Most of you know that I grew up in eastern Kentucky. Because of that, I started playing basketball about the time I was able to walk. And I went to my first basketball camp when I was five years old. And on the first day, the coaches started with the basics. Passing, dribbling, dribbling with your head up, dribbling in and shooting a right-handed layup… that sort of stuff. I went home that day and practiced all afternoon. By supper time, I felt like I had it pretty much down pat. I could pass the ball off the garage wall and make it come back to me every time. I could dribble for as long as I wanted without looking down. I could make a right-handed layup. I thought, “This is great. I’ve got it all covered. I’ll go in tomorrow, and I’ll know everything I need to know.”

 So I got up the next morning and went to camp, ready to show how good I had gotten with passing and dribbling and right-handed layups, and the first thing the coach said was, “Okay, today we’re going to learn to use our left hands.” And in that moment, I realized there was so much more for me to learn. I hadn’t even come close to covering it all.

 Well, I had a very similar feeling as we came to the end of our *DNA* series. We’ve spent a lot of time studying the characteristics that should make up our DNA as followers of Jesus. We’ve seen that we should be learners, pray-ers, worshippers, givers, relaters, servers, and reproducers. And as we studied these characteristics all over the Bible, we kept coming back to Acts chapter 2. And if you’re like me, you may feel like we’ve covered everything we can possibly cover in Acts 2. But I was looking over this text several weeks ago, and I realized there’s a very important aspect of it that we haven’t covered at all. We haven’t talked about the two ordinances that Jesus gave His church. And we would be leaving out something very important if we ended a series on what the church is supposed to look like without covering the biblical teaching about the ordinances.

 Now, the word ordinance may be a word that you’re not familiar with. It simply means something that has been ordained or ordered. So when I talk about the two ordinances of the church, I’m talking about the two ceremonies that Jesus ordered His church to observe: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And both of these ordinances are mentioned in Acts 2:41-42. Acts 2:41 says, *“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”* And then verse 42 says, *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.”* We’ll talk more about this next week, but in that verse the phrase “the breaking of bread” refers to the Lord’s Supper.

So in the very first days of the church, we see the church following Jesus’ command to observe the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And since Jesus gave these two ordinances to the church, I don’t want us to end our series on what the church should look like without studying what the Bible teaches about the ordinances. So this week we’re going to look at what the Bible teaches about baptism. And next week we’ll look at what the Bible teaches about the Lord’s Supper.

And right off the bat, there’s something really important to say about our study of baptism. Our beliefs about baptism should not be based on the teaching of any church or denomination. Our beliefs about baptism should be based on the teaching of the Bible alone. I hope you know that is always the case. Scripture alone is the authority for our beliefs and practices. So our focus today is not on a Southern Baptist view of baptism, or any other group’s view of baptism. Our focus is on the biblical view of baptism. And then as a Southern Baptist church, we want to make sure our view of baptism lines up with the biblical teaching.

So as we look at the biblical teaching about baptism, we’re going to try to answer three main questions: How do we baptize? Who do we baptize? Why do we baptize?

First for how. How do we baptize? We baptize by immersion. For your sermon notes, that’s i-m-m-e-r-s-i-o-n. Immersion. What that means is that we baptize by putting someone under water and bringing them up again. We immerse them. The other method of baptism that is used in some churches is sprinkling. But there are three really strong reasons why immersion reflects the biblical teaching about baptism better than sprinkling. First, that’s what the word baptize actually means. The word baptize comes directly from the Greek word *baptizo*. And the literal meaning of *baptizo* is to plunge, dip, or immerse. So every time you see the word baptize in the Bible, the literal translation of that word is immerse. So we baptize by immersion because the word means to immerse.

