

Text: Acts 2:37-47

Subject: Basics of Faith

Theme: 6) The Ordinances of the Church

Title: “Ordinances of Salvation!”

Introduction

- In our serious “Basic of Faith” we saw until now about the inspired and infallible Scripture, all about who God and His Son Jesus Christ is, the loss of mankind as a sinful nature and finally also the salvation of man through Jesus Christ, the savior of mankind. Even though men's general condition and situation is totally desperate, he can receive complete salvation and freedom from it. Man can be completely restored to a new relationship with God.
- But what comes then? Is that now all? Does someone who is saved now just continue to live as before? What is God's intention with a saved person like you and me? That is actually what we will see in the next parts of this series, when we consider further aspects of our Christian faith.
- But one of the essential plan of God with His people, was to form a group with all believers who are saved. The plan was the church, where all the people who get saved in Jesus Christ can find a home and family. This is what starts in the Book of Acts with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We will still look at the institution of the church in another sermon.
- Today we want to look at two essential aspects and parts of the church. These two aspects are the two main ordinances of the church. The fact is that...

Prop.: At the establishing of His church, Jesus commanded two ordinances of the church!

- In our preaching text in Acts 2:37-47 we can actually read that the Apostle Peter and the other disciples of Jesus immediately put these ordinances in practice. In this passage we see the strong link between these two ordinances of the church with the salvation work of Jesus Christ. Both ordinances completely enclose and express fully the perfect salvation work of Jesus. In the same time these ordinances are not staying apart from the church but are an essential part of it.
- We should maybe first see in general a few points about ordinances, before we name and look more closely these two ordinances.
- First of all we need to say what ordinances are not:
 - They are not sacraments. Sacraments are an expression of an actual saving process. If one does it, one receives salvation. That is not the fact with ordinances. They can never bring us salvation. You can receive salvation only through Jesus Christ. He is the only

- sacrament. Ordinances only express the salvation that you have received in Jesus Christ.
- They do not make you more holy or being sanctified. You are only holy through God.
- What are then ordinances:
 - First of all they are *“an established rite or ceremony”*.
 - Secondly it is an *“orderly arrangement”* given by the Lord Himself. The ordinances present order, the order of salvation. The ordinances give us a line of our salvation and a clear direction as we still will see.
 - Thirdly they are a *“permanent rule of actions, a rule established by divine authority.”* There is a certain authority and power in the ordinances, as we will still see.
- Let us now see what are these ordinances of the church and how are they defined and described.

I. Baptism, the first ordinance of the church (2:37-40; Matthew 28:19)

- After being filled with the Holy Spirit, we read in Acts 2 how Peter addressed the crowd and started to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It had a deep and powerful effect on the crowd, as we can read in Acts 2:37: They were “cut to their heart”. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful. Preached in the anointing of the Holy Spirit it has an outstanding effect on the people that hear it.
- The crowd wanted to know what they need to do to be saved. They listened to the Gospel of Jesus and his salvation work. Now they wanted to receive it themselves. How can one receive personally the salvation of Jesus? The answer is very clear in verse 38: *“38 Peter replied, “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.”*
 - First is to repent of all the sins and by faith accept Jesus in ones life. Acts 8:12 we read: *“But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”* Faith is central
 - Then follows according to the instructions the second important step: Get baptized. Baptism is the first ordinance of the church. It is a command for every one. In Acts 8:12 we see that it is for men and women. Everyone should get baptized who has repented and who believes in Jesus.
 - At this point we see that actually it was not a choice, but it was an essential part of the process of salvation in Jesus.
- Jesus himself commanded his disciples and his church to baptize those that get saved. We read this command in the great commission in Matthew 28:19: *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* The disciples were commanded to make disciples, which means to lead people to Christ so that they get saved. But the following command is to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To make disciples and to baptize them is closely linked and basically one step.
- In verse 41 we read then that all got baptized who accepted the message. It is important that

a new believer receives instruction and is aware of the full Gospel before getting baptized. Baptism follows the conscious step of repentance and receiving Jesus in ones life by faith.

