

Titus 3:4-7 *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

God Saved Us

1. When Christ appeared
2. Because of his grace
3. Through the Holy Spirit's work in baptism
4. So that we might be heirs of heaven

In England many years ago, a newspaper posed the question to the public: "What is wrong with the world?" People were supposed to write in with their answers and the best answer would win. A religious writer named G. K. Chesterton wrote in with his response. It was the shortest one received. What is wrong with the world? G. K. Chesterton wrote, "Dear sirs, I am. Sincerely, G. K. Chesterton." He understood that the problems in the world all stem from ourselves.

Paul wrote in the verses before our text, *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.* That's a pretty ugly description. Even though we can send men to the moon and rovers to Mars, deep inside, God's Word says that all we are is out of control and weak people. He said that we are *enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures*. Isn't that a pretty good description of Americans? We live for fun. Our lives are dominated by chasing after pleasures.

So, what did God do? *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared.* God's love and kindness appeared in history, visibly, in the person of Jesus Christ. Like a beautiful flower that pokes out of a manure pile, God's kindness appeared in the midst of sin, our sins. Paul did not say that others were once disobedient and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. No, he said that this is true of each one of us.

In 1868, when Andrew Carnegie was 33 years old, he had an annual income of \$50,000. He resolved that in the future he would spend anything he earned above that amount for charity. As it turned out, he had plenty to spend for charity. He made a fortune in the oil, railroad and steel industries. True to his word, he gave away more than \$350 million during his lifetime. People called him a philanthropist.

That's the word that Paul used to describe God. It's the only time in the New Testament that this word is used of God. It literally means "friend of mankind." It emphasizes that God not only loved us unconditionally, but that he likes us. He is our friend. And that is the only reason we are saved. We are saved by his mercy and love alone.

A French philosopher claimed that life is nothing until it is lived. In other words, your life has no value until you do something with it. The gospel of God's love says differently. God fully knew you and loved you before he brought you into existence. He wanted you to be. He wanted you to be with him. He wanted you to be here. Never doubt that God chose to make you and to save you.

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. Every non-Christian religion and many parts even within Christianity teach that somehow our good works play a part in our salvation. But doesn't Paul make it clear here that God saved us not because of righteous things we did? Martin Luther wrote, "No one can be good and do good unless God's grace first make him good; and no one becomes good by works, but good works are done only by him who is good. Just so the fruits do not make the tree, but the tree bears the fruit." (*What Luther Says*, #1878) Because of his mercy, God saved us. Not because of us. God saved us through the Holy Spirit's work in baptism.

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior. When God saves us, he raises us from spiritual death to life. We were as active in being born again as we were in being born the first time. In other words, God is active and we are passive. We do not exercise our free will to be born again any more than Lazarus exercised his free will to come from death to life. Jesus called him to life with his word.

The Holy Spirit saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal. By adding "renewal" it's like saying that God put us in the witness protection plan and gave us a new identity and a new start. No longer are our sins held against us. No longer are we drifting through life without purpose. The Holy Spirit gives you rebirth and renewal.

How? Through baptism. It's clear that when Paul talks about a washing of rebirth, he is talking about baptism. Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit." (John 3:5) In our text Paul is practically repeating what Jesus said. Water and the Spirit. Washing. Rebirth. How could we conclude that he is talking about anything else but baptism? God saved us through baptism.

It wasn't impressive as far as rivers are concerned. It wasn't particularly deep. It certainly wasn't navigable. The silt in the water even made the river take on a brownish color. To the proud Syrian, the Abana and Pharpar rivers of his homeland were far more impressive. However, after much hesitation he did as he was told and bathed seven times in the muddy waters of the Jordan. It was a miracle. Naaman the Syrian obeyed the word of Elisha the prophet and he was healed of his leprosy!

It wasn't impressive as far as water is concerned. It wasn't bottled water. It wasn't naturally carbonated or imported water. It came from the faucet in the church basement. To all appearances it was just plain water.

But as Martin Luther said in the Small Catechism, "It is water used by God's command and connected with God's Word." Just as God connected his Word and promise to the water when Naaman washed, so God connects his Word and promise to the water of our baptisms.

Jesus not only connected his Word to the water of baptism, he connected himself. By agreeing to be baptized by John, he was connecting himself and his saving work to baptism. That's why Paul can write, *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.*

What's the goal of God saving us? *So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.* When God put his name on you at baptism, he wrote you into his will. Baptism gives you a better bequest than inheriting millions of dollars. Through baptism we receive an inheritance that gets us through death and promises a life of joy and happiness that will never end.

Just because we can't enjoy it now, let's not forget about it. Life can do that to us, can't it? We can get wrapped up so much in this world that we can forget who we are and where we are going. When the troubles of life cause us to question our identity or doubt our future, we can turn to the promises God gave us at our baptism for comfort. Instead of looking at your bank account, your physical health, or your love life to see if God loves you, look at your baptism. Luther put it this way in the Large Catechism, "So when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say, 'Nevertheless, I am baptized.'" (Part IV, para. 44)

For this reason it would be good to have a reminder of your baptism in your bedroom or somewhere else in your home. Find your baptism certificate, frame it and put it on the wall. Or find something else that can remind you, "I'm baptized." When temptations come, you can remember, "But I'm baptized. A child of God doesn't do that." When problems make you doubt God's love for you, you can remember, "I'm baptized and so a child of God. God does not forsake his children."

God saved us. Through Jesus. Through baptism. Without our works. Purely because of his mercy. God saved us.