



Healthy Church

Week 7: The Ordinances of the Church

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

What are ordinances, and why are they important to a healthy church?

According to the International Mission Board, “Baptism is immersion in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and it is only administered to those who give credible evidence that they are born again believers in Jesus Christ. All believers are expected to be baptized. A healthy church regularly celebrates the Lord’s Supper in remembrance of the death of Jesus, as a visible sermon of the gospel, and in anticipation of His return.”

Whether with a church plant in the middle of an unreached people group or on one of our campuses at Mobberly, public baptism and participation in the Lord’s Supper are two ways we demonstrate our faith to our community and a means of ongoing confession and encouragement for the body of believers.

TODAY’S SCRIPTURES

Matthew 3:13-17; 26:26-30; Acts 2:41-47

THE MAIN IDEA

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the two ordinances of the church, and serve to help us remember Christ’s work on the cross for our salvation and look forward to eternity with Him.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What role have baptism and the Lord’s Supper played in your spiritual life, and why are these practices important for a body of believers?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Matthew 3:13-17 Jesus’ baptism demonstrated His humility and willingness to identify with sinners. He foreshadowed His death, burial, and resurrection, and received His Father’s blessing. Believer’s baptism is our public profession of faith, identifies us with Christ’s death, and bears witness to our new life in Christ.

Matthew 26:26-30 On the night of His arrest, Christ shared a final Passover meal with the disciples, demonstrating the atoning sacrifice He would make on the cross. He encouraged them, and us, to take the Lord’s Supper regularly to proclaim His death until He returns.

Acts 2:41-47 The early church held public baptisms and regularly participated in the Lord’s Supper. Their observation of these ordinances was a source of joy to the believers. In the same way, baptism and the Lord’s Supper are acts of obedience to Christ’s commands that result in increased faith and joy for the church.



START HERE

When we think about what makes a healthy church, we might be tempted to talk about aspects like the quality of the children's ministry or the way we welcome guests. We might consider how the church is governed, and how it stewards its financial resources. All these considerations are good, but a healthy church keeps Christ at the center of its faith and practice. Through the practices of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the church keeps Jesus at the center of its life together.

DISCUSS

How does public baptism minister to the person being baptized but also to the congregation as a whole?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. In baptism we remember how our faith story began.

Matthew 3:13-17: Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. But John tried to stop him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?" Jesus answered him, "Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John allowed him to be baptized. When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

Unpacking Matthew 3:13-17

The baptism of Jesus is so significant that it is directly or indirectly referenced in all four gospels (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34). What made it significant, and what connection does it have with believer's baptism today? We will take a deeper dive into Jesus' baptism and His command that the church should baptize all believers, and then we'll see the impact baptism had on the early church.

It is important to recognize Jesus' baptism was not the beginning of baptism. To understand the context, it is important to go back to the beginning of Matthew 3, when John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. The first four verses of this chapter reacquaint us with Jesus' first cousin, John the Baptist, who came preaching in the Judean wilderness, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 3:2). John the Baptist, as you might recall, was born to Mary's elderly cousin Elizabeth and her husband, the priest Zechariah, mere months before Jesus was born (Luke 1). John was set apart from birth as a Nazarite and consecrated for service to God (Luke 1:15). The angel who foretold of John's birth said, "he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And



he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people” (Luke 1:15-17).

When John the Baptist arrived in the Judean wilderness, he called people to a baptism of repentance of sin and in preparation for the coming Messiah: “I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out” (Matthew 3:11-12).

Pastor Timothy Keller said, “The baptism that John was doing was a radical act. When a Gentile wanted to convert to Judaism, he was baptized with water to symbolize that a spiritually unclean pagan was coming into the true people of God. But John demanded that everyone, Jews as well as Gentiles, be baptized to be ready for the Messiah. He was saying that everyone is unclean and undeserving. It was a bold public stance.”¹

John’s passionate, and sometimes eccentric, preaching exhorted his fellow Jews to turn from their sins, repent, and be baptized as an indication of their repentance. Imagine his surprise, then, when Jesus, who “did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22), arrived at the Jordan River for baptism. The prophet sought to deter Jesus, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?” (Matthew 3:14).

Because of Christ’s sinless nature, a baptism of repentance shocked and perhaps scandalized John. Jesus’ response, however, demonstrated His desire to identify with the very sinners He came to save (Matthew 3:15). While John’s disciples submitted to a water baptism to demonstrate their repentance from sin, Jesus would eventually submit to a baptism of death (Luke 12:50), to pay for the sins of the world (2 Corinthians 5:21). Today, we submit to water baptism as an external demonstration of the internal change that takes place when we come to faith in Christ. Unlike John’s baptism, Christian baptism is not an action to remove sin but a celebration of the removal of sin made possible by Jesus’ work on the cross and a symbol of our devotion to Him.