Second, the examples of baptism that are reported in the New Testament imply immersion. For instance, when Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist, they go down into the Jordan River, and Mark 1:10 says, *“As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.”*  The description that Jesus was coming up out of the water suggests that he was immersed in the water, not just sprinkled on the bank. We see something similar in Acts chapter 8 when Philip baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip shares the gospel with the eunuch while they’re riding in a chariot together, and Acts 8:36 says, *“As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away.”* Make sure you notice that it was only when they came to a body of water that the eunuch asked to be baptized. He didn’t ask Philip to sprinkle him with a water jug from the chariot. Also, notice that they go down into the water and come up out of the water. Everything about the description suggests baptism by immersion. So a second reason why we baptize by immersion is because the examples of baptism in the Bible imply immersion.

The third reason we baptize by immersion is because the biblical teaching about the significance of baptism requires immersion. In Romans 6:3-4, Paul teaches that baptism is a symbolic picture that represents a spiritual truth, and he says, *“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We 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.”* Paul says baptism represents the truth that we’ve been buried with Christ and raised to live a new life. But you only get that picture with immersion. You’re plunged under the water as a symbol of your burial with Christ, and you’re raised up out of the water as a symbol of your new, resurrected life with Christ. So the biblical teaching about the significance of baptism requires immersion.

So the reason we baptize by immersion is because the biblical word means to immerse, the biblical examples imply immersion, and the biblical meaning requires immersion. That’s how we baptize biblically: by immersion.

The second question is who. Who do we baptize? The Bible teaches that only those who have personally professed faith in Jesus are to be baptized. We often call this believer’s baptism, meaning that once you become a believer, then you’re baptized. Believer’s baptism stands in contrast to infant baptism, which is the practice of baptizing babies who are born into the church, even before they personally trust Jesus. And there are two very strong reasons why believer’s baptism reflects the biblical teaching better than infant baptism. First, when we look at the examples of baptism in the Bible, the Bible teaches that it’s believers who are being baptized. For instance, think about our text in Acts 2. Acts 2:41 says, *“Those who accepted his message were baptized.”* Who was baptized? Those who accepted Peter’s message. In other words, those who believed the gospel and trusted Jesus were baptized. The believers were baptized. We see the same thing in Acts 8:12, *“When they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized.”* When were they baptized? When they believed the gospel of Jesus that was being preached. The believers were baptized.

The second reason why baptism is for those who personally believe in Jesus is found in the meaning of baptism. We’ve already seen in Romans 6 that baptism is a symbolic picture that you’ve been buried with Christ and raised to live a new life with Christ. Well, that happens by faith in Jesus. You’re crucified with Christ and the life you now live you live *by faith* in the Son of God. So it’s only those who have put their faith in Jesus… those who are believing in Jesus… who should be baptized, because baptism represents something that only happens when you believe. It’s only when you believe that you’re buried with Christ and raised with Christ. We see something very similar in Matthew 28 when Jesus first commands the ordinance of baptism. Jesus says, *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* According to Jesus, baptism is for the people who are becoming His disciples. In other words, baptism is for the people who are following Jesus and trusting Jesus and believing Jesus. Baptism is for believers.

So the reason we only baptize people after they’ve professed faith in Jesus is because the biblical examples of baptism are examples of believers being baptized, and the biblical meaning of baptism only applies to believers. That’s who we baptize biblically: We baptize believers.

The third question is why. Why do we baptize? And there’s so much confusion about this third question that it’s important to start by making clear one reason that is absolutely *not* why we baptize. We do not baptize for salvation. It is completely unbiblical, and it is completely counter to the gospel of Jesus, to teach that baptism saves you. Baptism does not save you. Jesus saves you. You are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone. There is nothing you *can* add to the work of Jesus. And there is nothing you *need* to add to the work of Jesus. Baptism is not for salvation. And there is so much confusion about this in our world that I want to take just a minute to show you that the Bible clearly teaches that baptism does not save you.

