

What a difference the gift of a home can make! Good news, you just inherited a house from Great Aunt Sally who recently passed. It's an older house, but Sally took good care of it. The question is, what do you do with the property? Do you sell it? Do you move into it? Do you rent it out to tenants? Maybe it has one of those convoluted reverse mortgages on it so you actually are inheriting a liability. Maybe you say, "I never had a Great Aunt Sally! Who is this person? This is probably a scam." So you never actually go to Rhinelander to check the house out. Receiving property can sometimes be a blessing, sometimes it can be a headache.

In the Christian Church at large, baptism is kind of like this. It doesn't seem like we know what to do with it. Some Christians say it's only an outward expression of an inward faith. Others, such as ourselves, say that you should baptize at infancy. Some say you need to dunk, others say that pouring or sprinkling is fine. What does the Bible say about baptism?

1 Peter 3:21 **"Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, 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"**

This morning we're exploring baptism. What are we as Christians to make of it? 3. Is Baptism like throwing a housewarming party? So Aunt Sally wrote you into the will, you receive the house, and you move into it. Once everything is out of boxes and the house is spic and span, you invite all your friends and family and have a great party to showcase the house and all the work that Sally put into it over the years. In this party, you get to glorify Sally and what a great house she gave you.

For many Christians in America, in fact, close to a majority of Christians in America believe this about Baptism. They say it is an outward symbol of an inward reality. In other words, only faith counts, and baptism is simply a hoop to jump through. It is a way to showcase God and His work in your life. It is clear enough that Jesus commands baptism, so many church bodies will at least make it a requirement.

Yet this text is very clear. "Baptism now saves you." Now they say a text without context is a pretext, and I don't want to be tricking anyone here. The text reads, "Baptism, which corresponds to this," What is the this?

Baptism corresponds to Noah's and the flood. The wicked people of Noah's day were drowned, yet Noah and his family was saved in the water through the ark. Yet baptism is not a symbol for the flood. The Greek word for "which corresponds to this" is to be understood like the die a coin is cast in. It's the metal that makes the stamp, not the metal stamped into. If anything Noah and the ark foreshadowed baptism. Noah and the ark is a symbol for baptism!

The Bible often connects baptism and salvation. Jesus says in Mark, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** Acts 2:38, **“And Peter said to them, “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.”** Acts 22:16 **“And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”** Galatians 3:27 **“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”** Colossians 2:12 **“having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”** These verses prove amply that baptism is not simply a ceremony that has no actual effect.

Baptism is not something we do for God. It isn't about our outward confession of inward faith. It's not just simply throwing a housewarming party after you already have the deed in hand. Baptism is something that God does for us.

**“Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, 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”** 2. Is Baptism like receiving a deed? Let's go back to our Great Aunt Sally analogy. Say you receive the deed to the house in the mail. You are now the official owner of the house. Does that guarantee that in twenty years when it comes time to sell that you'll receive in cash the value that the house was appraised for the day you received it?

Say the house was worth 200 grand on the day you received it. If you never set foot in the house or even visited Rhinelander where the house was, would it still be worth 200 grand 20 years later? Of course not!

The grass would overgrow and create a jungle. Kids would get lost in the yard and they would need to send out search parties to find them. Paint would peel. Pipes would burst. Roofs would leak. Twenty years without maintenance! Even if the house isn't condemned, it would be a shell of what it was.

Baptism isn't to be treated simply as a get out of jail free card. We as Lutherans abuse God's gift of baptism when we treat it as a license to sin and to act as though God doesn't matter. Baptism doesn't save you as a mere outward act. It saves us not as a mere removal of dirt from our bodies. It's not that baptism is just a cleansing. I give my daughter plenty of baths, and I can do a better job cleaning her off than the washing she got when she was baptized. That's not the point.

Does a deed really give you ownership of the house? Yes it does. It doesn't do so only symbolically or ceremonially. But any homeowner or landlord can tell you that having a deed to the property is just the starting point.

Baptism is **“...an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** If you're using the gift of baptism as an excuse to

skip involvement in church, to indulge in sin, or to slack off in your devotional life, I have one piece of advice: stop it.

A house loses value when not maintained properly. A dilapidated house can be condemned. A deed can be revoked. Christians who despise their baptism and the gifts of faith can lose their salvation.

A text without context is a pretext. I don't have time to preach on 1 Peter 2:12—3:17, but I encourage you to read it sometime. It's a homeowner's manual. It tells you what Christian life looks like.

Is Baptism like receiving a deed? It is certainly that, but it's more than that. Baptism is a washing of dirt from the body, but it's more than washing of dirt from the body. Baptism is where the journey of faith takes place.

1. Is Baptism like owning a home? So you pull up tent stakes and you move into hodag country. You pull into the driveway at Aunt Sally's house and it's more amazing than you can imagine. There's a difference between a house and a home. Every home is a structure, whether it be a trailer, apartment or house, but not every structure is a home.

Baptism **"...now saves you, 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,"** Baptism saves you because it delivers to you salvation. It delivers to you Jesus Christ and His atoning death and vindicating resurrection.

**"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit"** Baptism saves you because in it, God moves in and makes His home with you. He keeps your house maintained and up to spec because of the hammer and nails driven into His Son and because of the eviction notice the Father placed on Christ's tomb, raising Him on the third day.

Baptism is our home. It's not just a placeholder for something greater. It's not just a piece of paper or a bowl of water. It's a place of refuge from the storms all around us. It's the ark we stay in when the floodwaters cover the tips of mountains. Baptism is our home precisely because that's where Christ is daily and richly forgiving your sins and the sins of all believers. **BAPTISM IS GOD'S PROMISE TO CHRISTIANS.**

And it's never too late to return home. Being baptized into Christ means that there is forgiveness for all our sins past and present. Being baptized into Christ means believing that indeed He died for you, the chief of sinners. Being baptized into Christ means that He is going to be working through His means of grace: the water, the word, and the bread and wine to accomplish a home improvement project in your life, and in the lives of those around you. What a difference the gift of a home can make!