



# **WHERE ARE THE BAPTIZED?**

**Sermon by: Dr. DAVID E. RAMIREZ**

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**TITLE:** Where Are the Baptized?

**TEXT:** 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. (Romans 6:3-4 NIV).

- 1) It seems that since the beginning, baptism was associated with going down into the darkness of suffering and death of Jesus—a small taste of what Jesus had to endure.
- 2) Just as Jesus emerged from the waters, receiving the Spirit and hearing the voice of the Father, the same happens with the newly baptized Christian; God's voice is heard saying: "You are my son! You are my daughter!"
- 3) Where should the baptized be found? Christians should be found in Jesus' neighborhood. Jesus is found in the neighborhood of confusion and suffering, along with those in need, among those who suffer the most.
- 4) The life of the baptized is a life of prophecy, priesthood, and royalty. The three characteristics that distinguished the ministry of Jesus were that of prophet, priest, and king.
- 5) The church is not a collection of perfect people, but we the baptized, are followers of Jesus, who advance with a mission of salvation.

Today...the Question is NOT, Where Are the Lost? The Question Is, Where Are the Baptized? (See Romans 6:3-4).

It is rather easy to find the lost. Just “google” it!

The difficult task today is to find the baptized of Jesus Christ.

“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” (Romans 6:3-4 NIV).

All of us start with baptism. Officially, people are formally incorporated into the Christian community after their water baptism. In its original form, the word baptism meant “to submerge.”

If we study the New Testament, we discover that Jesus used this word in His ministry and teachings. Paul also used it often in his letters.

Jesus spoke about distress and death awaiting him as the baptism He was to endure “... Jesus answered them... “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:38 NKJV). He spoke as if He would go toward suffering and death, like a baptism He would have to endure.

He said it was necessary for Him to go through immersion; and until this happened, His work would not be completed: “But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50 NKJV).

### **Baptism of Suffering**

It seems that since the beginning, baptism was associated with going down into the darkness of suffering and death of Jesus—a small taste of what Jesus had to endure.

In Romans 6:3, Paul refers to it as being baptized into Christ’s death. In the narrative about the baptism of Jesus, He went down into the waters of the Jordan River...and while Jesus was rising from the waters, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and a voice came from heaven saying, “This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

As we read this story, we can immediately connect it with another story involving water, the Spirit, and the Word. In the beginning of creation, Genesis 1 tells us the waters were in total chaos, and the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters; the Spirit of God would come and go over the surfaces of the chaotic waters. A strong wind of the Spirit was blowing on the surface.

First, there was chaos, then the wind of the Holy Spirit; and out of the chaotic waters, the world was formed and everything created. And God said, “It is good.”

### **The Waters, the Spirit, and the Voice**

With this we understand why the early Christians associated the event of baptism with the image Paul uses to describe the Christian life—the New Creation.

The beginning of the Christian life is a new beginning of God's creative work. And God is not finished with the creative process. He continues His work in the life of each of the believers—He is doing something wonderful with you and me. Be patient with your brother and your sister. God is not yet finished with His creative work. We are under construction.

### **Hearing God's Voice**

And just as Jesus emerged from the waters, receiving the Spirit, and hearing the voice of the Father, the same happens with the newly baptized Christian; God's voice is heard saying: "You are my son! You are my daughter!"

Being baptized is the recovery of humanity which God had planned from the beginning in Genesis 1 and 2. Jesus entered the scene and He restored humanity to be what it should be— a new creation.

For this to take place, Jesus had to come down into the chaos of our human world. He had to come completely to our level—where things have no form or meaning, so that humanity is born again. This means, that if we ask ourselves, where do we expect to find the baptized? One response would be, "...in the neighborhood of chaos."

In other words, we should expect to find Christians—His church—near places where humanity is at a higher risk, where humanity is in chaos, disfigured, and in need.

John 1:14 emphasizes, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." *The Message* version reads, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into our neighborhood."

