

Victory

Well again, good to see you guys today. All I want to in the next few minutes is simply set up what we're all about to see. In many ways, I'm not even preaching a sermon today—I'm just setting up *three* "sermons" that three *other* people will give (and don't worry—their sermons will be a lot shorter than mine usually are. I could see the sheer terror in some of your eyes when I said that).

And here's how their sermons will happen. If you haven't already noticed, there is a large metal trough—also known as a *baptisma*—up here at the front, filled with water. Here in just a bit, we're gonna have three different people from our church share their *story* via video, and then get in said trough. They will then have someone else dunk them *under* the water, and come back up, *out of* the water. Now, let me first say that it's not lost on me that if you are new to church, that is quite possibly one of the strangest things you have ever seen in your life. Like, *cult-level* strange. Without context, it's going to seem to you like these people are being temporarily drowned on purpose. I promise that's not what's happening. Allow me to explain what *is* happening.

What you're about to see is something church people call *baptism*. Baptism is mentioned a lot of different places in the bible, but one of the main places is in Romans 6. Take a look on the screen with me at this verse:

*[4] We [and by "we," it means "followers of Jesus"] were therefore **buried with him through baptism into death** in order that, **just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.***

So according to this verse, baptism is a symbolic way of communicating something very important that God has done in each of these people's lives. It's a symbol So think about another symbol a lot of people participate in—a *wedding ring*. I wear this wedding ring as a way of communicating something very important about me: that I'm married. And the ring itself really has nothing to do with the fact that I'm married, except that once upon a time, someone decided that *this* was a good way to communicate and symbolize *that*. Make sense?

Well in a similar way, Romans 6 just said that something about these people going down under the water and coming back up, symbolically communicates something important about *them*—something far more important than marriage. Each one of these people you're about to see and hear from—**at one point, they were spiritually dead**. Now, that may have looked a number of different ways on the surface:

- For *some* people, being spiritually dead means living in outright *hostility* to God. Maybe it looks like openly admitting "I could care less about God and I want nothing to do with him." Maybe it means you actively *resist* God and everything that he's about. Maybe you're *here* today, and that's where you're at. That's one form of spiritual *deadness*.
- For others, being spiritually dead means just being disinterested in God. So it's not so much that you're openly *hostile* to God, as much as you just don't really see the value in what God is all about. Or maybe you would even say that you're a Christian, but by that you just mean you made a decision at one point in your life and beyond that, not much of your life looks very different than it did before. According to the bible, that's actually another form of spiritual *deadness*.

- For other people still—and this one is by far the most popular here in the South—being spiritually dead looks like doing all the *right* things, being a religious *person*, but thinking that doing those religious *things* is what somehow makes God like you more. And Jesus is going to make the point over and over again in the bible is that people who think about their relationship with God in that way are actually spiritually dead and don't *realize* that they're spiritually dead.

So it can look a number of different ways on the surface. But **one way or another, at one point, we are all spiritually dead.** Every single person in this room. But **what you're about to see and hear in the stories of these people getting in the tub is that their story did not end there.** That what God did was that he came to them in any of their various spiritually dead states, and made them *alive*. What they are about to tell you is that the person they are *now*, is an altogether different person than they were *before*. That, in the words of Romans 6, "*just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father,*" they have been given a new life. What these people are about to put on display is that God did something to make them *not* spiritually dead, but rather *alive*.

And the thing that he did was Jesus' death and resurrection. If you're a part of City Church, you know that we've been in this series called *It is Finished*. When Jesus died on the cross, he cried out the words "it is finished" before he died. And for the past four weeks or so, we've been discovering just what all that statement meant. One thing it meant is that we were enslaved to the power of sin, and Jesus brought us out. Another thing it means is that we were guilty because of our sin, and Jesus declared us righteous. Another thing it means is that we deserved wrath because of our sin and Jesus showed us mercy. And today, what we celebrate is that **death was imminent because of our sin, and Jesus gave us victory.**

One of the most beautiful things about the cross is that the cross was not the end of the story. Three days after Jesus died and was buried, his disciples arrived at his place of burial only to discover that *he was no longer there*. To discover that death could not contain Jesus, but that he had risen from the grave. And what Romans 6 tells us is that in much the same way as Jesus was raised to life, you and I can be raised to life too. That you and I can be rescued out of our spiritual deadness and be made alive.

So when each of these people go under the water and come back up, they aren't *physically* dying. But they *are* communicating that the *old version* of them has died. That that version of them has been crucified and put to death, and that the version of them now living is the one that has been given new life through Jesus. And that right there is what baptism is all about. That's what *Jesus* is all about.

So because all of that, here's what *the rest of us* are going to do. The *second* that each of these three people come up out of the water, we are going to *lose our minds*. We are not going to smile and nod, we are not even going to do a golf clap. We are going to clap and yell and holler as loudly and as aggressively and as obnoxiously as we know how. The bible in Luke 15 tells us that **when even one person goes from death to life in Jesus, heaven throws a party.** So we just figured, heaven shouldn't be the *only* party happening today. We're going to throw one too.

Because what we are celebrating is that God, in his grace, has changed the very trajectory of that person's *life*—both *this* life, and the one to come. What we are celebrating is that that person has been given a new life and that they are not who they once were. So *all that to say*, if you don't plan on clapping loudly when each person comes out of the water, you're going to want to use those hands you're not

clapping with to cover your ears. Because it's about to get a tad rowdy in here for the next little bit. Are you guys cool with that?

Alright, let's do this thing. Let's take a look at the first video.