

Matthew 28:19 "It Starts with Baptism" [\\*\\*](#)

**Main Idea: When it comes to understanding the importance of baptism, we need to consider the subject from two important perspectives.**

I. Let's consider what Jesus said.

A. Baptism is part of our mission.

1. It's the first thing we're to do with new disciples.
2. It signifies commitment.

B. Baptism is for disciples only.

1. It doesn't make a person a disciple.
2. It's the evidence that a person is a disciple.

C. Baptism involves an identification.

1. It identifies a disciple with the Living God.
2. It identifies a disciple with other disciples.

II. Let's consider what the disciples did.

A. Here's what happened with Jews (Acts 2:41).

1. They accepted Christ.
2. Then they were baptized.

B. Here's what happened with Samaritans (Acts 8:12).

1. They believed in Christ.
2. Then they were baptized.

C. Here's what happened with Saul (Acts 9:18).

1. He came to know Christ.
2. Then he was baptized.

D. Here's what happened with many others in the book of Acts.

1. Cornelius and his family were baptized (10:48).
2. Lydia and her household were baptized (16:15).
3. The Philippian jailer and his family were baptized (16:33).
4. People in Corinth were baptized (18:8).
5. People in Ephesus were baptized (19:5).

Response: Ask yourself two questions...

1. Am I a disciple of Christ?
2. Am I living in obedience to the commands of Christ?

I'd like to take a break this morning from our series in the Gospel of Mark. We're going to address a very important topic...

One of the most exciting moments in the life of a family is when a child starts walking. A lot happens in that first year of life as the little one progresses from total dependence upon the parents to the day when he "gets his wheels."

We were just talking the other day with our girls about when they first learned to walk. As a parent you get down in the floor about an arm length away from your child, hold out your hand and say, "Come to Daddy!"

At first she stands there, looking at you with a quizzical grin, and then drops to the ground and comes crawling. And you say, "No, no, not like that. *Walk* to Daddy. You can do it!"

So you pick her up, steady her until she's balanced, move away a couple of feet, and try again. Some children get the hang of walking quickly. For others it may take a little longer. But when it's all said and done there's something *all* children have in common. In order to learn to walk, they must take the *first step*.

It starts with the first step. No one learns to walk without taking the first step. Whether you're the world record holder in the 100 meter dash, or merely someone who enjoys a nice stroll in the park, you wouldn't be walking today had you not taken the *first step*.

Answer this. Where do we start in disciple-making? You guessed it--by taking the first step! Have you noticed how often the Bible refers to the Christian life as a *walk*? 1 John 1:7 says we are to "*walk* in the light." 2 John 6 tells us to "*walk* in love." In John 8:12 Jesus said, "Whoever follows me will never *walk* in darkness." Right after listing the Ten Commandments God's Word says this in Deuteronomy 5:33, "*Walk* in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you."

A successful Christian life is a *walk*, not a run. It's a life of obedience lived one step at a time. Which raises this question. Just what is the first step of obedience that a disciple must take in order to please the Master? Granted we become a Christian by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. But then what? What is the first step of obedience in the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Jesus answered that question very plainly for us in Matthew 28:19. What He said may surprise you. Without a doubt, the interpretation of what He said is one of the primary reasons there are different denominations of churches today. Here's what Jesus said, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

So there it is. Our mission is to make disciples. He told us to go and make disciples worldwide. And what's the first thing we are to do once a person becomes a disciple of Jesus? Jesus said we are to *baptize* them. According to Jesus, baptism is the first step a disciple of His must take.

It starts with baptism... It doesn't end there, for sure. But it does begin there.

But why? What's so important about being baptized? And just what is baptism anyway? Human opinions abound when it comes to this subject. My desire is not to offer you my opinions. My aim, as I hope it is every time I stand behind the sacred desk, is to open the Word of God, see what God says, and seek to help us bring our lives in line with what God says.

So here we go. When it comes to understanding the significance of baptism, we need to consider the subject from

two important perspectives.

## I. Let's consider what Jesus said.

Right here's the source of a lot of confusion about the topic of baptism. Too often we talk about what our *church* says, or what our *theology textbook* says, or what some respected *Bible teacher* says. All those are good in their place, but our final authority is the Word of God. We need to give ear to what God's Word says, in this case to the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19. In so doing we'll discover three insights concerning baptism.

### **A. Baptism is part of our mission.**

As a church we need to have a clearcut handle on why we're here. We have a mission. Our Savior gave it to us in black and white terms. Our text is what is commonly called the "Great Commission," the words Jesus gave to His disciples just before returning to heaven.

That's what verse 19 is, our God-given mission statement. Jesus told us to "make disciples" (translated "teach" in the KJV) of all nations. Grammatically, that's the main verb of the sentence. The verse includes three participles which identify three important components of disciple making. Disciplemaking involves "going," "baptizing," and "teaching."