A great place to see that baptism does not save you is in Ephesians 2:8-9. Paul says, *“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”* As clearly as possible, Paul says you are saved by grace through faith. Salvation is the gracious gift of God, which means you don’t do anything to earn it, including being baptized. You simply receive it by faith. Paul explains this even more when he says that your salvation is not by works. There is no good work that you can do, including baptism, that will save you. God’s grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone saves you. Paul teaches the same thing in 2 Timothy 1:9 when he writes, *“(God) saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”* God saved you not because of anything you have done, including baptism, but because of His grace. We see the exact same thing again in Titus 3:4-5, *“When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy…”* God saved you not because of any righteous thing that you have ever done, including baptism, but because of His mercy. And then listen to the very next thing Paul says as he explains our salvation. He says, *“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”* Not through the washing of water baptism, but through the washing of the Holy Spirit. Water baptism is a symbolic representation of the spiritual reality. It does not save you. It is a visible picture of what God does spiritually when He saves you by His grace.

So the Bible clearly teaches that salvation is by grace alone and not by any work, including baptism. But there are still some verses in the New Testament that a lot of people refer to when they claim that you have to be baptized to be saved. So I want to look at a few of the most common ones very quickly.

Some people claim that 1 Peter 3:20-21 teaches that baptism saves you. In those verses, Peter says that when Noah built the ark *“only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also…”* And if you stopped right there, you might think the point Peter is making is that the water of baptism saves you. But you have to read the entire sentence, because the very next thing Peter says is, *“not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* Do you hear what Peter is emphasizing there? He specifically says it’s not the physical act of water cleaning your body that saves you. It’s the spiritual act of faith in Jesus as you trust God to cleanse your conscience through the resurrection of Jesus that saves you. So these verses do not teach that baptism saves you. These verses teach that God saves you through faith in Jesus.

Another verse that is often mentioned is Mark 16:16. The first half of that verse says, “*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved…”* And again, if you stopped there, you might think you have to be baptized to be saved. But the rest of the verse explains, *“But whoever does not believe will be condemned.”* You’re not condemned for a failure to be baptized. You’re condemned for a failure to believe.

Now, the first half of the verse does remind us of an important truth: True faith always produces works. If you truly believe Jesus, then you will obey Jesus and do what He says, because you trust Him. And since Jesus commanded us to be baptized, if you truly trust Jesus, you will be baptized… not to be saved, but out of faithful obedience to Jesus. So your baptism doesn’t save you. Your faith in Jesus saves you. And that fits perfectly with the second half of the verse, because it shows that your lack of baptism isn’t what would condemn you. Your lack of faith is what would condemn you.

And I hope this reminds you of why it’s so dangerous to rip Scripture out of its context. If you rip a small piece of Scripture out of its context and don’t allow the rest of the Bible to help you understand that small piece, you may end up interpreting it in exactly the opposite way of what it means.

One last example before we move on. Some people claim that Acts 2:38 teaches that baptism saves you. In that verse, Peter is preaching and he says, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* Some people say, “See, you have to repent *and* be baptized in order to be forgiven and to receive the Holy Spirit.” But turn over a few chapters to Acts chapter 10 and you’ll see very clearly that that’s not what Peter means. In Acts 10, Peter has gone to the home a Gentile (a non-Jew) named Cornelius, and he’s preaching the gospel in Cornelius’ home. Starting in Acts 10:43, Peter says, *“All the prophets testify about (Jesus) that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”* Already, notice that Peter only mentions belief in Jesus, and not baptism, as what’s necessary for forgiveness. Now, let’s keep reading in verse 44, *“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.”* And then skip down to verse 47. Then Peter said, *“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.”* This is really, really important: These people received the Holy Spirit *before* they were baptized, and we know from Ephesians 1:13 that the Holy Spirit is a seal or a deposit that guarantees our salvation. We also know from Galatians 3 that you receive the Holy Spirit by faith. So these people heard the truth about Jesus, believed that truth, received the Spirit by faith, and were saved… all before they were baptized! In fact, Peter says the reason they should be baptized is because they’ve already received the Holy Spirit. They’ve already been saved. They don’t get baptized in order to be saved and get the Holy Spirit. They get baptized because they are saved and they have the Holy Spirit.

