

Easter 6 / May 10, 2026

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 for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus.”

Baptism Saves as an Appeal to God through Jesus’ Resurrection

Peter was a very important person in Jesus’ ministry. His name is actually Simon. When Jesus called him, He renamed him Peter. Peter was the first to confess Jesus as the Christ. Jesus said He would build His church on that confession and that the gates of hell would not overcome it. However, if you look at the index of the New Testament you will see that Peter doesn’t have near as many letters in the New Testament as Paul, just two. Paul pretty much wrote the New Testament, the letters at any rate. Nevertheless, what Peter wrote, though less in quantity, is just as important as what Paul, the evangelists and John wrote. It was inspired by the same Spirit and so it truly and really is not the word of man, but the word of God.

In this letter Peter speaks at length about suffering in terms of our life in Christ. He begins speaking of how the readers’ faith had recently been tested, ‘as if by fire’. He speaks of their suffering as beneficial for their lives in Christ, saying, it is a gracious thing in the sight of God if “one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.” He is not speaking about any suffering, but about suffering because of our faith in Christ, our confession of His name and our association with Him in His body the church. Jesus said that we should not be surprised, but rather expect suffering for the sake of His name. Jesus uses our sufferings for His sake to strengthen our faith, drawing us closer to His heart, so that when big tests come our faith will stand firm.

Peter speaks about suffering in view of the suffering of Christ. Christ as Peter says, *“Suffered once for sins, (our sins) the righteous for the unrighteous, (He is the Righteous Son of God, we are unrighteous sons of Adam) that He might bring us to God (now through faith, fully and forever, body and soul in His resurrection).”* We suffer because of and for the sake of Christ, because the world, the devil and our own sinful nature are opposed to Christ and resist His rule and reign. Christians in the first century suffered much more persecution than we do in North America in the twenty-first century. Believers in many places in the twenty-first century suffer much more persecution, hostility and violence for the sake of Christ than we can imagine. We are thankful to spared such great suffering, but we also need to be

mindful that Jesus said if they hated Him, they will hate us also. We need to be aware that suffering for the sake of Christ is always a possibility, so that when it comes, we are not taken by surprise and our faith is derailed. We are aware of the possibility of suffering for the sake of Christ so that when it comes, we stand firm in the Lord.

Most importantly, we remember that God has given great promises that are guaranteed to sustain us in every suffering, keep us steadfast in faith in every persecution and guaranteed to bring us to life everlasting. He gives us His promises in His word enshrined in the scriptures. He gives us His promises in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. He gives us His promises in the word and washing of Holy Baptism. Peter speaks of baptism, in our text saying it *“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, Holy Communion saves, the Words of scripture save, because through them the Holy Spirit blesses us with faith, gives our faith growth, sustains it in every trial, persecution, affliction and suffering of life and promises to bring it to fulfilment in our share of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Baptism, communion and the ministry of the word are not our work, they are God’s work. They are things we do, but they are God’s work in us. We take the word, read it and hear it. We take the bread and wine of holy communion, eat and drink it. We present ourselves for baptism and remember it in repentance, but in baptism, communion and taking up of the word it is the Holy Spirit who is at work to create, nurture and give our faith growth. The outward action is ours, but the inner working is of the Holy Spirit. More than this, the very desire to hear the word, read the scriptures, receive baptism and holy communion along with the faith to believe, are the work of the Holy Spirit within us. This is important, because if we are tempted to doubt, if our faith is failing under the weight of any suffering we need to know where to look to find the certainty of salvation and the guarantee of God’s promises in Christ Jesus. We look to the guarantees God gives us in the word, the bread, the wine and the water; for in and through these, He gives us Jesus. Jesus earned our salvation on the cross, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God. God brings Jesus and His salvation to us in the word, the water, the bread and wine. These are the means by which He draws us close to His heart in love. These are the means by which He clears our conscience of guilt in the forgiveness of sin and guarantees our salvation in the resurrection of Jesus.

St. Peter compares Christian baptism to the flood, by which God washed away a sinful world and through which He preserved Noah and his family from the

condemnation of sin. God washed away the sin of the old world through the waters of the flood. God lamented he made humans in the world, because in the ages following the sin of Adam, the descendants of Eve became progressively worse, so that Genesis says, *“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”* Noah was spared, not because he had no sin, but because he found favour in the eyes of the Lord. Noah was righteous in comparison with his generation, but He was spared because God in His favour did not count his sin against him. He was saved as we are, by grace through faith. It was the gift of God.

Noah was spared, but the flood which he witnessed and survived by the grace of God, was a perpetual reminder that the wages of sin is death, that he was saved by grace and that he always needed to count his relationship with God as of first importance. Baptism is a similar reminder that sin, sinfulness and sinners will be swept away at the end of the age. Baptism is a reminder of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, who took our sins upon Himself in order that we would come to God. Baptism is a reminder that we are saved by the grace of God in Christ Jesus and always need to count our relationship with God as of first importance. Baptism is the power of God by which He gives us the blessing and benefits of Jesus’ death and resurrection, forgiveness, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and eternal life.

In the letter to the Ephesians St. Paul writes *“You have been saved by grace through faith.”* Several times Jesus told people their faith had saved them. Faith is the means by which we receive God’s grace for salvation. How then can Peter then say that baptism saves us? Isn’t faith something we do and baptism something someone does for us? Faith is something we believe, and baptism is something that is done to us, but both faith and baptism are the gift and working of God, inspired, created and maintained by the Holy Spirit. Faith saves because faith is the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts by which we believe in Jesus as our Saviour and receive from Him the grace of forgiveness, His righteousness to cover our unrighteousness and ultimately, His resurrection to transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body.

Baptism saves because baptism is the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to incorporate us into the body of Christ, to give us a share in Christ’s death and resurrection and to empower us to walk in newness of life, so we seek to please God with our actions and attitudes; loving Him with our whole heart and loving our neighbours as ourselves. The outward action is by humans, but the working is of God. The power of baptism is not the water. The power of baptism is the word and

working of the Holy Spirit. In baptism the Holy Spirit blesses us with the testimony of a good conscience by leading us to Jesus and the cross upon which He suffered and died for the atonement of human sin, our sin, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God. Baptism saves us, because it is the promise of God to work all things in our lives to our eternal good, that our faith may be secure through all the challenges, trials, tragedies and sufferings and sorrows of life and be brought to fulfillment in the resurrection of Jesus to life everlasting.

Peter writes, *“Baptism saves you...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* Baptism is God’s promise for the sake of Christ to hear us when we call, help us in time of need, empower us to resist the desires of the world, the devil and our sinful nature. Baptism is God’s promise for the sake of Christ to raise us up when we fall. Baptism is something God does in our hearts and in our lives, day in and day out, every moment of every day, with every breath we take, whether are awake or asleep, until we fall asleep in Jesus. And even that is not the end of what God does for us in baptism. For the fulfillment of His work in baptism is to bring our bodies to rise from the dust of death, so we may stand in His presence body and soul forever in the resurrection of Jesus. *“Baptism 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.”* May God’s promises in Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, be made full in each of our lives in the resurrection of Jesus. In His Name. Amen