

Born in a River - Lesson 13 of 21 - Landmarks of Prophecy

Tonight's study is really a very important one. And, in some ways, we're going to be departing a little bit from a purely prophetic theme, but it is something that the prophets talked about quite a bit. The lesson title tonight is 'Born In a River.' And as we often do, we begin with a story from the Bible. Now this story is based on something that happens in the second book of Kings.

Some of you have heard about an individual by the name of Naaman. Naaman, the Bible tells us, was a mighty general. He was a courageous man. He was a man that had been used of the Lord. And everything sounds really good about Naaman until you get to the part where it says, 'but' - last five words - 'but he was a leper.' He had everything going for him. He was a successful man. He had achieved a lot. He was wealthy, famous, brave, respected - but then he came down with the worst disease you could have in biblical times - no cure, nothing to arrest its growth and it just represented being unclean and separated from the ones you love - a deadly, contagious disease. And throughout the Bible, leprosy is compared to sin. And Naaman could no longer embrace his family. When he was going down the streets of Damascus, people would avoid him now. And it really caused a terrible stigma. And what good is it if you're strong and you're brave and you're wealthy and you're famous and you're dying? What profit is it if you gain the whole world and you lose your soul? But he was a leper. No matter what you might achieve in this life, you'll never have lasting happiness as long as you have the disease of sin because it is a deadly disease. It slowly eats away at your life.

Well, while Naaman was waiting for the inevitable, the Bible tells us that he had a little maid, a young girl, that served in his family as a servant. She had been captured during one of the raids where the Syrians went down into the northern country of Israel and they used to raid the farms and they'd carry off people and sell them into slavery, kind of like Joseph was sold by his brothers. But this young girl, instead of being bitter, she figured, 'Well, if God could use Joseph where he was, maybe God can use me here. And when she found out her master came down with this terrible, terminal disease, she told her mistress, 'If my master Naaman was only with the prophet Elisha, he would heal him of his leprosy.' Elisha was that great Old Testament prophet that had a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

Matter of fact, everybody that ever came to Elisha in the Bible, he answered their prayers and worked a miracle for them. He was something like Jesus. The name's even similar. Jesus' name is 'Yeshua' - it means 'Jehovah is Savior.' Elisha's name is 'Elohim is Savior.' So when you're dying, you're sort of desperate. And when this girl said, with such confidence, 'Oh, the prophet in Israel, he would heal you.' He was ready to try anything. And so, Naaman, he got permission from the King of Syria to go down to Israel. He took a king's ransom with him - millions of dollars by today's standards - to pay for his healing - something like our medical bills today, right? And he comes to the prophet Elisha, but Elisha doesn't even come out to him. Elisha sends out Gehazi, his servant, who gives him the message, "Go" - this is 2 Kings 5, verse 10, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean." His leprosy had advanced so far that he may have even lost some of his digits. It says not only will that return, but you will be cleansed from the disease.

Well, when Naaman heard that, first of all, he was a little insulted. He first went to the king and the king said, 'I can't help you.' And he eventually went to Elisha and Elisha didn't come out but he sends a servant. And he's a general. He's used to dealing with people that have prominence and prestige and then what - how do you interpret it when someone says to you, 'You need to go wash?' What's implied when someone says, 'You need to go bathe?' If someone says you need to go bathe seven times, what does that imply? But there's more. Have you ever seen the Jordan River? It's almost never clear. It is, quite literally, the lowest river in the world. There's no river that runs lower than where the Jordan River runs into the Dead Sea. And it sort of catches all of the washings that come off the hills of Judea and it's usually kind of brown or green.

And so, when someone tells you to wash, and they tell you to wash seven times, and they tell you to wash seven times in a dirty river - any of you ever, years ago, when your kids took a bath and you've got several kids - they all kind of shared one bath? Any of you ever have to go last? It was me. I don't know why. They always said - nobody wanted to go after me. But it implies then that you're dirty and that offended Naaman. And it says that he turned and he went away in a rage and he said within himself, are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus cleaner than all the waters of Israel? I could have stayed home and washed in those rivers? And I thought he'd at least come out to me and wave his hand over the place and heal the leper.'

And so he's insulted. His pride was offended. And so he began to storm home with his entourage guarding all the treasure - his chariots and - but on the way home, he realized he was going home to die, and God's good, he had to ride by the Jordan River to go home. And as he was going by the Jordan River, his servants came up to him and they said to him, 'Master, if the prophet had told you to do something extraordinary like go kill a hundred Philistines, you would have done it. But he just said wash in the river. Why don't you do it?' Finally he humbled himself and thought, 'What have I got to lose? I'm going home to die.' And he stopped, he got off his horse, and he went down to the edge of the river and he took off his armor. You see, the Lord had given several messages to Naaman. He gave a message through this little girl servant. He gave a message through the servant of Elisha. Now he gives a message through his own servants - his guards. And he thought his problem was leprosy. His problem was pride. That's most of our problem. That's where the devil fell. God was waiting for him to humble himself.