### **Where Should the Baptized be Found?**

Christians should be found in Jesus' neighborhood. Jesus is found in the neighborhood of confusion and suffering, along with those in need, among those who suffer the most.

If being baptized is to be led to Jesus, then being baptized is to be led to chaos and a humanity in need, who has forgotten its own destiny.

Baptism means to be in the depths with Jesus; in the depths of human needs, in the midst of darkness and chaos—but baptism also means to be in the depths of God's love; in the depths where God's Spirit is recreating and refreshing human life.

Heaven was also opened to the baptized in Acts 2, and all the power, the strength, and the wind of God descended on them, and God used Peter's voice to say: We are not drunk. What happened was the promise of the Father found in Joel 2 was fulfilled, where it was anticipated that He would pour out His "Spirit upon all flesh, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28 NKJV).

Then we are baptized twice—in the deep waters and in the flames of the Spirit.

Being baptized is not a state of separation or distance from people, instead, baptism is climbing to a level of higher compassion—solidarity with others. It is to become affected, even contaminated by human chaos and the pain of humanity. It is a profound paradox.

Baptism is a ceremony where we are washed, cleansed, and recreated; and the baptism of the Spirit is an experience where we are empowered. It is a ceremony where we are pushed to the center of the human situation—to the border of God’s kingdom and the kingdom that Satan thinks belongs to him. In other words, you don’t go down into the waters of the Jordan without stirring up some mud.

When we are brought where Jesus is in baptism, we let our defenses down so as to be where He is—in the depths of the human condition. In those waters, we not only find our sin and brokenness, but we also find the sins of the people, with their pain, brokenness, and human despair, with the ugliness of humanity, and with all its limitations.

And when we rise from the water of Jesus’ baptism, we hear what He heard: This is my son, this is my daughter; this is the one who has the right to call me Father. Galatians 4:6 says, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” (NKJV).

We are in between two things that seem contradictory. We are in the middle of God’s heart, the joy of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit; and we are in the middle of a world with challenges, suffering, sin, and pain. And because Jesus has decided to stand in the middle of these two realities, it is there where we should be “and where I am, there will my servant be also...” (John 12:26 ESV).

One of the greatest privileges in twenty years as missionaries, pastors, and educators in Latin America was going to places where people lived in a dangerous proximity to the neighborhoods of Jesus. Where their testimony meant they are at risk in several fronts.

The majority of our churches are anchored in the slums, urban settlements, and remote towns. We know of the martyrdom of pastors who have been killed by organized crime, only for fulfilling their call to bear witness and share the good news of the gospel.

### **The Baptized Life—Prophet, Priest, and King**

The life of the baptized is a life of prophecy, priesthood, and royalty. The three characteristics that distinguished the ministry of Jesus were that of prophet, priest, and king.

1. We have been baptized to be prophets. The prophets spoke and called their community to act with integrity. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Hosea constantly asked God’s people: Do you remember who you are? Do you remember what God has called you for? Have you completely forgotten the reason you are here?

Then, as baptized people, we should reflect on the prophetic role of Jesus, and ask direct questions. We should ask the baptized, repeatedly to the whole church: Have you forgotten why are you here? We must ask each other—What do you see? What is your vision? What is your role?

As prophets, we should lead each other back to the fundamentals:

- Return to the baptism,
- Return to the Word of God,
- Return to the Lord’s Table,
- Return to prayer,
- Return to the Upper Room.

We need to prophesy to each other to remind us we are God's redeemed, baptized, sanctified, empowered by the Spirit, loved by God, and have a missional responsibility before God.

“Pentecost is not a ticket to go to heaven, but an empowerment to go to the world.”

2. We have been baptized to be priests. We should remember that in the Old Testament, they interpreted God and humanity.

- The ones who built bridges between God and the people whenever relationships were broken.
- The ones who offered sacrifices to God to re-create a deeper relationship with Him, was the priest.

As baptized people, we are in the business of building bridges, not walls. We have become experts at building walls...how we like to make the ministry difficult and complicated...but God submerged us to be bridge builders. We don't build walls; we direct the people to the door—the door who is Christ, our Lord.