It starts with going. There will be no impact without contact. Our neighbors aren't supposed to come to us. Jesus commanded us to go to them for the purpose of disciple making. We're to introduce them to Jesus and teach them how to follow Jesus.

"Bob, we've been neighbors for awhile now. There's something I need to talk to you about if I may."

"Sure," Bob says. "What is it?"

"Well, it's the most important thing in my life. In fact, it's the most important *Person* in my life. It's Jesus Christ. I was just wondering if you've thought much about why Jesus came to this earth, died on a cross, and rose again?"

Now suppose Bob replied, "You know, I haven't. But I'm interested. Let's talk." And suppose that over the next few weeks or months you and Bob begin studying the Bible together. And one day Bob says, "Now I understand. God sent Jesus Christ into this world because I need a Savior. He did for me what I couldn't do--He met the demands of God's law by living a perfect life. And then He died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. And three days later He rose again. I believe that. Yes, right now I want to receive Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord."

And so Bob does just that. The two of you get down on your knees in your living room, and Bob calls out to God, repents of his sin, believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is saved. Your neighbor, Bob, has become a disciple of Christ.

The question is, *now what?* You say, "Bob needs to be taught how to follow Christ." That's right. As we'll see next week in verse 20, an important part of disciple making is *teaching*--as Jesus put it in verse 20, "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." If a disciple is to grow, he needs to be taught.

But according to our God-given mission statement, what's the first step of obedience that we need to help Bob take? Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them." What place does baptism have in the fulfillment of our mission?

1. *It's the first thing we're to do with new disciples.* That's what Jesus said. But why? Because...

2. *It signifies commitment.* The eleven disciples who heard Jesus say these words knew what their Master meant. They knew that baptism represented a commitment.

A little over three years before this John the Baptist had baptized people in the Jordan River . Why? To prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. In fact, the disciples themselves had already baptized people with Jesus.

Listen to John 4:1-2, "The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples." Notice carefully. When a person was baptized, what did it signify that the person had become? The answer is, a *disciple*. A follower. It indicates a change of allegiance: "I no longer live for myself, but for the One in whose name I am baptized."

Baptism is a serious matter. It indicates commitment. Martin Luther once put it this way, "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing."

Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." When a person is baptized, he or she is saying, "I'll go where You want me to go, dear Lord," recognizing that the path Jesus trod took Him to the cross.

Clarence Jordan, author of the "Cotton Patch" New Testament translation was once receiving a red-carpet tour of another church. With pride the minister of the church pointed to the rich, imported pews and luxurious decoration. As they stepped outside, darkness was falling and a spotlight shone on a huge cross atop the steeple. "That cross alone cost us ten thousand dollars," the minister said with a satisfied smile. "You got cheated," said Jordan . "Times were when Christians could get them for free."

There's a second insight we can learn about baptism by considering what Jesus said. First, baptism is part of our mission...

**B. Baptism is for disciples only.** Jesus said, "Baptizing *them*." Don't miss that. Who is *them*? It refers to the disciples we've made. What then does that indicate about baptism? Two things...

1. *It doesn't make a person a disciple.* Rather...

2. *It's the evidence that a person is a disciple.* The evangelist Billy Sunday once said in his blunt manner of speaking, "Going to church don't make a man a Christian any more than going to a stable makes a man a horse."

The same goes for baptism. Sometimes people will say, "I want to be baptized so I can become a Christian." What's wrong with that statement? Baptism is the evidence of a relationship with Christ, not the basis of it.

Baptism is for disciples only. It's not the means by which a person becomes a disciple. Rather it's the fitting response of one who has become a follower of Christ. Why? Insight #3...

**C. Baptism involves an identification.** How did Jesus say that disciples are to be baptized? Note the phrase: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Jesus says "name," not *names*. Commentator R. T. France observes that the singular use of "name" underscores the unity of the three Persons (415).

We know that in the Bible God reveals Himself as a Triune God. He is One God, yet He exists eternally as three persons.

But why would it be significant to mention His triune nature in the baptism of a disciple? It's interesting that all three persons of the Trinity were involved at Jesus' baptism. The Son was immersed in the water, the Spirit descended like a dove upon Him, and the Father spoke, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased (Matt 3:16-17)."

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus specifically says a disciple is to be baptized "in" the name of the Triune God. A literal rendering would be "*into* the name". France suggests this preposition implies an entrance into an allegiance (414). D. A. Carson says, "The preposition 'into' strongly suggests a coming-into-relationship with or a coming-under-the-Lordship-of (597)."