And he finally took off his armor and all his medals and laid it at the river and he went down as he was and he dipped himself there in the muddy waters of the Jordan. He came up and he still had leprosy. He looked at his soldiers and said, 'This is a waste of time. How humiliating.' And they said, 'Master, the prophet said seven times. Don't stop. You're almost there.' So he dipped himself two times and three times. He came up - leprosy was stinging now - it's as bad as ever and he thought, 'What's this? What am i...?' They said, 'Seven times.' He goes down four times, five times, six times. And every time he went down he thought it was washing away his leprosy. It was washing away his pride.

Finally, after the seventh time, he went down, he came back up again and the Bible says, 'His flesh was restored to him again and he was clean.' Not only was he healed, do you think he was happy? The Bible says his flesh came back like the flesh of a little child. Isn't that something? A soldier - picture that - a big soldier general with baby skin. He got out of the water and his soldiers - 'Well, wonderful sir. Can we feel your cheek? You look so new and vital.' But that's what God does for us. He washes away our leprosy and we become like little children.

A Christian is a soldier with baby skin. Now don't miss the very important point here: do numbers matter to God? Was he cleansed the third time or the fourth time when God said the seventh time? When God says, 'I've blessed the seventh day.' do you think it matters to the Lord what day? God means what He says. He has a blessing for us when we obey and do what He says.

Now, the message today - the Jordan River really was a type of a cleansing from sin. It's later where Jesus is baptized and John the Baptist begins his ministry. Now, during the bulk of our prophecy studies together, we're dealing with different Bible truths. But all of those truths are of no value to you if you have not made a commitment to Jesus. And the presentation tonight - because this weekend we are getting into some of the strongest Bible subjects. You heard the announcement, we're going to be talking about who is the antichrist, bowing to Babylon, the mark of the beast. These are some very heavy things - very serious truths.

The most fearful curses you find in the Bible are in Revelation chapters 13 and 14, where it talks about those that receive the mark of the beast. And, in order for you to spiritually appreciate these things, I think it's important for you, in your own mind, to say, 'Have I humbled myself? Have I surrendered to the Lord? Am I wanting to be washed?' So our study is about how to receive that washing that God talks

about and being a new creature. It's related to baptism. Naaman was really like your first Old Testament baptism.

Question #1: What New Testament prophet washed people in the Jordan River? You can read the answer in Matthew chapter 3, verses 1, 5 and 6 and the answer will be on your screen. You're, of course, welcome to say them with me and you can fill them out in your lessons. "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea. ..." He was the forerunner who went before Christ to prepare the way. It says, 'then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan.' By the thousands people came swarming out of the cities to this remote spot down by the river to hear this primitive preacher out there in the wilds among the cathedrals of the canyons, saying, 'Prepare the way of the Lord. The Kingdom of heaven is at hand. The Messiah is coming.' Speaking of the first coming. And to show that they were preparing for Jesus' first coming, they were to humble themselves, repent of their sins and baptism was, basically, the commitment, the ceremony that really sealed the deal. They said, 'I am seeking after God and making a decision to live a new life.' So that was symbolic of that washing.

Question #2: What glorious Bible ceremony symbolizes the 'washing away' of the leprosy of sin? You find the answer in Acts 22, verse 16. They said to Paul - Ananias said to Paul, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." So baptism is very clearly a symbol of what we do that recognizes our sins being washed away. Now, typically, when they were baptized, they came down to the river. You didn't have to have a river, but you did need to have enough water where a person was immersed. It represented a new birth. It represented a resurrection. It represented a marriage. It just meant a new beginning.

And I don't know about you, but have you ever wished you could start over? I just remembered prophecy - Isaiah the prophet, when he begins his prophecy - there's very few Old Testament prophets that have more prophecy than Isaiah. You know how he begins in chapter 1? As he's getting ready to introduce some heavy prophecy, he says, in Isaiah 1, verse 16, "Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean." - What does he mean by that? - Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good.' - That's what we're doing here, we're learning. - "Seek justice. Rebuke the oppressor. Defend the fatherless. Plead for the widow. 'Come now, let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet,'" - you ever feel that way? - "They can be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they can be like wool. If you're willing and obedient you will eat the good of the land, but if you refuse and rebel, you'll be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken it."

So this was a message of even all of the apocalyptic prophets in the Bible. Humble yourself. Surrender to the Lord. Get a new beginning. Be washed. And then he introduces these heavy prophecies. It's also that way in Revelation. It talks about how to be cleansed in the messages to the churches.

Question #3: According to the Bible, how many different kinds of baptism are acceptable? We're going to let the Bible give us the answers to this. Ephesians 4, verse 5 - you can say it with me. "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism." And not only is there one Lord and one truth we are baptized into, there is only one biblical method of baptism that you see as you read from cover to cover in the Bible. Matter of fact, the word 'baptize' itself comes from the Greek word, 'baptizo' and that means for something to be plunged, immersed, dipped. In the ancient literature, when they would dye cloth - in the ancient Greek, whenever they would dye they said you would 'baptizo the cloth in the dye.' Otherwise, if you sprinkled, you'd get polka dots. But they would plunge it. They would immerse it. It would soak into all the fibers. And that's what God wants us to do. He wants us to go through this ceremony of a total consecration to him. And so, the ceremony actually means something. Some things are sacred and they shouldn't be tampered with.