We must recognize situations where there are ruptures, wounds, damage, sin, and disorder, to present them the power of God and build something new.

Now more than ever, we must see the most vulnerable of the earth; the foreign and immigrant, the abused woman, the violated, and marginalized, and the boys and girls at risk. We must connect the needs to a missional strategy which will make a difference.

We, the baptized, are responsible for connecting the people to God. If we don't do it, who will? Are we waiting for others? Are we waiting for the rocks to speak?

We need more entry points, bigger and better access to the kingdom of God. The way of faith will be narrow, but its doors are wide. (One of the branches of the Pentecostal church in Chile has eighty thousand ministry outreaches throughout the country that serve as entry points to the Kingdom of Christ.)

Social networks, radio, television, small groups and home groups are excellent access doors to God's family. We need to open more doors, build fewer walls, but more access bridges to the kingdom of God. We have to think larger, and stop being governed by the grasshopper complex; (we can't do it; we don't have resources; it's too complicated). Let's build access bridges that generate hope to people in all the spheres of our society.

3. We have been baptized to be kings and queens. The kings, in the olden days of Israel, spoke to God on behalf of the people. The king himself had a priest's role. The difference with this king was the authority and liberty to improve the laws of his society. In Jeremiah, we read the definition and meaning of a king: “He defended the cause of the poor and needy” (Jeremiah 22:16 NIV).

The baptized seeks reconciliation and repairs broken relationships; they live a life pursuing justice and freedom.

Up from deep waters, we rise from chaos and desperation to experience an open heaven and the Spirit who descends with hope and power. This is followed by a voice saying: This is my son; this is my daughter who fills me with joy. It is a new beginning, a new humanity, a new creation. Our

church must become an expert in identifying brokenness and destruction, harm, and disorder, and replace it with love, and the transforming and creative power of God.

The reason why many of our sanctuaries are empty is because we are on the inside and the unbelievers are on the outside. We should find Jesus and His Church in the land of sinners. Many of our pastors have become good church chaplains, we care for the same members of the church through all their stages of life until we bury them. I believe it is good.

However, it is time to mobilize the church outward. We need to scatter more and meet less. It is time to move the waters with more force. The hour of the creative Spirit of God has arrived...the chaos, sin, and confusion are in their maximum expression. In our time, the Spirit of God is moving from there to here and from here to there.

The church, the baptized, should move where the Spirit is moving, rising against chaos, evil, terrorism, sin, violence, and injustice. We must move from here to there and from there to here. Nothing should stop the movement of the church.

The church must know how to move with the Spirit. The Spirit is already there, over the chaotic situation in every nation, over every city upon the entire earth, and is waiting for HIS CHURCH. God, move your church ... let us rise to the tsunami of God.

Let us go to the sinners and non-believers, let us bring the good news of the gospel!  
It is not the time to be absent from the world. The world is in this condition because we, the baptized, lock ourselves in our temples. Too many churches are entertaining their people within their four walls while the giants of violence, human trafficking, and poverty walk loose doing their thing.

### **The Mission of Salvation to Jesus' Neighborhood**

The church is not a collection of perfect people, but we the baptized, are followers of Jesus, who advance with a mission of salvation. The church is not a social club, we are the baptized! We are followers of Jesus to bring Christ to the world with the power of His Spirit. The church is not a kiosk or a warehouse where we buy what we want...but a place of gathering to see the glory of God, and then, go out and change the world.

Healing the wounded is vital to the church, but we cannot become just a hospital. We should go out into the world—to Jesus' neighborhood with urgency—to finish the work of Christ and His kingdom.

Luther used to say, "Here I stand." Three words that changed the world forever. But now, for the new reformation we need to change these three words to. . .

### **There We GO**

It is not here anymore; it is there.  
It is not I anymore; it is we.  
It is not stand anymore; it is GO.  
There we GO!

—Leonard Sweet

### **Where are the baptized?**