The point is this. Baptism is an affirmation. When a person is baptized he is affirming his relationship with the triune God. In baptism we are saying, "We believe there is one God who exists as three persons. We believe that the Father sent His Son to this world to redeem a people for His honor. We believe that the Holy Spirit has come to indwell His people until the Son returns."

You may not be able to *explain* the Trinity, but when baptized you *affirm* its truthfulness. To put it simply baptism involves a twofold identification.

*1. It identifies a disciple with the Living God.* In baptism we identify with the Father who designed our salvation, with the Son who accomplished our salvation, and with the Holy Spirit who applied it to our lives.

I don't believe that Jesus merely intended these words to be a formula to recite at a baptismal service. That helps explain why a text like Acts 8:16 speaks of being baptized "in Jesus' name" without mentioning the other two persons of the trinity.

John Stott, in his book *Baptism and Fullness*, writes, "The very concept of baptism is initiatory. Water baptism is the public rite of initiation into Christ." Romans 6:3 asks this question, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" Galatians 3:26-27 puts it this way, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

Baptism identifies a disciple with the Living God. But that's not all it does...

*2. It identifies a disciple with other disciples.* The Lord never intended His people to be islands. He wants us to be active members of a Body, living stones in a Building, and growing branches in a Vine.

I think that's Paul's point in Ephesians 4:5 when he talks about "one baptism." In verse 3 he urges us to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. Here's why our unity is so important: there is "one body and one Spirit" (verse 4), and there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." This is what unites us. We have the same Lord. We've been saved the same way--through faith. And we've made the same public confession of the Lord by being baptized. Believer's baptism identifies us with each other.

So according to Jesus, baptism is part of our mission, is for disciples only, and involves a public identification with God and each other. Jesus told the eleven, "Go make disciples and baptize them."

Which raises this question. Did they? What exactly did the men who first heard these words do with them? We can gain valuable insight into what Jesus intended us to do by considering what the disciples did.

## II. Let's consider what the disciples did.

Where do we find the actions of the disciples? In the book known as the "Acts of the Apostles."<sup>[1]</sup> Acts tells us what happened in the first generation of the church's history (from approximately A.D. 30 to 60).

What did the disciples do? In an earlier study I mentioned that the early church was a *going* church and subsequently a *growing* church. We're about to see that it was also a *baptizing* church. Simply take a concordance and trace the word "baptize" through Acts and you'll discover, to put it plainly, a lot of water! You'll also observe that when the church progressed and reached new people groups, they were baptized the same way. Let's notice the highlights...

**A. Here's what happened with Jews (Acts 2:41).** On the birthday of the church in Acts 2, Peter preached a sermon to a Jewish audience. You'll read the punchline of his message in verse 36, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

The Holy Spirit brought great conviction upon the people that day, and they cried out (37), "What shall we do?"

Peter's answer (38), "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

And that's what they did as verse 41 explains. First...

1. *They accepted Christ.* The text states that they "accepted his message."

2. *Then they were baptized.* It wasn't the act of baptism that saved them (for that matter it wasn't the act of praying the sinner's prayer that saved me when I was eleven). It's Christ that saves us, not what we *do*.

The Bible doesn't teach that the waters of baptism wash away our sins. The blood of Christ already did that (Eph 1:7). And those who've trusted Christ are clean the moment they place their faith in Christ.

So baptism isn't necessary then, right? Wrong. It's not necessary for salvation, but it is for identification. It's the means our Savior commanded us to identify ourselves publicly with Him.

That's what Peter meant when he told them to repent and be baptized in Jesus' name. Repent--admit your sinfulness. And be baptized in Jesus' name--that is, identify with Christ. Acknowledge that He alone can save you. Which is exactly what 3,000 Jews did that day!

From Acts 1 to Acts 7 the early church was basically made up of converted Jews. That began to change in Acts 8...

**B. Here's what happened with Samaritans (Acts 8:12).** Verse 5 reveals that the evangelist Philip went to a city in Samaria and preached Christ. Verse 12 details the impact of Philip's preaching, "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized." What happened to the Samaritans? Two things, first...

1. *They believed in Christ.* And...

2. *Then they were baptized.* The word *baptize* in the New Testament comes from the Greek word "baptidzo." By definition, the verb has various meanings: "immerse, sink, drown, go under, sink into, and bathe (*I.S.B.E.*, 414)."

When a person was baptized in the Bible, he was immersed. Mark 1:9 states that Jesus was baptized in (lit. "into") the Jordan. Later in Acts 8 Philip baptized an Ethiopian man, as the text reads (38), "Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him." Let's move to a third highlight...

**C. Here's what happened with Saul (Acts 9:18).** You remember Saul's story. Saul, whose name was later changed to Paul, was on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus. On the way, he was blinded by a light from heaven and confronted by the Living Christ. Two things happened to Saul that day. One...

