptism and the Lord's Supper, they function as what we call signs and seals.

[2 : 33] Signs and seals of God's covenant promises towards His people. So whenever you think of baptism or the Lord's Supper, you should be thinking of these two words, sign and seal.

And as signs and seals, they're a channel through which God graciously blesses us. Or to use the old fashioned word with the cool phrase that you'll have heard long ago, their means of grace, a channel through which God graciously blesses us.

And so what I'm going to say tonight is applicable to you whether you are baptized as a child or as an adult. And I'm not really going to go into the whole infant baptism question, but if any of you want to ask about that, I will be very happy to chat about that over a cup of tea afterwards.

First question we've got to ask is, what do we mean when we say that they're signs and seals? So it's easy to write that, that's what theological books have said for centuries, but what exactly does that mean?

Well, what I want to say is this. As signs and seals, the sacraments are telling you something. They are telling you something.

[3 : 42] A sign is giving you information. So it takes something simple, in the case of baptism, water, in the case of the Lord's supper, bread and wine, everyday stuff.

It takes these simple things and uses them to show us something about what Jesus has done for us. So the sign is giving us information. A seal gives you confirmation.

So a seal would confirm the genuineness of a document or an agreement. You can imagine that even still happening today, where a seal confirms that something is genuine.

In terms of God's covenant relationship towards us, the sacraments function to confirm that God's promises are genuine and reliable, and his commitment to you is utterly dependable and irrevocable.

And so all of this means is that, what all this tells us is that we don't believe that baptism in the Lord's supper have power in and of themselves. They're not, you know, baptism doesn't make you a Christian, and the Lord's supper doesn't keep you as a Christian.

[4 : 53] It doesn't have any power in and of itself. It functions as a sign and seal of the incredibly powerful promises that God has made towards us.

They're signs and seals of his incredible covenant commitment. So I want to just make sure that that's very clear that a sacrament is a sign and seal of God's covenant promises.

A sign gives you information. So that means you can be taught by it. A seal gives you confirmation. That means that you can be reassured by it.

And what I want us to see tonight is that your baptism does both of these things. As you approach the Lord's supper, your baptism gives you information, and it gives you confirmation.

In fact, your baptism is telling you some amazing things. There's lots that we could say. What I want to focus on tonight is the fact that your baptism tells you that you are a baptized bride.

[6 : 03] That's our title, but if this is going to make sense, there's a lot of things that we're going to have to piece together. So we're going to just have to roll up our sleeves and go for it.

There's lots and lots of pieces of biblical theology that we're going to have to piece together over the next 20 minutes or so in order to see how all of this works. So I'm putting my sleeves up.

You've got to as well. We've got to go for it together and don't get left behind because I really think it will be worth it. So first of all, what's your baptism telling you?

Well there's three key things that baptism is telling you. The first is cleansing. You can see a verse there, Acts 22, 16.

Now, why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins. And that in many ways is the most obvious aspect of baptism.

[6 : 59] The water is used to symbolize the fact that we have been cleansed from sin through Jesus. Throughout the whole Bible, there's a very clear emphasis in the fact that sin makes us unclean before God.

We're stained by sin. And for that reason, we can't just waltz up to a holy, impeccable God. We're stained and we're unclean before Him.

But the great emphasis of the Gospel is that through Jesus' blood, we are cleansed. John 1, 1 John 1.7 says that if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we are fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.

So that's the first thing that we see in baptism. It's talking to us about cleansing. Another thing is it speaks to us about clothing.

Now, this is maybe not so obvious and it's maybe not something you think about so much. But you can see it here in Galatians 3, 27, if you just dig into it a wee bit. For as many as you were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.

[8 : 10] Now that word put on is the word for clothed. And we can see that when we compare it with another verse, Mark 1.6, speaking about John the Baptist, he was clothed with camels here, a leather belt around his waist.

That word there and that word there in Greek are exactly the same word. It's the language of clothing. And so Paul here is connecting baptism with the idea of being clothed.

So as water is put on us, that speaking of renewal, of new life. And so that makes perfect sense if you think about it because cleansing, washing something off, clothing, something new being placed on instead, we're clothed with Christ's righteousness.

And Paul vividly describes this in Ephesians 4. He talks about putting off your old self and putting on the new self. And that's the same language.

Put off, put on the idea of being cleansed and being clothed. And in so many ways, these two aspects, these two emphasis of cleansing and clothing are teaching us about the two halves of what the cross achieves.

[9 : 24] Through the cross, we're cleansed. Jesus' shed blood washes away our sin. And through the cross, we are clothed.