Colossians 2, verse 12 - you can read there, it says we are "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye

are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." So one thing that baptism represents is a burial. The old man is crucified with Christ. He is dead and buried. Now, when a person goes under the water, they at least, momentarily hold their breath, which is symbolic of a death. When they come up again, it's taking a breath - it represents a resurrection and a new beginning - a new life. If you were told to go bury the garbage, by your parents, and you took it outside and sprinkled some dirt on it and then the family wonders the next day why the raccoons spread it all over the yard, you say, 'Well, I sprinkled it.' They say, 'No, we told you to bury it.' And that's what we want done with our sins, right? We want them buried out of sight - under the blood.

Question #5: How was Jesus, who is our example, baptized? Now, a Christian is what? A follower of Christ. If you have any doubts about if it makes a difference how you're specifically baptized, how was Jesus baptized? You read in Mark chapter 1, verses 9 and 10, it says, "Jesus came...and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened." It's hard to miss the imagery here. First of all, John is baptizing at a river. If the biblical method of baptism was to pour or to sprinkle, and I - don't get upset if some of you were sprinkled and you're saying, 'What are you telling me? My baptism's not valid?' Stay with me. But if that was the biblical method, then why did John need a river? He could have baptized with a canteen in Jerusalem, right? I mean, you don't need a river. You need a - matter of fact, it tells us - you could read the next verse that's in your lesson, John 3:23 - it's a note, actually. "Now John (the Baptist) was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there." Why did he use that spot? Because there was much water there. And when you had those crowds of people and they were being immersed, you needed a place that was deep. And that's, actually, a photograph there of the Jordan river.

Question #6: How did Philip baptize the treasurer of Ethiopia? The Bible tells us that Philip, who started out as a deacon, and later became an evangelist, was led by the Lord. The Holy Spirit told him, 'I want you to go down to the deserts by Gaza.' And he wasn't sure why the Lord was leading him there, but when he went down there, there he saw the treasurer for the Queen Candice of Ethiopia was riding in his chariot - he was an Ethiopian - and he's reading from the scroll of Isaiah about the Messiah - the prophecy about the Messiah - he's parked. He's reading out loud. Philip overhears him reading the prophecy in Isaiah 53 saying, 'Who has believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' And it's the prophecy about Jesus. And Philip says, 'Do you know what you're reading? He said, 'I could sure use some help if a man was here to help me.' He said, 'I could explain that to you.' He said, 'Why don't you ride with me in the chariot?' It's the first example of a hitchhiker in the Bible. So he gets up in the chariot and he preaches about Jesus is the fulfillment of this very prophecy. The man's heart is stirred within him. He is a Jewish - believer in Yahweh, who had come to Jerusalem to worship. He was on his way back to Ethiopia.

He says, 'I don't want to go back without making this decision to be baptized and you're one of His disciples. You're qualified to do it. What prevents me from being baptized? Philip said, 'Nothing, if you believe with all your heart.' And so it tells us - Acts 8:38 and 39 - what happened? They found a - there was some water there, evidently. It says, "They went down both into the water, both" - if he's sprinkling they wouldn't both need to be in the water - "both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." And then it says, "And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away."

That's the first example of someone in the Bible being beamed from one location to another. It's, quite literally what happened. I mean, he came out of the water and the Ethiopian was just going to praise the Lord and - poof! - Philip disappeared. And then Philip finds himself off in Joppa, walking down the road. God had something else for him to do in a hurry. Brought him all the way to the desert to baptize this one man. You know why? That man, as a leader, took the Gospel down to Ethiopia. That man became a messenger to his whole country and so it was very important for him to reach him. So, you can see from these examples in the Bible, every example in the Bible of someone being baptized, they're all being immersed.

Question #7: What other truths are symbolized by baptism? Romans chapter 6, verse 4, it says, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death:" - we touched on that part - but it goes on to say, "that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in" - what kind of life? - A "newness of life." You know, when you're baptized, it represents you're going to get a whole new beginning. Wouldn't you like to know there was something you could do and you could just peel away the past and experience a new birth? You could get a divine transfusion and just know that you've been forgiven for all the mistakes you've ever made and that God can do it lovingly and He has a right to do it because Jesus has traded places with you? And He's giving you His new life? And then, because you appreciate what He's done for you, because He died to give you this new beginning - it says we walk in what kind of life? A newness of life. So a preparation to walk in a newness of life goes along with baptism.

But, you notice, He said, it's not only like a death and a burial, it's like a resurrection. Now, some people say we're supposed to now keep Sunday as the Sabbath in honor of the resurrection. If you've heard that before, let me see your hands. A lot of people have heard that before. I asked earlier and there's no scripture that tells us that, but there is a scripture that tells us there's something we're supposed to do to honor the resurrection. You know what it is? Baptism. Baptism is a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection. God didn't create a new Sabbath day because there was nothing wrong with the old one. Baptism is what is an indicator that we believe in the risen Lord, and we come from the waters and are willing to live a new life. Romans 6, verse 5, "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection." And so, baptism is a symbol of death, burial, resurrection, new life - it's like the old man is dead and buried and you've become a new creature. Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.