So when we go back to Acts 2:38 and Peter says, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,”* we understand that what he means is that you need to repent in order to be forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit, and if you truly repent as an expression of faith, then you will be baptized. We know that’s the right interpretation, because Acts 10 makes it clear that you are saved as soon as you repent in faith, not when you’re baptized.

So everywhere you look, the Bible teaches that you’re not saved by baptism. You’re saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone. And now we’re ready to answer our third question, “Why do we baptize?” If we don’t baptize in order to be saved, why do we baptize?

Let’s look at five biblical reasons why you should be baptized. First, baptism is obedience to Jesus. We already saw in Matthew 28:19 that Jesus says, *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* Jesus commands His followers to be baptized. And if you truly trust Jesus, you’re going to do what He says. You’re going to obey Him. And what’s so great about baptism is that it’s the very first opportunity you have to obey Jesus as Lord after you’ve trusted Him and been saved. Baptism is the first chance to practically express your faith by obeying Jesus. So baptism is obedience to Jesus.

Second, baptism is following Jesus’ example. In Matthew 3:13-15, Matthew tells us, *“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then John consented.”* Jesus Himself was baptized, and if we’re going to follow Jesus, one of the ways we follow Jesus is by following His example of baptism. It’s also worth pointing out that Jesus clearly was not baptized in order to be saved. Jesus didn’t need to be saved. He was sinless and perfect. So the example Jesus set is that baptism is not for salvation. Baptism is an act of righteousness that comes after we’ve been saved by Jesus. And in our baptism we follow Jesus’ example.

Third, baptism is public identification with Jesus. In Matthew 10:32-33 Jesus says, *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”* Now, Jesus is actually talking about a lot more than just baptism in these verses. He’s talking about whether or not we will stand up and be identified as followers of Jesus even in the face of rejection and persecution. But baptism is the first opportunity you have to publicly demonstrate that you trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Baptism is a public declaration of your faith. When you’re baptized, you’re making a public statement that your allegiance is to Jesus and you’re following Him now. So baptism is public identification with Jesus.

Fourth, baptism is symbolic of our spiritual death and new life in Jesus. We saw this earlier in Romans 6:3-4 when Paul wrote, *“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We 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.”* Baptism is an external, physical expression of the internal, spiritual reality that has already taken place by faith. We have died to our sin. We have died to ourselves. We have died to our selfish desires. By faith all of that was crucified with Christ on the cross, and it was buried with Him. And now, by faith, Christ has come to live in us, and because He was resurrected, we have been raised to live a new life in Him. And baptism is a picture, a symbol, a metaphor, an illustration of that truth.

And that brings us to the fifth reason why baptism is so important. Baptism declares the gospel of Jesus. Baptism puts the gospel on display for people. Every time someone is baptized, that act represents the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And it declares that the only way for you to be washed and cleansed and forgiven before God is through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Baptism declares the gospel of Jesus.

So I hope you see just how important baptism is. Baptism is obedience to Jesus. Baptism is following Jesus’ example. Baptism is public identification with Jesus. Baptism is symbolic of our spiritual death and new life in Jesus. And baptism declares the gospel of Jesus. And what I really want you to notice is that every one of those truths teaches us that baptism is about Jesus. It’s all about Jesus’ command, Jesus’ example, being identified as Jesus’ followers, Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus’ gospel. Baptism is all about Jesus. And that’s why baptism is so important. Jesus has given baptism to the church as one of the two great ceremonies that remind us of His gospel and His grace and His great work on the cross. And Jesus calls all of His followers to be baptized as a sign and as a declaration that we truly trust Him and are following Him.