Christ's righteousness is placed upon us. Paul writes so powerfully in 2 Corinthians 5.21, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

First half talking about our sin, being taken off us and put on him. Second half speaking about his righteousness being placed on us.

So we've got cleansing. We've got clothing. Third key thing in baptism that baptism speaks to us about is naming.

You see that in the Great Commission at the end of Matthew 28. Go there, for make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 32] Now, we'll often think of baptism as a naming ceremony, especially in the case of infants. And it's true, baptism is a naming ceremony, but not in the way that we tend to think about it.

Baptism is not naming the child or the adult. It's not a christening where somebody is named. And christening is not really the best word to use for baptism.

It's not really a good word to use at all, because it's not a biblical term. And baptism is not naming the child. It doesn't make someone a Christian.

It's not a kind of christianizing christening like that. And it's not a ceremony where they get their name, whether that's Thomas or Timothy or Claire or Kate or whatever your name is. It's not a naming ceremony in that kind of way or the way we tend to think about it.

But it is a naming ceremony, but not your name, God's name.

[11 : 33] That's what this verse is telling you. Baptism is about God putting His name on you. God's name is placed on the recipient.

You're baptized into His name. And that is so important because it's telling you that you are His. To have His name upon us means that we belong to Him. We're welcomed into His family. We're given His family name.

And that's a key part of why baptism functions as the initiatory sacrament that brings us into membership of the church. Baptism makes you a member of the church.

And He puts His name on us because we are His. And to have God's name on you is such an amazing privilege.

[12 : 34] And it's a sign of being a recipient of God's blessing. There's the famous blessing at the end of number six that we often use at baptisms. The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. So they shall put My name upon the people of Israel and I will bless them.

It's a sign of God's favor and blessing towards us when He places His name on us in baptism. So here's the three things.

Baptism speaks to us. It's telling us something. It's telling us about cleansing. It's telling us about clothing. And it's telling us about naming. And if you think about it, all three of these are actually reflected in what we actually do at a baptism.

At a baptism, there has to be water speaking of cleansing. That water has to be put onto the recipient speaking of clothing. And that has to be done in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[13 : 38] And if you mis-ed hear them out, it's not baptism. It's not baptism if you don't use water. It's not baptism if it doesn't actually go in the Persian. And it's not baptism if it's not in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And all three of these things are telling you something. They're telling you that you are cleansed. They're telling you that you're clothed.

They're telling you that you are His. Your baptism is telling you all of these things.

But I think there's even more that we can see if we dig a little bit deeper. And that's what I want us to just spend a few minutes doing. And what I want to suggest is that I think the Bible associates all three of these things, not just with baptism, but also with marriage.

And this is where we're going to have to jump to lots of different places in the Bible and we'll have to hold quite a few things together to see, just to get all the pieces lined up side by side.

[14:42] But I think we can do it. And I think it's going to be worth it. So what I'm saying is those three things, cleansing, clothing, naming, they're all associated with baptism. They're also all associated with marriage.

Let's try and prove it. Well, first of all, we've got Ephesians 5. It's speaking about husbands and wives. It's speaking about the imagery of marriage. But that's in the context of, well, it's in the context of giving instructions to husbands.

But Paul just cannot help talk about the fact that marriage is actually just a shadow of the great relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. And so you have this amazing teaching speaking.

You know, Paul tries to talk about husbands. He actually spends more time talking about Jesus. Husbands loves your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word so that he might present the church to himself and splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing that she might be holy without blemish.

That's describing Christ cleansing his bride. Isaiah and Revelation, they both speak about the church as a bride that has been clothed.

[15:57] So we'll just go through them together, look out for the clothing language. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation.

He's covered me with a robe of righteousness as a bride groomed ex himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress as a bride adorns herself with jewels. There it is right there, clothing, marriage together.

Same at the end of Revelation. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory for the marriage of the Lamb has come. His bride has made herself ready. It was granted to her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

There you go, clothing, marriage, joined together. Same again in Revelation 21. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

So there's that link. And then another section of Isaiah, it's 62 I think, here it is, yeah, it connects naming and marriage.

[17:02] So I'll just read it all, but again I want you to look out this time for naming language. For Zion's sake, I'll not keep quiet and I'll keep silent. For Jerusalem's sake, I'll not be quiet until her righteousness goes forth as brightness and her salvation is a burning torch.

The nations shall see your righteousness and all the kings your glory. And you shall be called by a new name that comes out of the mouth that the Lord will give. You shall be crown, a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

You shall no more be termed forsaken. Your land shall no more be termed desolate, but you shall be called my delight is in her, your land married for the Lord, delights in you and your land shall be married for as a young man marries a young woman.