The word “baptized” in verse 16 comes from the Greek word *baptizo*. It quite literally means to “baptize” or “immerse” someone under water and is the word from which we get the name Baptists. The Greek word is similar to the word *bapto*, meaning “dipped,” but is more nuanced. Historians have discovered extra-biblical sources that use *baptizo* to mean immerse. “The clearest example that shows the meaning of baptizo is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C. It is a recipe for making pickles and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be ‘dipped’ (*baptô*) into boiling water and then ‘baptised’ (*baptizô*) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptising the vegetable, produces a permanent change.”² Sources like these give us



confidence that baptism by immersion is a consistent biblical representation of the New Testament practice.

In verses 16 and 17, the Father, Son, and Spirit were all uniquely present. The Son was obedient to the Father, the Father was well-pleased with the Son, and the Spirit came down to bear witness. Jesus' baptism both predicted His death and pointed toward His resurrection and identity in the godhead.

Considering this background and example, why are we to be baptized today? First, believers are baptized as an act of obedience to Christ's command. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus spoke the Great Commission to the apostles, saying, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Baptism, as a public profession of faith, is an act of obedience to Jesus. Immediately after Christ's ascension, on the day of Pentecost, the book of Acts records that three thousand people came to faith in one day. And what did the apostles do with this mass of converts? They baptized them (Acts 2:41).

Second, in baptism we identify with Christ's death. Believers have died to our old selves and now walk in new life in Christ. Public baptism as a conscious expression of faith is our opportunity to declare to the world that we are made new in Christ and look ahead by faith to eternity with Him.

DISCUSS

- *How did John's baptism differ from Christian baptism?*
- *Why is it appropriate and necessary that baptism is reserved for those who make a personal profession of faith in Christ?*

2. In the Lord's Supper we look forward to how our faith story will end.

Matthew 26:26-30: *26 As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take and eat it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them and said, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. But I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

Unpacking Matthew 26:26-30

Have you ever taken a child to Disney World? If so, you know the brilliant strategies they use to convince you to buy souvenirs for your kids. Disney conveniently places thematic gift shops throughout the parks and at the exits of many rides. Even if you remind your kids that they



received a glow-in-the-dark toy the day before, they will want a new souvenir the next day. Kids (and adults) on vacation can be forgetful people.

Perhaps that's why God gave us the Lord's Supper. He knows we are forgetful people, and no matter how many times we reflect on the death of Christ and His work on the cross, our hearts are prone to forget. Taking the Lord's Supper together as a family of God, regularly and reverently, is a primary way we remind one another what He has done for us and what awaits us in eternity.

The apostles did not have this insight at that first Lord's Supper. Gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem for the Passover meal, they could not have imagined Jesus would be arrested that same night and later crucified. The meal began in a most unusual manner, as Jesus took the posture of a servant and washed the disciples' feet (John 13:12-17).

Jesus' act of radical service and humility set the tone for the first Lord's Supper. As John said earlier in chapter 13, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (v. 1). As He prepared for His death, Jesus commanded the disciples to love and serve one another, and washing their feet was a practical reminder of His command. Of course, His upcoming crucifixion would be the ultimate act of love and service. Christ proceeded to prepare them for this reality through the Lord's Supper.

It is important to remember that this meal was not an ordinary dinner: It was the Passover, a holy memorial celebrated annually to remember God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. On the night God freed the Israelites, He gave them this command, "Go, select an animal from the flock according to your families, and slaughter the Passover animal. Take a cluster of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and brush the lintel and the two doorposts with some of the blood in the basin. None of you may go out the door of his house until morning" (Exodus 12:21-22).

The first Passover consisted of roasted lamb that had been sacrificed and whose blood was brushed on the doorframe of the house (Exodus 12:23). In the hours immediately after the Last Supper in our passage today, Christ Himself became the ultimate Passover Lamb. His blood was shed on a crude cross, similar to the cross-shape of smeared blood from the Passover lamb. And in His last moments, He was offered a "sponge full of sour wine on a hyssop branch" (John 19:29). While the disciples might not have perceived the symbolism of this meal in the moment, its clarity, gravity, and meaning would soon be impossible to overlook.

Pastor David Platt wrote, "Just as baptism is the ordinance that signals our entrance into the church, so the Lord's Supper signals our ongoing membership in this new covenant community. Every time we partake of the elements together, we are renewing and affirming our covenant commitment to Christ and his people."³

Jesus' purpose in the Last Supper went beyond anticipation (and for us, recollection) of the cross. The Last Supper won't really be the *last* supper, after all. We anticipate a day when we



will feast with Christ and His church, a celebration of the salvation made possible by the cross and the initiation into His kingdom that will last forever (Revelation 19:7-10).

There will come a day when we sit with all the saints who have come before us and feast together with the Lord Jesus. Our elements of bread and juice, a mere symbol of His sacrifice, will be replaced with the goodness of God and the presence of the Lamb. In this way, the Lord's Supper looks back through history to the rescue of the Israelites from slavery, and our rescue from sin and death. It also looks forward, awaiting a day by faith when a celebration feast will replace these earthly reminders of Christ with Him.

So, how should we take the Lord's Supper today? What are the guidelines that the church should use to help us remember and look ahead? Scripture guides and informs us about practicing the Lord's Supper.

