

Crossing Over

John 5:24-27

February 5, 2023

Please open your Bibles today to John 5. Today is another celebration day here at Antioch! We get to welcome new members both by baptism and by transfer. In so doing, our family gains members as God adds to our number. Today we want to particularly talk about what the act of baptism actually means and what difference it makes in a person's life. For those who have already been baptized perhaps short or long ago, this is a reminder of what happened then and what it should mean to us now. You may have heard about the old Dunkard preacher who baptized an old drunkard parishioner. After dipping him three times, the preacher said, "You are now baptized, you are a new creation. The old one is gone, no more drinking for you. Your new name is Christian!" Christian went home and headed straight for the fridge. He took out a beer bottle, dipped it 3 times in the sink and said: "You are now baptized, you are a new creation. The old one is gone. Your new name is Green Tea!" Thankfully, God gives us a new life with our new name.

If you are able, please stand as we read from John 5:24-27 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. 25 I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.

We begin this morning with the red letter words of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this passage we find part of His response to the Jewish leaders who were already trying to kill him. His comments in vs 24 are very powerful. He gives two conditions for escaping condemnation and receiving eternal life, which we've talked about the last two weeks. 1. We must **hear** Jesus' word and 2. We must believe Him who sent Jesus. Let's flesh those out a little.

1. We must hear Jesus' word. Say hear. God's Word is not hard to hear today in the US. Nearly 400,000 Bibles are sold every single week. 88% of American households own at least one Bible including most non-Christian homes! The average family has 3-4 copies and 24% have more than five. In addition, you can hear God's Word in a million churches each Sunday and on the radio, TV, and internet every single day. Jesus' word is easy to hear. We could get into hypothetical discussions about what this means for tribes that never heard the Gospel. Most people who do that are usually trying to avoid Jesus' words that they have themselves have already heard but don't want to obey. Everyone here today has heard Jesus' word or will before you leave today. In addition, His word is not hard to understand. His Word is not on a college or even high school level. Jesus put

His saving truth on the bottom shelf so even children can reach it. So thankfully, the first stipulation Jesus put on receiving everlasting life is not hard for any of us to do. We have all heard Jesus' word!

The second is the kicker. We must believe that God sent Jesus. That He is God's One and only Son and that He died to save us. It's not enough just to hear Jesus, we must believe Him and believe IN Him! We must believe in and trust Jesus to wash away our sin and present us spotless before His Father in glory. And there's the rub. So many resist this. They don't want to accept Jesus usually because we don't really want to be clean. We're happy living in the pigpen. Until the boar gets ahold of us and we realize that he only wants to steal, kill, and destroy us. Thankfully, we have a way out of the pigpen! Even when we've stayed there too long and been beat up by the boar too much.

We can cross over from death unto life. And that is what we celebrate this morning, a physical symbol of the real spiritual crossing from death unto life. Whenever we have baptisms at the river it is less obvious because we usually go in and come out at same place, but here, it's different! Those who are baptized actually cross from one side of the platform to the other illustrating very clearly the spiritual reality of crossing over from eternal spiritual death to everlasting spiritual life. The two sides could not be more different. Over the last several weeks, we've been talking about the differences between hell and heaven and they are nothing alike. They are complete and total opposites in every single way. Hell, to be avoided at all costs and heaven to be easily accessed through Jesus as we've already discussed today. And praise God for all who have chosen to cross from death to life!!

I usually share with folks considering this decision that it is the most important and most lasting decision they will ever make and one they will be so thankful for 2 million years from now. These three that will be baptized today have already crossed over for they have privately asked Jesus into their hearts but their public demonstration of that by baptism is so important. Jesus died a public death and expects us to make a public proclamation. If we won't confess Him before others, He won't confess us before His Father. So I'm thankful for these choosing to confess Him in Word by vow and in action by baptism. If you haven't done either, let me know. But let's talk about what this crossing over means.

The Bible is a book of crossings. Say crossings. Noah, his family, and the animals were saved and crossed through the flood which Peter describes as a type of cleansing by baptism. They crossed from the pre-flood world to the post-flood world, two very different places. Later Jacob crossed over the Jabbok River and his life changed forever. In one of the most miraculous crossings of all, the Hebrews crossed over the Red Sea passing through it on dry ground. They left behind their old life of bondage and slavery to enter a new life of freedom and joy. This helps us understand that when we cross through the waters of baptism, we cross from the bondage and slavery of sin to the

freedom in Jesus! If the Son shall set you free, you are free indeed! Also, before that night, they identified as Egyptian slaves, but afterwards, they were the people of the living God!

And then of course, forty years after they crossed the Red Sea, their children crossed the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land! They could have and should have done it much sooner, but their parents' disobedience kept them out. Their lack of faith in the God who had saved them from Egypt prevented them from crossing over. Friends, God has a better, more blessed life waiting for you on the other side of your decision. Accept Jesus today! There will still be battles to fight, challenges to face, but His best awaits you on the other side!!

Turn over to 1 Peter 2. As we celebrate the crossing over of these individuals today and remember our own, I want to remind us of what this crossing signifies. In 1 Peter 2:9, we are told, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but **now** you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but **now** you have received mercy." How you like them apples?

