



Biscuits or Basketball? Mark 1:4-11

TITLE PAGE

Take a look at these three pictures a DONUT, a BASKETBALL and a BISCUIT? What do they have in common?

DUNKING!

Yes, you DUNK BISCUITS, you DUNK BASKETBALLS, and there is an American company called DUNKIN' DONUTS!

TITLE Today is a Baptism Sunday. And dunking is here to remind us that baptism is not a mysterious word, it simply means TO DUNK or TO IMMERSE OR SUBMERGE. It's an important word in the Bible that is often confused but when you think of baptism in terms of dunking biscuits or dunking basketball (or dunking donuts!) then everything makes perfect sense as far as I can see.

Today we are going to baptise three people in water. We are going to dunk them in this pool of water. Tony and I are going to push them under. Why? Because in the Bible, people who believed – that was who trusted in Jesus as their Saviour and Lord – became Christians were baptised in water. “They believed and were baptised”. And we read just now of how Jesus also was baptised by John in the River Jordan.

In fact in the Bible it is recorded that ONLY BELIEVERS WERE BAPTISED. No infants, no unbelievers – just people who had made a decision to follow Jesus. What we are doing this morning follows the example set us by the Word of God.

So WHY BE BAPTISED? Simple – because Jesus commands it. Just about the last thing Jesus said before He ascended into heaven was *Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. If we say we are followers of Jesus then we do as He commands – be baptised. Besides He was baptised – and so he never asks His followers to do anything He didn't do Himself! Simple as that.

It's AN OUTWARD SIGN OF AN INWARD CHANGE. When we trust Jesus, we become new people. Because of His death on the cross, God is able to forgive us our sins. He cleanses us of them – that's one of the significances of water baptism. In fact *baptizo* was a word used in the dyeing industry. The cloth which was in one colour is immersed and comes out a different colour. When we trusted Jesus, He changed us into new people with a new life and a new hope. Being immersed in this pool today won't make them a Christian – they are already one, but they are doing this as a sign to themselves and the rest of us that God has forgiven their sins and He has given them a new life in Jesus a life that is going to be with them for eternity. That's already happened for each one of them. If you are not a believer this morning, then God is giving you this message through them performing this simple sign of being baptised – you need to trust Jesus as your Saviour and Lord if you want to know cleansing from sin, have a relationship with God and experience eternal life.

But there's more. Baptism is a STATEMENT OF INTENT. Each of these is going to confess quite soon that they are going to follow Jesus wherever they may call them to go. Baptism is what is known as an initiation ceremony. It's something that should happen at the beginning of someone's Christian walk. That's the witness of scripture. “They believed and were baptised”. Some people think that you shouldn't be baptised until you have proved yourself as a Christian in some way and many people wait a long time before getting baptised. Usually they are influenced by the experience of seeing somebody who confessed Christ, was baptised then fell away or whose life as a Christian is less than exemplary, so they want to be sure.

Guess what – there were people in the Bible (lots of them) who were baptised and whose life was less than exemplary – and there were those who fell away. But do we stop doing something just because a few foolish people misuse it? We baptise people on confession of their faith. That is how it was in scripture and therefore that's how it is now. No other test of fidelity was asked for or required.

Baptism is a therefore statement of intent. It says "I am going to follow Jesus wherever He may call me to go". In fact it usually cements people's faith by doing something dramatic. And then it is down to them, and to us as their church to encourage them, to live a life worthy of the calling God has given them. Baptism is the easy bit. The hard bit starts tomorrow!

So the message of scripture is clear. Jesus commands all believers to be baptised as an outward sign of an inward change. And it is a statement of intent, not perfection.

WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT BAPTISM

The baptism of Jesus shows us a number of things about baptism.

IT GIVES GOD PLEASURE. His message that day in the River Jordan caused the Father to utter – "this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Jesus hadn't done anything yet in terms of His ministry. Yet God was pleased with His act of getting wet. Why? Because it was an act of obedience and submission to God. That was the easy bit. The hard bit was the cross. These three people have come to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord. They have become children of God. They have all in obedience to the risen Christ obeyed the call of God to be baptised. And God's reaction. He's pleased with His beloved children! If you are a believer this morning and have never been baptised, then understand this; God is pleased with all those who obey Him.

IT CONFIRMS OUR STATUS IN PUBLIC - Baptism is a public act. It actually takes a lot of guts to do it because it's a pretty stupid thing to do. But because it's something given us by God, it's a public sign of just what we've believed. Many Christians have dramatic conversions. They are massively changed as people. It's always great to hear what God has done in their lives. Sometimes as you'll hear soon, conversion is not very dramatic at all. The nice thing about baptism is that it's a piece of drama which people usually never forget. It makes our testimonies more exciting and meaningful as we and the church affirm our personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Finally **IT'S A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE.** God doesn't ask us to do something for kicks. Jesus' baptism was a power encounter with God. The Holy Spirit descended on Him and afterwards, Jesus went and did amazing things. John said this on the day: "I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit." John called on people to ask God forgiveness of their sins and to follow God – but following Jesus means something more. Jesus baptism day was a power encounter with the Holy Spirit.

If this is an act where God is well pleased, then we should expect God's blessing. God has given each believer the Holy Spirit. But God wants us to know the Spirit's fullness in our lives and that includes power encounters with Him. Baptism in the Spirit – immersion in the Spirit is a power encounter with the Spirit that again should occur early in our Christian experience. I say power encounter, but it isn't necessarily massively dramatic – for many it is experiencing the closeness of God in a profound way. For others He is experienced through manifestations of spiritual gifts. And such experiences of the filling of God's Spirit is not confined to early in our faith. The continual challenge to each of us I believe is to continue to be filled with the Spirit.

I have said to each of these folks this morning to both expect and ask for the blessing of God in their baptism and to encounter the Spirit of God in a fresh way. It may have already happened this week, it may happen in the pool. It may happen later. God will affirm their act of obedience in some way. They just need to be aware of that and be ready to receive.

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So here we come. Baptism. If you have never trusted Jesus before, then this is a piece of drama that God challenges you with. Why not trust and follow Jesus for yourself. If you are a non-baptised Christian this morning then God is saying to you - "Why?" The command is to be baptised. Besides, why miss out on the blessing? For the rest of us to which this is all old hat, then I pray this won't be. The one who was baptised that day in the River Jordan is the one who immerses people in the Holy Spirit. Have you ever been immersed in the Holy Spirit? Today is Pentecost. If that has not been your experienced; have you asked? If that is your experience; do you need a top-up to be filled with the Spirit?