

Luke 23:32-43

No Water

Today we will baptize five individuals. Five persons who have come before me and the Elders of this congregation in profession of faith making known their desire to be baptized. Desiring to be baptized in obedience to the words of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 28:19, “<sup>19</sup>Therefore, go and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Having had conversations with them all and others I find it necessary to make clear the purpose and significance of baptism. First, baptism is a visible sign to the community of what has taken place in the heart by the working of the Holy Spirit by way of the gospel of Jesus the Christ. Second, baptism does not enhance, improve or make sure one’s salvation. Stated this way, baptism is not the final step in one’s assurance of belonging to and/or forgiveness by God through faith in God’s Son, Jesus. Thus, it is not a prerequisite or a requirement of salvation. True faith in Jesus that brings about one’s justification, reconciliation, sanctification, salvation and eternal life with God and Jesus requires no water. These promises have always been and will always be a matter of one’s heart. Then, why do it? Because Jesus did it and he instructs his followers to do so. Having said these things we come across a story this morning that I thoroughly believe supports, if not makes certain, what I’ve said. Having spent considerable time mulling over this conversion story I want to share three things this criminal conversion story teaches us.

**First thing, learn to fear God. V40** “<sup>40</sup> But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die?”. Anyone who does not have a genuine relationship with Jesus should

be afraid and we, disciples of Jesus, should be very concerned, even afraid, for them. Why? Because that person is literally a dead man/woman walking. And apart from intervention by God he/she will face two deaths. A physical death and an eternal death. The Greek word for fear here is phobeō (fah-bay-oh). Which means to be afraid of God, the judge and avenger. Not reverence but literally fear. Now, before you say fear has no place in the gospel of Jesus let me give you several additional witnesses and then I will make my point.

**Matt 10:26-28** <sup>26</sup> “But don’t be afraid of those who threaten you. For the time is coming when everything that is covered will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you now in the darkness, shout abroad when daybreak comes. What I whisper in your ear, shout from the housetops for all to hear! <sup>28</sup> “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” **NLT**

**Luke 12:1-5** “Meanwhile, the crowds grew until thousands were milling about and stepping on each other. Jesus turned first to his disciples and warned them, “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees—their hypocrisy. <sup>2</sup> The time is coming when everything that is covered up will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all. <sup>3</sup> Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be shouted from the housetops for all to hear! <sup>4</sup> “Dear friends, don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot do any more to you after that. <sup>5</sup> But I’ll tell you whom to fear. Fear God, who has the power to kill you and then throw you into hell. Yes, he’s the one to fear.” **NLT**

**Exodus 1:17** <sup>17</sup> But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king’s orders. They allowed the boys to live, too.” **NLT**

I don't believe people ultimately turn to Christ because of fear, but fear will compel you to rethink your position. Coming to this realization on the cross this man finds himself, finally, in a position where God could change his heart and in changing his heart, change his predicament.

**Second, authentic confession changes everything.** That is to say, when we finally see Jesus for who he truly is we finally see our true selves, and the only reasonable response is a cry for help. **V41-42** “<sup>41</sup>We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong. “<sup>42</sup>Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” What turned this man's heart in his final moments? What brought about this life changing confession? I believe we can correctly assume he had very little first-hand experience with Jesus. He very well may have known of him, but he was not eyewitness to any miracles or a student for any teaching sessions led by Jesus. Not only that, he turns to Jesus though Jesus is in the same predicament, suffering the same fate. His tattered body, broken and blood soaked is hanging on a cross next to him and he, the criminal, puts his life/soul in Jesus' hands. **Remember me! This is his confession. This is his prayer. This is his creed. This is his cry for help! Remember me! What brought about faith in this man? When. Maybe it was how Jesus conducted himself even on the cross. Innocent but no protest. Scorned and still full of grace,** **V34** “Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.” What was it for you? What turned your heart to Jesus? I can guarantee you it wasn't anything you did or could do.

**Eze 36:25-26** “<sup>25</sup> Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I

will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.” **NKJV**

**John 6:37-39, 44** “<sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup> This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day..... <sup>44</sup> No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” **NKJV**

**Third and final thing, Jesus won't make us jump through hoops. V43**

<sup>43</sup> And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.” No creeds to be memorized. No bible content exam. No sinner's prayer to be recited. No classes to attend. No coming before the Apostles to be screened. No 40 days and 40 nights of fasting. No tarring. No confirmation. No dedication. No speaking in tongues. No getting your house in order! No water! My point is not that these things are bad, but they have no power to save you. By grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus the Christ alone! This is how one is saved, Jesus doesn't make us jump through hoops.

**Titus 3:4-7** “<sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” **ESV**

No water. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**