We cross from that side of the platform, from being a nobody, to becoming a person of the living God. From loneliness and wandering to being a part of the holy nation of God, the Church! Especially Antioch Covenant Brethren Church! The people of Israel became God's Covenant people under the Old Covenant, and we become His Covenant people under the New one! Our primary identity is now in Jesus! We might have been known as a Bowers before, or a democrat or a republican or a Commanders fan, or whatever, but as we cross over, our new identity that eclipses all others is that of Jesus! We become a Christian! One of God's people!

We were all born on the other side of the baptistry. We were all on that side at one time. We were all in darkness without mercy but those who heard Jesus' word and believe Him who sent Him have crossed over. We cross over from having not received mercy, being under sin, condemnation, and eternal judgment and death to having received mercy, justification, eternal life and all good things! We cross over from spiritual darkness to spiritual light!

But to those who have crossed over, let me share what Peter writes in the very next verses, "11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they **accuse** you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." Life on this side of the baptismal pool is to be very different from life over there. We are to live righteous and holy lives. And now we can because His Holy Spirit enters into those who receive the Son empowering us to say no to

temptation and evil and yes to that which is blameless and upright. As we do that, we get to declare the praises of the One who crossed us over!

During the Baptisms, the individuals go down under the water symbolizing death and burial. We are buried with Christ. We die to our old sinful natures and we come up out of the water in the newness of life in Christ. **Raised** with Him in resurrection. Born again to live a life that glorifies Him. What happens in the waters of baptism are powerful physical reminders of deep spiritual truths. Which is why Jesus was baptized Himself to fulfill all righteousness and set an example for us.

When the Israelites were preparing to cross the Jordan in Numbers 33, God told them to destroy all the idols and false gods they will find on the other side. They are to cleanse the place and live differently from those who had been sacrificing their children in the fire, engaging in prostitution and all manner of abominations before God. The people of God were to live like God's people. And we still are. In Ephesians 5:8-11 Paul reminds us, "For you were once darkness (over there), but now you are light in the Lord (over here). Live as children of light... 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." We are to behave and live differently on this side of our baptisms.

In Deuteronomy, Moses repeats God's laws so the people will remember how to behave in the new land on the other side of their crossing. Deut 32:45f says, "When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, 46 he said to them, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. 47 They are not just idle words for you — they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

God wants us to enjoy life on the other side! His commands are not burdensome, but rather life-giving! And they come with a promise! For God also spoke through Moses and said, (Deut 31) "6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified... for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." God is with us on the other side! He is with us no matter where He leads us on the other side of our commitment to Him. He may lead us into the mission field. Lo, I am with you there always. He may lead us into the ministry or a life of service. He may lead into business or finance, into education or government. Wherever He leads you He says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." That promise didn't apply on the side of your baptism. Only on this side.

And we need to remember our crossing over. When the Israelites crossed the Jordan and began living in the Promised Land, God wanted them to remember. We are forgetful people. We are prone to become distracted by the milk and honey and forget to thank the One who provided it. Oh may we never do that. May we remember

Him. After the Israelites came out on the other side of the Jordan, God commanded them to build a memorial with 12 stones that they were to get out of the riverbed as they crossed over. This would not be an altar, but a simple pile of rocks.

In Joshua 4:6-7, he says, "In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' 7 tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever." I pray that we have some memorials around us of our crossing. Not that we worship, but that remind us of the day we crossed over from death unto life and of the One who made that possible. Baptismal certificates and pictures remind us as do Bibles that were presented. We can show these to our children and grandchildren and tell them about the day **we** crossed over from death unto life. Since the three we baptize today are children, we as their parents and grandparents, SS teachers, and Christian siblings, it is our responsibility to remind them of their crossing from death unto life, and them to remind us of ours! We help each other on this side of the baptistery. We help each other live and act like Jesus and to walk in His way.

In Exodus 30, the Israelites were counted as they crossed from one side to another and each had to pay "atonement money" of a half shekel to prevent plagues. Accepting Jesus and being baptized is how we become numbered with God's people today, how we can get counted with His family and are spared the plague of eternal death and hell. This happens because our atonement price is paid by Jesus, the cost of which was much higher than a half shekel. It was his blood. Which reminds us that these crossings through the waters of baptism are only possible because of Jesus' cross. Say cross. You may have seen this image of a great deep canyon with death and darkness on one side and light and life on the other. And Jesus' cross becomes the bridge by which all may cross over. When Jesus died on that cross, He built a bride for us to cross over from death unto life, from darkness unto light, and from hell unto heaven.

There is no other bridge. If you want to live forever instead of die forever, you **must** take Jesus' bridge, His cross. He said, "No one comes to the Father except through me." That means the bridge of good works is out. The bridge of getting baptized without repenting and trusting in Jesus is out. The bridges of church membership, your parents' faith, Muhammad, Buddha, reincarnation are all out! And one day Jesus' bridge will be out too. It will be too late. Cross over while you can! Today is the day to do that. Next year, next week or even tomorrow might be too late. As Abraham told the rich man in Hades (Luke 16:26) "... between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." Friends the time to cross from death to life is today. Although you might not physically leave the building, your eternal destination will change when you hear Jesus' word and accept Him as your Savior. He shed His blood upon the cross that you might

cross over it. Friends, cross over Jesus' cross today and cross from death unto life while we pray.