- What is the meaning of the ordinance of Baptism?
 - It is not the act of Baptism that saves us. We might have heard from the Catholic Church or also the Lutheran church, that infants need to be baptized, so that they are saved in Christ and not lost. They consider baptism as a saving element, again as a sacrament.
 - However baptism in itself does not save. According to the Word of God only repentance and faith in Jesus Christ save us. Even if you have not been baptized, but you have accepted Jesus in your life and received forgiveness, you are saved (still you should get baptized and not hesitate to do so if you haven't).
 - The full and obedient step of salvation in Jesus is to get baptized as a result of a saving act by Jesus. Everyone that becomes a believer should acknowledge it by getting baptized. However, every person needs to make himself or herself this decision. No one can be forced to it.
 - Baptism is very important because with it we identify ourselves with Jesus, as we can read in Romans 6:3-4: *“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*
 - Baptism first of all symbolizes the fact that we die with Jesus. We bury our old life with all sin and transgression. As we immerse into the water, we express that we die with Jesus. We declare with it that we accept the death of Jesus for our sins in our life.
 - Fortunately we do not stay under the water, but we immediately raise again out of it. By this we symbolize that we raise to new life with Christ, as Christ was risen from the death after 3 days.
 - But with the baptism we also openly and publicly confess the Lordship of Jesus over our life. We read in Romans 10:9: *“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* It is a personal declaration to the visible, but also invisible world that Jesus is now the Lord over our life and we are following him.
 - It is finally also an entrance rite that we are now belonging to Christ's church. Again in verse 41 we read that those that accepted the message and where baptized were added to the other believers instantaneously. Here we see how baptism is the tide link between the salvation of Jesus and the belonging to his body, the church.
- Thus baptism looks at our past, present and future. Our past in what Jesus has done for us when he died at the cross. In our present that we are now saved by repentance and faith through the salvation work of Jesus. In our future that we have received new eternal life in Jesus Christ.
- Here I can only call everyone who has not yet get baptized, but has become a believer to make it fixed by getting baptized. It is the same way like a product. Of course you get the

product, when it is in your hand. But you are then the legal owner, when you have put the signature under your contract for the product. Baptism is the signature to our contract of life with Jesus. Jesus has given us new life, but with the baptism we fix it and show to everyone that we are followers of Jesus. Also as a church we should always emphasize the baptism in water and also offer and practice it.

- Finally it is to see that according to the symbolic we clearly hold to a faith baptism of adults (also children with a clear decision for Jesus) by immersion. That is normally the given biblical example, which we want to follow. In that way baptism is the first important ordinance of the church that we want to keep and follow.

II. Communion, the second ordinance of the church (2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25,26)

- The second ordinance of the church that Jesus commanded us is the breaking of bread or the Lord's supper or the Communion. We read that command of Jesus to his disciples the first time in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25: *“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*” Jesus commanded his disciples that they should always break the bread and drink the wine to his remembrance, that He died for us and saved us through the breaking of his body and the shed of his blood.
- The disciples put the second ordinance immediately into practice with the first church, as we can read in Acts 2:42: *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to **the breaking of bread** and to prayer.”* All the followers devoted themselves to the church. They devoted themselves to the teaching, the fellowship, the prayer and also to the communion. Beside the teaching, the fellowship and the prayer, communion was an essential part of the church. Later in verse 46 we read, that even when they met in their homes for fellowship they were breaking the bread and thus holding communion to the remembrance of the Lord. Communion was not just one element of their worship service in the temple, but even of their home-groups, when they came together.
- Communion was more for the disciples than just a religious exercise and tradition to maybe feel holy. It was the full remembrance of what Jesus has done for them and for us as we can read in 1 Corinthians 11:26: *“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”* Actually to eat the bread and drink the cup in remembrance of Jesus, was to proclaim the death of Jesus Christ until he comes. Here we see some important spiritual aspects of the communion:
 - There is first of all again the past element of remembering, what Jesus has done. It is looking back to the salvation work of Jesus and its effect on our live. We are looking back with full gratitude to Jesus for his work and with its effect on our lives.
 - But what happened in the past is not also effecting the present. In fact with taking the Communion we are proclaiming the Lord's death. We are giving testimony that reaches out to people. Even though there is no saving power in the elements of the communion or the communion itself, like the Catholic church believes, still through the power of the Holy Spirit it is one way of a powerful proclamation to people. As we take Communion

we should trust that the Holy Spirit is using it and reveals God's changing power. We should even expect God's work through signs and wonders.

- The third aspect is the future element. By taking the bread and wine we are looking forward to the day that our Lord Jesus Christ and his Kingdom will finally come. We are expressing our expectation for His coming.
- Communion should be a fixed part in our church and fellowship. There are different ways to celebrate communion. It is good to do it ones a month. However, I believe it can be even more often be celebrated. There is not even anything against it to celebrate it every time that believers come together. Also the elements are free, even though the best symbol is the bread and the wine. The most essential is to do it in order and in remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ. The communion should always be a special part and celebration for us Christian that we should highly value and cherish.

Conclusion

- Jesus intention to save us was not only for ourselves, but especially to establish his kingdom through the form of the church. In order to make the link between the salvation work of Jesus and the church, *at the establishing of His church, Jesus commanded two ordinances of the church!* These two ordinances of the church are baptism, which was also the intaking or adding of the convert to the church and the communion, which was the constant remembrance and proclamation of the salvation work of Jesus in the church.
- These two ordinances are still today an essential element in the church. Every church should have this ordinance fixed established in its midst and exercising it regularly. It should be a fixed part in a church, as it was commanded by the Lord himself. And also every saved person should undergo the baptism at one point (ideal in the beginning of a Christian life) and then also participate in the Lord's supper, the Communion. Amen.