First, followers of Jesus should regularly celebrate the Lord's Supper. In Acts 2:42, immediately after the three thousand new converts received baptism, the text says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." Verse 46 goes on to say, "Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house." The "breaking of bread," more than just an expression of hospitality, is a recognition of the importance of the Lord's Supper. These new believers, who had *just* experienced baptism, were immediately gathered into a family of faith who regularly remembered the work of Christ. When we take the Lord's Supper regularly, it is an opportunity for those new to faith and those who have walked with Jesus for many years to remember Christ's sacrifice and anticipate the promise of heaven together.

Second, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated joyfully. Acts 2:46-47 says, "They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." We should not view participation in the Lord's Supper as an add-on to worship, an extension of the service, or a delay in getting to lunch on time. When we gather around the table together, it is a joyful celebration of our salvation and is a witness to others who have yet to come to faith.

Finally, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated reverently. In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, the apostle Paul gave instructions to the church regarding the Lord's Supper. First, he emphasized equality that should exist among believers. He rebuked those who would arrive early, take an unfair portion of the meal, or eat before the poorer laborers among their congregation could gather. In creating division rather than unity, Paul said the meal they ate bore no resemblance to the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20-22).

Furthermore, Paul instructed the people to enter a time of self-reflection before participating in the elements (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). Just as Jesus instructed in Matthew 5:23-24, before we can worship God sincerely, our first offering is a clean conscience before God and our brothers and sisters in Christ. Forgiveness and reconciliation, as much as it depends on us (Romans 12:18), are the reverent postures in which we should approach the Lord's Table.



DISCUSS

- *How does the Lord's Supper connect back to the first Passover? Why is there no lamb in our practice of the Lord's Supper today?*
- *Have you considered the Lord's Supper as both looking back and looking forward? How does that inform the way we should approach this time?*
- *How can we celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly, joyfully, and reverently? Which is most challenging for you?*

3. Baptism and the Lord's Supper help us remember and anticipate Christ's promises together.

Acts 2:41-47: So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Unpacking Acts 2:41-47

This passage reminds us that baptism and the Lord's Supper are meant to be shared in community. Baptism, our first public profession of faith, is an opportunity to give witness to what Christ has done in our lives. Baptism puts our testimony on a lampstand so the world can see Christ's love (Matthew 5:15). Baptism is also a way to encourage other believers. Imagine the apostles' delight and encouragement on the day of Pentecost when three thousand people gave their lives to Christ and were baptized.

Baptism is an opportunity for the whole church to celebrate what God has done in that person's life and to reflect on what He has done in each of ours. In Acts 10, Peter shared the gospel with Cornelius, a Gentile centurion in Caesarea. As a result, the man and his entire household believed the gospel, received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized, shifting the believers' understanding of salvation from only good news for the Jews to good news for the whole world. When Peter reported the Gentiles' salvation and baptism to the apostles, sharing how they too had received the Holy Spirit, "they glorified God, saying, 'So then, God has given repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles'" (Acts 11:18). Baptism celebrates the salvation of the individual and strengthens the faith of the church.

Similarly, the Lord's Supper is meant to be shared in community with other believers, and the early church observed it regularly. Acts 2 tells us that when God's people broke bread together



regularly, the result was a community of believers, bathed in grace, and marked by their generosity, joyfulness, sincerity of heart, and worship (vv. 45-47).

When we, as a body of believers, partake in these two ordinances, we participate in a rich history of public witness and celebration that dates back to the earliest days of the church. These ordinances are not add-ons to worship but are the very heart of the gospel expressed publicly. How we enter these times of worship impacts our hearts, other believers, and gives witness to the world of the saving grace of Jesus and the promise of eternal life.

DISCUSS

- *Why is it important that we continue these two ordinances as a church today?*
- *How does today's lesson challenge the way you think about or participate in baptism and the Lord's Supper?*

GOSPEL FOCUS

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of the church for those who have put their faith in Christ. In baptism, we identify with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We declare that we died to our old life and have new life in Christ. In the Lord's Supper, we remember Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross and look forward to the promise of heaven. If you have never made a personal decision to follow Jesus, why not do that today? If you have accepted Christ, but you've held off on baptism, what's holding you back? Your public profession of faith might be what helps someone else follow Jesus.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *The early church experienced explosive growth. How do you think public baptism and regularly taking the Lord's Supper had a positive impact on people coming to Christ?*
- *Can you think of a time that seeing someone else being baptized or taking the Lord's Supper helped you connect with Christ in a meaningful way?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

When you see baptism and the Lord's Supper on the order of worship, what do you think? How does thinking of these ordinances as something we participate in together rather than something we merely observe help us and encourage others?



APPLY

Thinking about today's study, is there something in your attitude about baptism or the Lord's Supper that needs to change or an action that you need to take?

¹ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Change in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015),

² *Blue Letter Bible*, "Strong's G907 – baptizō," accessed March 27, 2025, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g907/csb/mgnt/0-1/>.

³ David Platt, "What Is the Lord's Supper?," *Radical*, June 17, 2024, <https://radical.net/article/what-is-lords-supper/>.