Bible also tells us that baptism symbolizes a birth. You know, when a person briefly goes under the water - a baby, before it's born, is in an envelope of water and then when it comes forth, the first thing you want to do is see it breathe. I know the old model was the doctor would kind of pick them up by their feet and give them a stinging swat on the posterior, right? Then they'd let out a shriek and everybody was so happy because that meant that they were breathing.

I forget which one it was - Bonnie remembers - one of our boys - Karen was on oxygen - Stephen, before he was born, Karen was on oxygen and the baby was so well oxygenated when he came forth, he had no desire to breathe. He was just pink and fine and didn't want to breathe. It took him awhile to get him to have that craving to breathe. And we all felt a lot - we were breathing better when he started breathing, right? And so, when a person goes under water, and they come out, it's like a birth. It's a new beginning. And we all need that new birth as well.

Question #8: How important is baptism for a Christian? Mark 16:16 - now this is very important. You're wondering, 'Pastor Doug, why are you talking about this?' "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Now, you notice he doesn't say 'he that is not baptized will be damned?' He says, 'he that believeth not will be damned.' But he that believes and is baptized' - wow, who said that? Jesus. Is it important for us to make a priority out of what Jesus makes a priority out of? You know the chapter where you find John 3:16 you also find John 3:5. He's talking to Nicodemus - same conversation. Jesus said, "Except a man (and a woman) be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

'Wow, Pastor Doug, are you telling me that nobody who has not been baptized is going to make it to Heaven?' No, I'll explain. First of all, in this verse, where Jesus said, 'Unless he's born of the water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven,' you need both births. A person can be born in the water and Jesus, here, is referring to water baptism. Some Christians think that what Jesus is saying here is, 'Except a man is born naturally of a woman,' - where he comes out of the envelope of water - 'and of the Spirit, he can't enter the kingdom of heaven. But the context of the Gospel of John is talking about

baptism and it would really be redundant to say, 'Unless you're born of a woman and the Spirit, you can't' - anyone here not born of a woman? Just wondering. You never know. These days - but the Bible says, 'except you're born of the water,' - it's talking about water baptism is something you choose - 'and the Spirit' - something God chooses - 'you cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven.

Give me - let me give you an example. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, that the children of Israel, being saved from the slavery of Egypt, is a symbol for salvation. After they sacrificed the lamb, God baptized the whole nation in the water, when they went through the Red Sea, and in the Spirit, with a pillar of fire, right? The disciples were baptized by John, in the water. But John said, 'Oh, I baptize you in water, but the one who comes after me, He is mightier than I. I'm not worthy to bear his shoe latchet. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire.' Then you read in Acts chapter 2, when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all gathered together in one place of one accord and they heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind and the Holy Spirit descended on them with tongues of fire.

And so the Lord is wanting us to have both baptisms in order for us to be prepared for that new beginning. It's a washing where you're surrendering. You say, 'Lord, I choose.' the Spirit baptism is something He chooses. When Jesus was baptized, He had both at the same time. He had His water baptism, came out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended. You and I probably know people that have been baptized in the water but it doesn't appear they've been baptized in the Spirit. But we need both baptisms.

So this is very important. Unless you have this, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. 'Well, Pastor Doug, what about the thief on the cross?' He wasn't baptized. How is he going to go to Heaven?' When Jesus was baptized, was He baptized to wash away His sin? The Bible says, '...who did no sin.' Jesus was sinless. He never sinned. That's why He could pay for our sin. So if baptism is a symbol of having your sin washed away, why was Jesus baptized? Three reasons: Jesus was, first of all, baptized as an example for us. Christ said, 'I've given you an example that you should walk as I have walked. He was baptized to show us that it's something important that we should do. When Jesus first came to John the Baptist, John recognized he was the Messiah. He said, 'Wait a second, you need to baptize me. You're sinless.' And Jesus said, 'No, allow it to be so now to fulfill all righteousness. The second reason Jesus was baptized is Christ was baptized because it's a symbol for those who cannot be baptized. There are some people who, maybe they're in a hospital, and they're on their death bed and they're hooked up to machines. Maybe they're in a prison on death row and they are making a decision to accept Jesus.

Do you think that God's going to say, 'You know, you couldn't get unplugged from all those hospital machines and get baptized so you can't be saved.' I've prayed with people that were literally on their death bed and invited them to accept the Lord and I believe God heard their prayer. So I believe Jesus was baptized and He will give them credit for His baptism. And so, He's given us an example. The other reason is the baptism of Jesus marked the launching of His ministry. You never hear about the miracles that Jesus performed or the teachings of Jesus, other than when He was twelve years old and He was talking at the temple - but nothing specific is mentioned, it just says that He amazed the teachers.

But He really began His public ministry with His baptism. And in the same way, baptism, for us, ought to represent a new life of living for God. Whatever your gifts are, using them for God, right? And so Jesus was baptized - also, we learned the other night, that marked the ending of that 400 - or an 83-year prophecy in Daniel chapter 9.

