

# “Practical Matters” – Pr Jim Sprengle

## The Baptism of Our Lord Sunday – January 7, 2024

- I. **Romans 6:1-11** – previously read
- II. **How much do you like yourself?**
  - a. I suppose there is a fine line between a healthy self-confidence and being arrogant and self-absorbed.
  - b. However, if we had a list of things we could change about ourselves... our bodies, our personalities, our health, our lives in general... what would we change?
  - c. Throughout history, people are known to seek ways of changing what they perceive as inadequacies or not measuring up to popular culture.
  - d. In America, statistics show that between 15 to 16 million people get plastic surgery each year.
    - i. Most of these are out of pocket expenses that insurance calls cosmetic, but people are willing to spend big money to look different.
    - ii. The main ones are nose jobs, eyelids, facelifts, liposuction, and breast augmentation.<sup>1</sup>
    - iii. The trouble is that changing things on our bodies might be helpful to lift our self-esteem for a while, but we are still the same person.
  - e. Historically, we also know that people have tried all kinds of snake oil to make changes in their lives.
    - i. In ancient times, some leaders died from drinking things mixed with gold, lead, mercury, and other toxic substances.
    - ii. Just watch TV, and a commercial will tell you all about the next “breakthrough” supplement that will help you remember things, lose weight, stop snoring, or see better.
  - f. Maybe we are wired to be discontent with who we are... that we see ourselves in a certain light and want to make changes.
    - i. It is not a problem that we want to do better or be a better person, it’s that we often have a false perception of self... and we look for external fixes that are only temporary... or don’t help at all.
    - ii. We are barraged on social media and advertisements with the standards of beauty for the current day...
      1. The response for some people to fit in and feel good about themselves is to change their bodies to reflect what they see on Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok...
      2. How many people will look back in 20 years from now and wonder why they found it so important to transform their bodies when the standards might be the exact opposite at that point?
  - g. Now, you all might be snickering about the people who do these things, but we all fall for the idea of taking a supplement, trying a new exercise program, or any number of gadgets and ideas to make changes in our

lives... only to toss them to the side over time... and look for some other shortcut or external “fix” to change ourselves.

III. **Paul writes about real change today.**

- a. St. Paul writes about baptism in our reading today using very plain terms... like death and life, enslaved and free, buried and raised, crucified and resurrected.
  - i. Paul wants to be clear that a major transformation takes place in a person who is baptized.
  - ii. These words are opposites because God changes things that much for those He saves... as those in bondage are freed, He raises the dead to life, and the crucified are resurrected.
- b. The description of baptism in our text is one of transformation... starting with dying...
  - i. Verse 3 says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”
    1. Stop for a moment and think about what this means... why did Jesus die?
      - a. He died as the perfect sacrifice to atone, or to pay for our sins...
      - b. When Paul says that our baptism connects us to Jesus’ death – it means that we are connected to the forgiveness of sins!
    - ii. Verse 4 then says, “We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”
      1. Again, this says that baptism also connects us with the resurrection – which means that we rise in victory over death and sin.
      2. In baptism, we are also connected to Jesus’ life and glory.
- c. So it all begins with a person who has no faith... whether that is a baby or an 80-year-old... and remember, before we have faith in God, we bring no good to the table... as Ephesians 2:1 says, “We were dead in our trespasses and sin” – and Psalm 51:5, “In sin did my mother conceive me.”
  - i. Every human being is born with sin that permeates all our being... and that cannot be fixed with plastic surgery or a supplement.
  - ii. I often tell my confirmation students that before we are given faith by the Holy Spirit, we are spiritual zombies – walking around but dead to spiritual life and salvation.
  - iii. We are broken and unable to save ourselves.
- d. In this profound state of brokenness is where God seeks us out.
  - i. Somewhere along the line, another Christian shares the Good News that Jesus died and rose again for our sake, and He is the Savior who

- paid for our sins on the cross – but also rose again to give us faith and forgiveness... and a person is drawn to the baptismal font.
        - ii. Or perhaps we were just a baby – as it says in Psalm 51, sinful from conception – and the family brings that child to the font.
        - iii. Either way, when the water is combined with the Word of God – “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” a miracle takes place as that person is transformed.
- e. I really wish we did more immersion baptism, not because it's right or wrong, but just because the visual of a person going under the water and the old Adam being drowned is very powerful.
  - i. In a short moment, the person is raised up out of the water and the new Adam is alive... resurrected ... and transformed.
  - ii. Our reading stresses this transformation over and over, as we are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ (vs 11).

IV. **Baptism challenges our perception of who we are.**

- a. Baptism is the true change we need.
- b. No surgery, pills, or exercise equipment will bring about eternal changes – only God's grace has the power to make us right.
- c. Now, I understand that sometimes we need to change habits in our eating and exercise... or we need to take care of our bodies because they are the temple of the Lord...
  - i. However, we don't have to long for changes that will only be empty when we have a God who made the most important change of all – forgiving us so we live forever.
- d. As God's children – adopted as heirs of the Father – we don't have any business looking down on ourselves... or looking outside to the world to transform us into its likeness.
  - i. No, we have baptism and the promise of God Himself that we are living, resurrected, free, and forgiven.

V. **Baptism matters in the present time.**

- a. We might want to look back on it like it happened a long time ago, therefore it doesn't do much in the here and now.
- b. Yet, baptism isn't some theory or idea that we talk about... it's a practical matter!
- c. I am baptized, therefore my day begins with a remembrance of that fact... as we all need water, just put a cross nearby, then when you see it, – make the sign of the cross and thank God that He called you His own child.
- d. I am baptized, so I pray each morning that God would drown the old Adam as I confess and repent of my sins... and guess what? A new Adam walks forth, ready to see where God leads me.
- e. I am baptized, so I see myself as infinitely valuable – not by the world's standards and not because I'm prideful, but because God took this dirty,

rotten, no-good sinner and gave me His grace, called me forgiven... and called me His son.

- f. I am baptized, and I will always have that anchor in my life so no matter how big the storms get, I am God's – and I will live with Him forever. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> American Society of Plastic Surgeons, "Plastic Surgery Statistics Report, PlasticSurgery.org (Accessed 4/11/23)