1. *He came to know Christ.* And...

2. *Then he was baptized.* Acts 9:17-18 explains, "Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul [note that Saul is called a "brother" before he's been baptized], the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized."

See the pattern? The Jews accepted Christ and then were baptized. The Samaritans believed in Christ and then were baptized. So did the Ethiopian. And so did Saul.

Someone might object, "But what's so important about baptism? I've trusted Christ. Why do I need to be baptized?" That's a good question.

When it comes to baptism, the bottom line is this. It's a matter of *obedience*. The Christian life involves

obedience. If you want to be a successful Christian you must learn to obey the Master, to do what He commands. It starts right here.

The Lord never intended for Christianity to be a "private matter." In our day many are saying, "A person's faith should be a *private matter*." Not according to Jesus. The world ought to know we are Jesus' followers. Not by our bumper stickers, and not by our cross necklaces, but by our public identification with Christ in baptism and in our subsequent commitment to obey His Words.

Perhaps you'd like more evidence. Okay...

**D. Here's what happened with many others in the book of Acts.** In Acts 10 the gospel broke new ground and the arms of the Church began to embrace Gentiles.

1. *Cornelius and his family were baptized (10:48).* Later...

2. *Lydia and her household were baptized (16:15).* That happened in the city of Philippi . That's also where...

3. *The Philippian jailer and his family were baptized (16:33).* There's more...

4. *People in Corinth were baptized (18:8).* In fact the verse says "many" were. "Many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized." The tense of the Greek verbs indicates this was a process going on daily, as day after day people were believing in Christ and being baptized.

5. *People in Ephesus were baptized (19:5).* This is an interesting text. Here twelve men who'd already been baptized by John the Baptist now hear the good news about Jesus. What happened to them? Verse 5, "On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus."

Now stop and let the evidence sink in. We've just seen what the disciples did with the charge the Lord gave them. They went out, made disciples, and baptized them--just like Jesus told them to do.

Dear people, there's no escaping this fact. Being a disciple of Jesus is costly. It doesn't cost you anything to "pray the sinner's prayer"--because nobody can see that. But when a person is baptized he is saying, "I have counted the cost. I am willing to take up my cross and follow Jesus. I am willing to be identified with Christ and His people."

Listen. If you are a disciple of Christ and have never been baptized by immersion, I encourage you to prayerfully consider what the Word of God says. In the New Testament there is no such thing as an unbaptized believer--not that I've found. When a person trusted Christ, the first step of obedience was to be baptized.

I understand this may be new teaching for some of you. It may go against what you've been taught before. Perhaps you were sprinkled. Maybe you were sprinkled when you were an infant. When I was born my parents were part of a church that sprinkled infants, so I was sprinkled. But that wasn't baptism, not according to the biblical definition. I wasn't baptized until years later *after* I received Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord.

In my study this week, I read an article this by a person promoting infant baptism who says that those who deny its validity want to "depopulate the church of most of its membership and most of its finest sons and daughters."[\[2\]](#)

Beloved, I'm not questioning whether a person who hasn't been baptized by immersion is a Christian. If a person has placed his faith in Jesus Christ, that person is a child of God (John 1:12). In fact, it's possible to be baptized by immersion and *not* be a Christian. I know that godly people differ over the question of the mode of baptism.

But it seems to me that the issue is *authority*. When it comes to decision making, what will be the authority by which we make our decisions? Will it be what our church tradition says? Or a church father? Will our authority be what a family member says? Or will it be the Bible, God's Word?

You see, the Bible is God's revelation. Can we benefit from the wisdom of church tradition and church fathers and

wise family members? Certainly. But only in the Bible can we find, "Thus saith the Lord."

So I urge you. Consider what Jesus said. And consider what the disciples did.

Response: Ask yourself two questions...

1. *Am I a disciple of Christ?* To be His disciple I must know Him. I must put my trust in Him and His redeeming work for me. I must trust Him and entrust my life to Him. I must let the world know I am His and He is mine. Have you done that? Are you a disciple of Christ? If not, why not today? A second question...

2. *Am I living in obedience to the commands of Christ?* Is there any command of the Savior that you are knowingly disobeying? The first step is baptism, but there are other steps. One is being committed to a local church. Another is using your gifts to serve in that church. Another is personal Bible study. Another is prayer. Another is giving. Another is witnessing.

Are you living in obedience to Christ's commands? The hymnwriter said it well, "Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

### **Baptismal Service to Follow** (Nicole Lee)

--Nicole will read her testimony

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[\[1\]](#)In the book of Acts, baptism is practiced. In the epistles, baptism is explained.

[\[2\]](#)R. S. Rayburn, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 118.