Question #9: What blessed ceremony can be compared to baptism? Answer: Galatians chapter 3, verse 27. It says, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." It's like a bride puts on her beautiful wedding dress - a symbol of purity and a new beginning. "Husbands," the Bible tells us, "love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." And so, when a person's baptized, it's sort of like a marriage in a sense. See, it's a ceremony where you're showing you're consecrating yourself to God. Now, how much does a person need to know before they're

baptized? Well, you need to know the basics. You should be able to say that, you know, you understand - you've made a commitment to God - you understand the basic teachings of Jesus.

The Bible tells us that. But do you have to wait until you know everything? Those of you here that are married, did you learn a few things after you got married? How about the person you got married to? But, when people don't know something before they get married, you know, the people that meet in Las Vegas and get married the same day, those marriages don't often work out very well, do they? And so you need to take time to know and understand the commitment. When people come to me and say, 'Pastor Doug, I'm surrendering my life to Jesus. I'm interested in baptism.' I say, 'Great, let's prepare.' That's very important. And make sure they study and they understand what's involved.

But when a person goes down in the water, it represents they're coming up - they're leaving behind the old life. They're now beginning a new life. Sometimes a person will come to me and they'll say, 'Pastor Doug, I want to get baptized but I think if you'd only baptize me I could quit my drinking and my smoking. I say, 'No, it doesn't work that way.' I say, 'You want to lay these things aside.' When they came to John the Baptist, before they were baptized, he said, 'Bring forth fruits meet for repentance.' Meaning, there ought to be evidence that you're prepared to turn from the old life before the ceremony.

Ask the ladies a question here. If a man - assuming you're not married - if a man came to you and said, 'I love you and I want to get married, but you won't mind if I'm still dating Jane and Sally a little bit. Just - but I'll quit soon, I promise. Just marry me and I think I could quit dating them.' Would anyone accept a proposal like that? So when people come to me and they say, 'You know, if you just baptize me I think that I could stop...' Baptism, in the Bible, the water is still H₂O. It's a commitment. The new birth happens in your heart before.

The apostles were baptized by John the Baptist, but they were filled by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It was three and a half years later. And so, I'm not saying you have to wait that long, I'm just saying that it may not happen, necessarily, at the same time. I remember when I went to the pastor when I accepted Jesus and I - I was still smoking. And I went to the pastor and said, 'Pastor, I just want to get baptized.' And he said, 'How's it coming with the cigarettes, Doug?' I said, 'Oh, the Lord knows I love Him.' He said, 'I don't question that, but baptism represents a new birth and what kind of witness is it for people when you say, 'I just got baptized' and you blow smoke in their face, you know?' 'Jesus set me free - pass me another beer.' That doesn't go right, you know? You want to have evidence that you've been delivered from some of these obvious chains that people are struck with. That doesn't mean you need to feel like you're perfect before you're baptized, but you don't want to be dating the devil either, you know what I'm saying? So, yeah, it's like marriage. I'll probably go back to that illustration again.

Question #10: What command did Jesus give to His people just before His ascension to Heaven? Matthew 28, verse 19, He said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations," - doing what? - "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Now, whenever I do one of these prophecy seminars, we always include - always - the subject of baptism because it was a priority of our Lord. He said, 'I want you to go teach. Teach the truth. Teach the prophecies. But wherever you go, tell them I not only want you to know, I want you to commit your lives to Me.' And so it doesn't do us any good to understand the subject of the beast and the mark of the beast and Armageddon and the second coming and all these subjects, if we've not given our hearts to the Lord, because the devil understands those subjects but it's not going to save him.

Baptism is as important to a Christian as a wedding is to a marriage. Baptism is very much like the wedding in a marriage. It is the ceremony where you make official - you make public your decision to accept Jesus and have your sins washed away. And the symbolism is very important. I know that some people are afraid, quite honestly, of water. I did a - I talked to a person about baptism before and they said, 'You know, pastor, the reason I waited for years is I am so afraid' - some people have hydrophobia and they're just so afraid. And they said, 'I'm so afraid of somebody putting me under.' And, you know,

when a person's baptized by immersion - and this is the only biblical method that you find - you briefly - you just lay them under - you bring them back up again. You don't hold them under. I've never lost anyone yet and I've baptized thousands of people.

I did hear about one minister in Northern California that he was baptizing this man in a lake and his family had all gathered. He had been quite a scoundrel, I guess, and he had a dramatic conversion, gave his life to the Lord. And right when he walked out in the waist-deep water there with the pastor, he told the pastor, he says, 'Pastor,' he said, 'you know, when you put me under,' he said, 'could you just hold me there a moment because I want to have a prayer. I've just been such a rotten person. I want to have a prayer while I'm under water.' The pastor wasn't sure how he felt about that. He'd never done that. He said, 'Don't worry about me,' he said, 'I'm a good swimmer. I could hold my breath for an hour. Just put me under,' he said, 'I'll pinch you when I want to come back up again.' Pastor said, 'Okay.' You know, it's his baptism.' He wanted to let him do what he wanted. But he hadn't told the family. They were all watching. And so he said, 'In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.' And he put him under the water and he held him there. Someone who watched this told me about it. And there's the family starting - they're looking like they were getting ready to charge the pastor. And pretty soon he eventually brought him up again, but we don't normally do that so we don't want you to worry. You just - you put them under and bring them right up. We even - well, I won't go into that. It is a sacred service but, you know, baptism, like many things, it may not always look dignified, but it represents a new birth.

