

Sermon

September 28, 2014

Title: Baptism Journey

Text: Romans 6:1-11

Where Are We? (Romans 6:1-5)

Setting your watch:

A few weeks ago I was sitting next to my wife on a plane headed for Amsterdam. The flight would cross 6 time zones in about as many hours. And this raised an interesting question: when do you change your watch? Do you leave it on the “old time” or set it to the “new time”?

Of course, changing your watch doesn’t change where you are. It doesn’t make the plane fly any faster or take any time off the trip. On the plane you’re in between the two times.

Leave it on the “old time” and in a funny sort of way you feel like you’re still back home.

Change to the “new time” and it feels like you’re already already in a place that’s still hours of flying time away.

Sure enough, I did take off my watch about 2/3 of the way through the flight. And once I changed to the “new time” I knew I had left home behind.

The Old Time Zone:

Paul was concerned that followers of Jesus know what “time zone” they are in. For that reason he raises a question that forces us to say good-bye to the Old Time Zone of Sin and Death:

Romans 6:1-2 NIV

What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Paul is certainly concerned that we change our behavior and put an end to sins that may have been very much part of our life before we put our trust in Jesus. But in these two verses he is talking about more than changed behavior. He is talking about “where we are” – about the spiritual continent or kingdom in which we now live.

A better translation of “shall we go on sinning” would be “shall we *remain* in sin.” Think of sin as a realm, a country ruled by the dark forces of Evil.

Verse 2 makes this more clear:

Romans 12:2 The Message

I should hope not! If we've left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there?

Isn't that sort of what happens when you face the reality that “you're not in Kansas anymore.” It may be 9:00 p.m. back home, but it's already 3:00 a.m. where you're going. It's time to say goodbye to the Old Time Zone.

The New Time Zone:

For Paul, the way that you made the break with the Old Time Zone – and reset your watch, as it were – was through being baptized into Jesus, the King.

Romans 6:3-5 The Message

Or didn't you realize we packed up and left there for good? That is what happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace – a new life in a new land!

That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country.

Baptism – going under water and coming back up – is a powerful picture of dying and rising again. To be baptized “into the life of Jesus” means that we act out His death and resurrection for ourselves. Like changing our watch to the New Time in the middle of a long flight, we announce to the whole wide world that we're on God's Time and already living in God's Country.

Baptism Journey (Romans 6:6-10)

What does Baptism stand for?

To really understand *baptism* and how it symbolizes dying and rising with Jesus, we need to see how connected it was to Israel's greatest story: The Exodus. The Exodus was the story of God delivering His people, Israel, out of slavery, oppression and death in Egypt. No sooner had they begun their journey to freedom, they found themselves trapped in

between the Red Sea (or Sea of Reeds) to the east and Pharaoh's army to the west. It was death on either side and no way out! But God caused a strong wind to blow, pushing back the waters of the Red Sea and opening a way on dry land to the other side.

To ancient peoples, from the Israelites to the readers of Paul's letter, the *Sea* was much more than a large body of water. It was seen as the realm of chaos and destruction. It was the one part of the world that had never been tamed. In the Book of Daniel and in the Book of Revelation we see visions of monsters that emerge out of the sea to oppress and terrorize the human race.

But when God rolled back the waters of the Red Sea, He conquered that last vestige of evil and death. He brought His people through the "valley of the shadow of death," if you will, and placed them safe and sound on the other side.

Baptism serves as a picture of that great rescue. When we are baptized, we take the journey from the land of death to the land of life. As Paul put it:

Romans 6:3b The Message

When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace – a new life in a new land!

From Slavery to Freedom:

Baptism pictures us leaving the old land of sin and death behind and entering into God's new country of grace and life. But it also captures the essence of the Exodus Journey: the journey from slavery to freedom. Paul connects the dots this way:

Romans 6:6-10 The Message

*Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the Cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life – **no longer at sin's every beck and call!***

What we believe is this: If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection.

*We know that when Jesus was raised from the dead it was a signal of the end of death-as-the-end. **Never again will death have the last word.** When Jesus died, he took sin down with him, but alive he brings God down to us.*

Paul's point is all about slavery and freedom. When we left Sin Country behind, we left slavery to sin as well:

Romans 6:6 NIV

*For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, **that we should no longer be slaves to sin** --*

Changing where we are changes who we serve. Sin is no longer our sole reality. Sin is no longer in charge. We “died” to sin when we dared to see ourselves as dying alongside Jesus on the cross. And we came to life as part of God’s New Creation, when we dared to see ourselves as rising alongside Jesus.

That’s the picture the baptism paints for you and me.

What Time Is It? (Romans 6:11)

So just what time is it?

So what time is it for you? Which time zone is your watch set to? If God has set us free through what Jesus did for us, then it’s time to leave the old country of Sin and Death behind once and for all. Paul says:

Romans 6:11 The Message

From now on, think of it this way: Sin speaks a dead language that means nothing to you; God speaks your mother tongue, and you hang on every word. You are dead to sin and alive to God. That’s what Jesus did.

He uses the language of accounting. In other words, he says: “Do the math.” Jesus died and was raised from the dead. You were baptized into Jesus. Therefore, you to have died and been raised. You’re on God’s New Time. It’s time to reset your watch! There’s no going back.

Every one of us needs to choose for ourselves to take the journey from the land of Sin and Death into God’s land of Life and Forgiveness. Baptism is the Christian’s way of saying this is my decision. Throughout this earthly life it will often seem like we’re somewhere in between those two realms. Like a plane half way across the Atlantic Ocean, we’re neither back where we started, nor at our final destination.

When we feel that way, or when we feel the temptation to just go back to the old way of thinking and action, it’s time to check our watch and see what time we’re on. Is that watch still set to the old time zone? Are you tempted to do things the old familiar way – resorting to anger, deceit, selfishness or pride? Check to see what time it really is – and is going to be from here on out! You took the plunge. Now you are on God’s Time.