So in order to honor Jesus and His gospel, it is absolutely crucial that we declare the truth about baptism. First, that baptism is not necessary for salvation. We honor Jesus with the truth that only faith in Jesus is necessary for salvation. And then, at the same time, in order to honor Jesus and His gospel, we also declare the truth that baptism is extremely important, because Jesus made it important. Jesus calls all of His followers to be baptized. So baptism is not necessary in order to be saved, but it is commanded for those who are saved. And we want to honor Jesus by obeying His command and declaring His gospel through biblical baptism.

And some of you need to do that right now. You’ve heard the biblical teaching about baptism, and you need to be biblically baptized today. So here’s what we’re going to do: We’re going to give you the opportunity to do that. We’re doing things a little differently today. When I first started working on this sermon and talking to our pastors about it, I kept thinking about the Ethiopian eunuch saying to Philip, “There’s some water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” And I felt led that we should take that approach today. You’ve heard the gospel. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life. He died a sacrificial death for your sins. And He was raised by the power of the Holy Spirit. And if you put your faith in Jesus and trust Him to forgive you and save you, by God’s grace, He will make you right with God and change your life forever. That’s the gospel. And if you believe the gospel, we’ve got water in the baptistery. Why shouldn’t you be baptized? Obey Jesus. Honor Jesus. And just in case you’re already coming up with an excuse like, “I don’t have the clothes,” or, “My hair will get messed up,” we already thought of that. We’ve got baptismal robes and t-shirts and shorts that you can wear. We’ve got towels and blow dryers. We’re going to record your baptism, so you can have a DVD. No excuses today. We’re ready for you to come and be baptized.

And a few weeks ago, one of our church members set an awesome example for you. David Angotta is one of our residents at Rutland Place. And last year during our series in Galatians, God opened David’s eyes to the truth of the gospel, and David believed and was saved. And David has several health conditions that he’s been struggling with. He’s confined to a wheel chair, and his health conditions prevent him from being submerged under water. But after David came to faith in Jesus, he had a strong desire to obey Jesus in baptism. So we began to talk about how we could baptize David since he can’t get into the baptistery or even into a tub. We came up with a solution, and a few weeks ago at Rutland, I had the privilege of baptizing David. And I want to share with you this morning the video of David’s baptism.

In a wheel chair. Struggling with health issues. But a desire to obey Jesus and be baptized. I want to challenge you: What’s your excuse? Do you believe the gospel? Are you trusting Jesus alone as your Lord and Savior? Then come honor Him in the obedience of baptism today.

So we’re going to have an invitation in just a minute where you can come and talk to one of our pastors if you need to be baptized. Maybe you need to trust Jesus and respond to His gospel for the first time today. You can start following Jesus by following Him in believer’s baptism. Maybe you’ve been trusting Jesus for a while, but you’ve never obeyed Him in baptism. Today’s the day to get that right. Maybe you’ve been baptized but not in a way that matched the biblical teaching as well as it could have. Maybe you were sprinkled or maybe you were baptized before you had really come to faith in Jesus. Maybe you just did it because your friends were doing it. I want you to have the opportunity for your baptism to follow what the Bible teaches about baptism: believer’s baptism (after faith in Jesus) by immersion.

Whatever your situation, if you’ve never been biblically baptized, now is the time. Our pastors and decision counselors will be here to receive you, and you can step outside the worship center for a few minutes to talk privately about your decision. We want to make sure that you’re believing the true gospel and that you have a biblical view of baptism. And while you’re doing that, there’s no rush, because we’re going spend some more time worshipping together in here… 15, 20, 30 minutes, however long we need, depending on how many of you respond. And then our pastors are going to baptize everyone who’s ready to be baptized today. We already have several people scheduled to be baptized. We’ve got time for as many as will come. So I’m going to pray for us, and then if God is working in your heart through the truth of His Word… if you need to come and obey Jesus in believer’s baptism, today is the day for you to do that.