Births - ugh - I don't know how many births you've seen, but they're not all real dignified either. Weddings, sometimes, are interesting too. It's compared to a funeral and that's not always pretty. And baptism represents something very radical. It represents making a decision to get a new beginning with Jesus and being willing to demonstrate that publicly - making that declaration.

So, because Christ makes it a priority - He said, 'Go into all the world.' These are the last words of Jesus. How important should that be? You know, years ago, when you would say good-bye to someone for awhile, they didn't have mail. They did not have telephones. They did not have internet. You said good-bye to someone, you may never see them again and you would pick your closing words very carefully. Now, you say, 'Good-bye, I'll text you later.' I mean, you know, people don't think like that anymore. But when you said 'Farewell' 2,000 years ago, you might not see them or talk to them and those closing words were very precious. And Jesus, before he ascends to heaven, He tells us, 'Go, teach, baptize.' That's a priority. Baptism begins the New Testament. It begins the book of Acts. It closes the New Testament. And so, this is something that I think is integral to even the presentation of prophecy.

Question #11: Where did all these counterfeit forms of baptism originate? And I need to be very careful. There's a lot of dear Christians - I believe there's going to be a lot of people in Heaven who maybe didn't understand what the biblical method of baptism is. Is that clear to everyone? I want to make sure you heard that - those watching. I believe there'll be a lot of people in Heaven, maybe they weren't baptized by immersion. The Bible says that the times of this ignorance, God winks at - Acts chapter 17. The Lord is good and He knows sometimes we don't understand. When we do understand, He wants us to do what He commands. But sometimes we don't understand and God blesses according to the knowledge we have. But there's a lot of counterfeit methods. Mark 7, verse 8, "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold" - to the what? - "The tradition of men." It just came from man-made traditions.

Let me just give you a little archaeological evidence. I'm going to show you a series of pictures here real quick. Here is a first-century baptistery in Philippi. That goes back to the first century. They were baptizing by immersion in the early church. Here is a fifth-century baptistery in Emmaeus - that's a town in Jerusalem. Again, they would go in the water, they were immersed. They had these down by the Nicene village by the Dead Sea. Any of you recognize that building? Tower of Pisa - I've been there a long time ago. Right across the courtyard is this church. The whole church is built around a baptistery where people were immersed. The church is a thousand years old. You go to Rome - middle of this church -

again, a baptistery. People were immersed.

You might be wondering 'Why do so many dear, sincere, Christians now get baptized by a variety of other methods?' - Sprinkling being one of the most popular. Pouring - some do it with rose petals. Some churches do it with salt. Some do it by speaking words - it's called 'the dry-cleaning method.' Just, I don't know, say a few words. They say, 'Oh, you're spiritually being baptized. But, historically, that was not the method. If you want to be a Bible Christian, I recommend you follow Jesus. It was not until the Council of Ravenna in 1311 A.D. that sprinkling and pouring were officially accepted as equally valid as immersion in the rite of baptism. So here it's over 1,300 years after Jesus before these other methods began to come in.

Now, you might be thinking, well, what difference does it make, Pastor Doug? It's just a symbol. I agree - that it's water - but I do think the symbol matters. Jesus gave the church a couple of institutions. One is the Lord's Supper - communion - and one is baptism. Not that many. I heard about one youth pastor that said, 'Well, since communion is just a symbol of the body of Jesus and the blood of Jesus, you know, we can pray. We're going to take the kids out and we're going to get them Coca Cola and hamburgers and we'll just bless it and it's the same thing.' And so they said they're going to do hamburgers and Coke and call it the body of Christ and the blood. Now, isn't that sacrilegious? In my opinion that's sacrilegious.

So, whenever you start to get away from the beautiful symbolism that God put into these services, you're departing from the truth. He told us, explicitly, how to do it and so when people say, 'It doesn't matter' - slowly, what happened - the change of baptism method did not happen overnight. It began, probably, with some of the wealthy and the aristocrats in Europe and when they were baptized they said, 'Well, you know, it's not very dignified for us to get plunged - to have to, you know, take off our royal robes and since it's a symbol, perhaps you could just pour a little bit of that water on us. And if you bless the water before you pour it on us, it will be holy water and a little bit will go a long way.' And so, you've heard about holy water? Where do you find that in the Bible - you pour holy water on people? I'm just saying - I'm going by the Bible.

And then there were people who were sick and they thought, 'You've got to be baptized before you die.' And they would dip a sheet in water and wrap them in a wet sheet and say, 'This is as close as we can get.' And so, it was in an effort to accommodate people, they gradually began to change it. And, you know, little by little the compromise begins to creep and pretty soon the symbolism was lost. Do you ever find an example in the Bible of babies being baptized? No, but were babies in the Bible dedicated? Yes. Was Jesus - how old was Jesus when he was baptized? Thirty - it tells us it was around his thirtieth birthday - the book of Luke, chapter 3. How old was Jesus when he was dedicated? He was dedicated in the temple at eight days old. And so, it is appropriate to dedicate babies, but the Bible says you need to repent and be taught before baptism. How can a baby do that? What are they repenting of?