So shall your sons marry you as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride. So shall your God rejoice over you. There we have a link between marriage and naming. And so the thing connects together. So you've got the example from Ephesians about cleansing. We've got Isaiah and Revelation talking about being clothed. We've got Isaiah talking about naming.

[18:09] We've got all three of them in the passage that I can read from Ezekiel 16. And I'm going to just go through them. Just go through this again. I'll just read it slowly and I want you to see it all coming together.

This is the language of marriage. When I passed by you again and saw you behold, you were at the age of love. And I spread the corner of my garment over you.

That's a phrase speaking about engagement. That's that kind of an old testament way of showing that you are going to marry someone.

And covered your nakedness. I made my vow before you and entered a covenant with you to clear the Lord God. You became mine. There's that ownership, that ownership that we speak of in relation to naming.

Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you. I clothed you also with embroidered silk, shot you with fine leather.

[19 : 08] And then I won't read it all, but it's all just more clothing language. There it is. Cleansed, clothed and owned your mind.

And so I think that we can do this. I think that we can say that that cleansing, clothing and naming are clearly associated with baptism.

I think we can say cleansing, clothing and naming are also associated with marriage. And I think that's telling us that the New Testament teaching about baptism is tied to the image of marriage that runs right through the Bible.

And I think there's a passage that proves this. And that's the passage in John three where John the Baptist speaks about baptism and he speaks about Jesus.

And let's see what he says. They came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness, look, he's baptizing and all are going to him.

[20 : 08] John answered a person cannot receive even one thing unless it's given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness that I said I'm not the Christ, but I've been sent before him, the one who has the bride is the bridegroom.

The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.

I think there is a link between baptism and marriage imagery. I think it's a deliberate link. I think it's incredibly important for us to recognize.

Why is it so important? For two reasons. First is because it's reminding us all that your baptism is an amazing declaration of our union to Jesus and our union to one another.

Marriage is the definitive union that scripture presents before us. It's when a man and a woman become one and that union between a husband and a wife is a glimpse into the incredible union that Jesus has with his church that was established through his death and resurrection.

[21 : 27] That's why the New Testament makes such a strong link between baptism and unity. The body is one as many members and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.

For in one spirit, we are all baptized into one body. Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, all made to think of one drink, same and Ephesians 4. One body, one spirit, just as your call to the one hope that belongs to your call.

One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is overall and through all and in all. Baptism is speaking about our union to Jesus.

He is our bridegroom. We are united to him and to everything that he's accomplished and your baptism is telling you about that. Paul speaks about this in Romans 6. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

We were buried there for with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in needlessness of life. For we have been united with him in a death like his.

[22 : 30] We shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Baptism is the sign and seal of our union with Christ and everything that he has accomplished.

It's also the sign and seal of our union with one another as a church family. And that's why it's such a tragedy that baptism, the sacrament that is supposed to unite us and that's supposed to identify us as one body is the thing that's divided us because we can't agree on the question of infant baptism.

We need to get back to the fact that baptism is telling us that we're united to Jesus. We're united to one another. The church is a baptized bride.

You are a baptized bride. So bringing it all together. Baptism is speaking to us about cleansing, clothing and naming.

And all of that is because we are united to Jesus and we're united to one another. And you can see there's a gap, there's one thing missing from our diagram.

[23 : 43] And that's because there's one more thing that the Bible associates with marriage. Now we're nearly there, so stick with me. One more thing that the Bible associates with marriage.

And I think this is the second reason why it's so important for us to notice this connection between baptism and marriage imagery. In the Bible, with a marriage, what's the one thing that always happens?

What's the one thing that always takes place when there is a marriage? There's a feast. There's a meal.

There's a marriage supper. Ephesians 19 speaks of it that we go back to the same one, the bride being clothed, the angel said to me, blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb.

Where did Jesus turn the water of cleansing into the wine of celebration? At a wedding in John chapter two. And that's why the last piece of our diagram is a supper, a wedding supper.

[25 : 01] Do you see how all this fits together? As you come to share the Lord's supper tonight, you're doing that on the basis of everything that your baptism is telling you.

So that means as you eat the Lord's supper this evening, you should be thinking about your baptism because your baptism is telling you something. It's telling you something amazing. It's telling you that you are cleansed. Not cleansed by the water that's poured out on you, but cleansed by the blood of Jesus that was poured out for you on the cross.

So often we come to the Lord's table and all we can think about is the fact that we're dirty. People stay away from the Lord's table because they think that they're dirty, that they're not good enough, that they're not clean enough, that they're not the way that they should be.

We feel like we're a mess. We feel like we're covered in stain from our sin. We feel like we're unclean, unsuitable, unworthy, but it's actually not true.