Question #12: What does the Bible say about those who put the teachings of men before the truth of God? Matthew 15, verse 9, "But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of" - what? - man-made commandments. Paul goes on to say, in Galatians 1:8, "But though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Paul said, 'Don't let them change it. It's - don't get away from the commandments of God and start following traditions.

Question #13: But doesn't the baptism of the Holy Spirit replace baptism by immersion? No, not according to the apostle Peter. You read in Acts chapter 2, after Peter preaches that Pentecostal sermon, in verse 38, the people said to Peter and the apostles, 'What do we do now that we realize we've sinned and betrayed our Messiah?' He said, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you' - this is after the Holy Spirit is poured out - 'in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' He said we need to repent and be baptized.

Now, the apostles got baptized by water then later they were baptized by the Holy Spirit - tongues of fire came. If you read in Acts chapter 10, it talks about a man named cornelius and his family. They were baptized by the Holy Spirit then they were baptized in water. They got the Holy Spirit baptism before they got the water baptism. But you need both. And Jesus, he was baptized by the Spirit and water at the same time.

Question #14: According to the Bible, what must a person do before he's baptized? Now here's a list of some of the criteria to prepare for baptism. It says that - Answer A: "Understand Jesus' teachings." That's Matthew 28:19 - we need to know what we're being taught. Answer B: "Believe all of Jesus' teachings." That's what Philip said to the Ethiopian treasurer - he said, 'If you believe with all your heart.' It's one thing to understand it - the devil understands, but he doesn't believe it. You've got to believe it with your heart. Answer C: "Repent of your sins." John the Baptist said, 'Repent and be baptized.' Be willing to turn from your life of sin and walk in a newness of life. And let's go on here - answer E: "Agree to turn from sin." Romans 6, verses 5 and 6 and that's also in Luke 3, verses 7 and 8. Answer F: "Accept Christ as his personal Savior and experience the new birth." And this is what Jesus told Nicodemus.

Now, these are the criteria for baptism. Can a baby do all those things? No, that's why some of you who were baptized as babies - I'm not trying to offend you - you were dedicated by your parents as babies. That's very important and God's blessed that. I believe He blesses the parents that come and bring their children to the church and dedicate their children. But, technically, it's not the kind of baptism that Jesus practiced.

Question #15: Is rebaptism ever proper? You find an example in Acts 19, verse 5 - actually starting with verse 2 - through 5. Paul was traveling through the coast of Ephesus and he encounters twelve Ephesian believers and it says he asked them, "'Were you baptized?' And they said, 'We were baptized by John's baptism.' And then said Paul, 'John verily baptized you with a baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him who was to come after him.' And when they heard this, - on Christ Jesus - when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." They had been baptized by immersion - the right method of baptism, but they'd not heard about Jesus.

So, there are three reasons a person might consider rebaptism. One is if you were not baptized biblically, like Christ, by immersion, you technically have not followed biblical baptism yet. That's important. Second reason where it might be necessary to be re-baptized, is if you come into a whole new understanding of the truth, you might consider being re-baptized. You know, I've been baptized twice.

Quick story: you've heard my testimony - some of you - I was up in the cave reading the Bible, I gave my heart to the Lord. I had no preachers around me. One day, a couple of hikers came by my cave. They were some Calvary Baptists and they stopped to visit with me. I told you my cave was right on the creek so I frequently encountered hikers. And they said, 'Are you a Christian?' They were good witnesses. I said, 'Well, matter of fact' - one of the first times somebody had asked me - after I accepted Jesus, now I can say 'Yes.' They said, 'Have you been baptized?' No one had ever asked me that. I said, 'No.' They gave me a really quick Bible study sharing some of these verses about baptism, but they didn't teach me about, like, living the Christian life. I was still smoking and doing lots of things wrong. And they said, 'Oh, you've got to get baptized.' I said, 'Oh yeah, okay, okay.' You know? They knew much more than I did so they took me off there into the water. Right outside my cave there's a deep pool, waterfall - beautiful picturesque spot. The water came from melted snow so I - I did feel born again, I want to tell you right now - when I came out of that water. And they went hiking on up the trail. They didn't teach me any more. You know, teaching also comes after baptism too.

And I thought, 'Wow, this is great. I don't know what to do now. I'm going to go celebrate my baptism.' So I went to town and told my friends, 'Hey, I got baptized let's go get some beer.' And before the sun went down that day I was in jail. It's true - telling my friends in jail, 'I just got baptized today.' A few years later I studied some of the things I'm sharing with you in this seminar and the old pastor - wonderful

saint - he explained to me that baptism was a little more serious than that. It's a serious life commitment, like marriage, and you don't just rush into it. And since that time, praise God, I have never smoked, I have never drunk, and God just saved me from those things and it's been a blessing walking with Jesus.

Question #16: Is baptism connected, biblically, with joining a church? Acts 2:41, it says, "Then they that gladly received His Word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Yes, of course you need to be part of a church. Acts 2:47, "Praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." The Bible tells us in Colossians 3:15, it says, "Ye are called in one body." Let me ask the ladies again, what would you think if a man came to you and said, 'I love you. I want to marry you. But will it be absolutely necessary for us to live together?' How would you do with that proposal? Wouldn't you assume that if you love me you want to marry with me - be married - that we're going to like, you know, merge our lives now?