[26 : 08] It might have been true once, but it is not true now. Your baptism is telling you that you're clean.

You have been cleansed. All your sin and guilt has been washed away. And so if you feel guilty and useless and rubbish, then just let your baptism hose you down again because God has cleansed you.

Remember, your baptism is not telling God anything because He knows that you're clean already. It's telling you something. It's telling you that you're clean. And as you eat the bread and drink the wine, you're being pointed back to the incredible cleansing power of Jesus' broken body and His shed blood.

Your baptism is telling you that you're clean as you have the Lord's Supper in a few minutes time. Your baptism is also telling you that you are clothed.

Now, this is crucial. How would you feel if you took your clothes off right now? Freezing is probably the first thing you'd feel.

[27 : 21] Also very embarrassed. Yes? Very embarrassed. We would feel exposed, vulnerable. We would want to run a mile.

So often that's how we feel before God. And so often that's how we feel in front of each other. We feel embarrassed about our sin and our failings.

We feel ashamed of our failures and our sense of inadequacy. And like Adam, we just want to hide. Your baptism is telling you that you don't need to.

You don't need to hide because you've been clothed by Jesus. So He's washed you clean, but He's not left you naked. He's clothed you.

He's adorned you. That means that you're ready. In fact, it means that you are beautiful. Your baptism doesn't make you beautiful.

[28 : 17] It's telling you that Jesus has made you beautiful. Your baptism is telling you that God is looking at you right now and saying, my beautiful, baptized bride.

As we eat the Lord's supper together, we are celebrating the fact that we have an amazing bridegroom who's washed us in his blood and clothed us in his righteousness.

And your baptism is telling you that God has put his name on you. And that means that you are His. And as we come to the Lord's supper, it's so easy to think that we are lots of things. Here's some examples. We think, I'm unworthy. I'm ashamed.

I'm guilty. I'm not doing very well. I'm struggling and broken and tired.

[29 : 19] I'm a rubbish Christian. I think everybody in here feels like that. And it's so easy to think like that.

Your baptism is telling you that you need to score out all of those words and replace them with one word. His.

I am His. And if there's anybody here who has not sat at the Lord's table before and would love to sit at the Lord's table, that is all you have to say.

That is all you have to say. I am His. And you will probably feel that unworthy and that ashamed and that guilty and that not very doing very well and that struggling and that broken and that tired and that you feel like you're rubbish as a Christian doesn't matter.

All you need to be able to say is I am His. Your baptism is telling you that he's put his name on you. [30 : 31] That you are united to Jesus. And that marriage imagery is telling us that we belong to him and that we've forsaken all others as we eat and drink.

We are celebrating that marriage union and we're renewing our dedication to our magnificent, heroic, incredible bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

So to go back to your diagram, you're a baptized bride. You're cleansed, you're clothed, you're named and now we get to share a supper with him as we anticipate the great marriage supper of the Lamb on that last day.

Your baptism is telling you something. It's a sign giving you information about everything that Jesus has done for you.

And it's a seal giving you confirmation that all these promises are real, they are true and they are dependable.

[31 : 43] As we come to the Lord's table in a few minutes time, we're doing that on the basis of everything that your baptism is telling you. We're celebrating the amazing truth that you're a baptized bride in Christ.

You are cleansed, you're clothed, you are named. That means that you're clean, you're beautiful, you are His.

And we share all of that together because we're all baptized and that's all telling us that we are all His bride.

Last of all, why does He do all that? He does it because He loves you. And that's the final piece of our diagram.

All of that is planned, initiated, accomplished, kept, maintained forever because He loves you.

[32 : 57] As those beautiful words in song of Solomon 2 say, He brought me into the banqueting house and His banner over me was love.

You're a baptized bride above all else that is telling you just how much you are loved. Amen.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you so, so much for Jesus, that He's cleansed us, clothed us, that through Him your name has been placed upon us and that now we can celebrate a supper together. Please have mercy on us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, just before we share the Lord's supper together, we're going to sing a few verses from Psalm 118, these are just beautiful words that speak of really just the rejoicing in their access to God and what He's accomplished and the fact that all of that's pointing towards what He's done through His Son Jesus, the one who's become the cornerstone.

After we sing this, I'll just come down to the front and it'll just be a very short and simple supper together. I wanted to say though that as we're singing this Psalm, if there is anybody who's not sitting in the middle who can say, I am His and who does love the Lord, then just move over and we know that that's you professing faith.

[34 : 52] So we're all looking at the screen, so no one's looking at you except God and His is the only opinion that matters. So you can do that if you want. So we're going to sing as Mertur leads us.