And so, baptism is you become part of the body of Christ and the Bible says that's the church so baptism's a baby. If a baby's born without a family, how long does a little lamb last out with the wolves? You need the protection of the family. And so, of course, it's part of that. Colossians 1:8, "He is the head of the body, the church." If I were to say to you, 'Look, a nose.' And I point at the audience you'd think, 'Well, so what? Everyone has one, right?' But if I point at the ground and say, 'Look, a nose.' You'd say 'Oh, that's really weird. A nose on the ground.' It belongs on a face. It doesn't belong on the ground by itself, does it? If any part of your body gets separated, you start to worry, don't you? It doesn't last very long. We need to stay together. We're all members of the body of Christ. We need to be in one body. Corinthians 12:13, "For by one spirit are we all baptized into" - how many? - "One body."

Question #17: If I refuse baptism, according to the Bible, whose counsel am I refusing? Luke 7, verse 30, "But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him." Speaking of John the Baptist. They spurned and mocked John the Baptist and they didn't repent of their sins and get baptized and they were rejecting the counsel of God. Do you think that they were saved? Unless you're born of the water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus tells us that it is very important. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Have you made that decision? It doesn't mean we do it today, but you might want to plan on that. If you've been thinking about being a Christian, embracing the everlasting life, preparing for the last-day events, we would like to help you do that. We don't just do these seminars to entertain people, we do it to try to get people ready for what's coming. If we're just doing it to entertain people, we're wasting our time. We're doing it because we want to get the message out there so people will know what's coming and be prepared. And part of that means being baptized. You know, the Lord wants you to experience what His Son experienced at baptism.

It tells us in question #18: When Jesus was baptized, what did His Father say? Matthew 1, verses 9 and 11, "And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan." And it says, "And there came a voice from Heaven, saying, Thou art My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And that's something God wants all of us to experience.

You know, in connection with this meeting - both for those who are watching and those who are here, we want to give you an opportunity to respond and we prepared a card we're going to ask our ushers to give you right now. And you can make a decision tonight. You give that to us - we will pray for you and with you. Those of you at home, you can actually download this at the Landmarks of Prophecy website. You can make a decision right now and say, 'You know, I don't want to just be a hearer of the Word, I want to be a doer of the Word. I want to hear the Father's voice say to me what He said to Jesus. I want the heavens to be opened for me. I want to hear the Lord speak to me and say that the Holy Spirit is coming into my life and walk in a newness of life. And you can make a decision tonight.'

And I'd like for all of us, in our hearts, to be praying right now because I think some people are going to make decisions tonight - people watching around the world, people here in Albuquerque - that could be the turning point of their lives. You can say, 'I want to be married to the Lord. I want to be washed from my sins - washed from that leprosy - get a new beginning. Take your card and fill it out. I'm going to invite Christian to come out and he's going to sing, 'I surrender all' and then we'll be praying together. When you've completed your cards, you can hand them down the aisle and give them to the ushers with the buckets. And those at home, you can e-mail them back to us. We'll pray for you and help you prepare.

All to Jesus I surrender,

All to Him I freely give.

I will ever love and trust Him,

In His presence daily live.

I surrender all.

I surrender all.

All to Thee my blessed Savior,

I surrender all.

I trust you all have your cards now. Some may have already started filling them out. It asks four very simple questions: 1) I want to surrender my life completely to Jesus. If that's your desire, check that box. Make the decision right now. Question #2: I love Jesus and desire to be baptized soon and you'd like to start preparing for that very important decision, you can mark that spot. Third question: some of you maybe were baptized but maybe it wasn't biblically or you may need rebaptism - maybe you've learned so many new things. It says, 'I've been baptized but I'd like to be re-baptized. You can mark that. We'll answer your questions - we'll try and have someone contact you. We'll provide information online for those of you who are watching around the world. You'll know where to turn. Question #4: maybe you're struggling with this decision - I am praying about this decision, but I still have these questions. Mark that down and then you can turn your cards in and we'll be praying for you.

Friends, this is - you know, I felt like I rushed through a very important subject. But I trust the Holy Spirit is compensating for whatever I couldn't say in your heart right now. This is something Jesus is calling on us to do to get a new beginning - to have our sins washed away. He'd like to provide that for you. He's paid a lot to make it possible. I'd like to pray with you before we close so you can have that experience - and you who are watching. Let's bow our heads.

Father in Heaven, I know some, right now, are struggling with this eternal decision. Help them, Lord, make it right now and say, 'Yes, Jesus.' Though they may feel the struggle in their hearts, that they'll surrender to You and say, 'I want to surrender my life. I want to be a follower of Christ and be ready for Your return and believe that, with Christ's help all things are possible.' We thank You and we pray this in Jesus' Name, amen.

Thank you, friends. God bless you and when is our next meeting? Tomorrow morning - 11:00 right here. Also, tomorrow evening we're going to be talking about bowing to Babylon. And tomorrow night 'Marked for Death.' Don't miss it. God bless you.