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*Fearless Q: What Do the Scriptures Say About
Infant Baptism?
Various Verses*

Welcome to our Sunday morning service, kids! I'm so glad to have you worshipping with us. You're a significant part of our church family! I know most of you know me as Pastor Megan. But to my big brother, Mike, I'm just Megan, and he tells me that I have a "Pastor Voice" when I start talking spiritual stuff at home. But you know what? He's a pilot, and he has a pilot's voice that he uses when he's getting bossy. We're very different people, Mike and I. But you know what? We share a lot of things. We are in the same family! Up until 10 years ago, we shared a last name. And it's a doozy—Podawiltz.

I want to talk about my family, but as I do, I want you to write down your **family name** on the back of this blue Write Back 'Atcha card. Leave some space because I have 2 more words for you to write down as we go. If you like to draw, go ahead and doodle around it things that your family is about. I am absolutely sure that anywhere I go in the world, if I meet a Podawiltz, I am meeting someone who's in my family. To be a Podawiltz means you must love the beach. You must love big potluck events, especially Thanksgiving. It means there's a lot of military family that I'm closer with than my own cousins. It means we are west coast, pioneering people. I was born into this family, and when I was born, my family gave me their last name, Podawiltz. Then over the years, growing up proved that I really was a Podawiltz—a lover of the beach and potlucks, a pioneer, and always including new military family.

But do you think I knew I loved the beach when I was 9 months old? Could I name all my military relatives? No, those were family traditions and values that I grew into and took on as my own. I'm proud to be a Podawiltz.

The Fearless Question today is a matter of family business. What does the Scripture say about infant baptism? The next word I want you to write down, kids, is **baptism**. Baptism is something the Church has universally agreed is a good thing to do, no matter what church you're from! Jesus commanded it very clearly in Matthew 28: 18-20, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

So I'll give away my punchline now—be baptized! Jesus wants us all to make disciples, that is, followers of Jesus, and mark them with water speaking the

blessing of the name of God—the family name—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey all that God said. We all agree that this is God’s way of marking his family! So if you have never had the family name spoken over you, we want to baptize you and extend the family promises of God to you. Our next baptism opportunity is at the end of the month, August 28th in the Harbor or here in service. If you or your children want to be baptized, we’d love to see you at the membership class today or Thursday. So be baptized! That’s the clear teaching of Scripture we can all agree on.

We also all agree that baptism is not the same thing as salvation. You don’t have to be baptized to be saved! Look at Jesus on the day that he died on the cross. Who was also dying on a cross that day? Two thieves, and one of them believed that day that Jesus was the Son of God! And what did Jesus say to him? Today you will be with me in paradise. Was he baptized? No! Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” So baptism isn’t what gets your name written into God’s Book of Life. All evangelicals in all denominations agree about this.

So we all agree you should be baptized because Jesus commanded it but not because it’s what gets us into heaven. So what does baptism do? And when should we do it? That’s what we want to explore today. Let me say, though—sincere people who love and follow Jesus and study the Scriptures have decided different things about this, and that is okay. Because we agree that baptism at whatever age is not essential for salvation. So you won’t find instruction for baptism in the essentials of our faith, which is the core things we believe. You can find those essentials right there in the pew in front of you. So whether or not you agree with me from this point forward doesn’t determine which one of us gets to go to heaven, and it doesn’t even determine whether or not you can sincerely become a member at Chapel Hill. But I will say, what I’m about to share with you I have deeply studied. And furthermore, the most of the Church for most of history has agreed with the baptism of infants. So I’m confident that what I’m going to say is a sincere interpretation of Scripture. I am going to represent the standard practice of Chapel Hill and of most Jesus followers both now and historically.

Baptism is one of two signs that God gave us to remind us that Jesus has made the way for us to be in relationship with God. God seals that relationship with baptism and we remember that relationship in communion.

Here’s an amazing and unique thing about our God—God wanted to be in relationship with us. So he initiated relationship. We call this relationship **covenant**. That’s the third word I want you all to write down and learn today, covenant. Covenant means formal relationship. It’s a relationship that includes vows and promises from both parties and blessings that extend out of that relationship. And God is the one who initiated relationship with us—he is the covenant-maker. When we understand God as a God of covenant, we then understand what actually happens in baptism and when we should do it.

We don't use the word covenant a lot anymore. There's really only one way we use this word today. Does anyone know when we still use the word covenant? At weddings! Really until my generation, it was still common language to use the word covenant to talk about marriage. Because we're not using this word covenant very much anymore, we have to do some work to understand it and define it.

We have some holdouts of covenant ceremonies that happen at weddings today that help us understand God as a God of covenant and baptism as a sign of the covenant relationship he has with us. What's the back and forth stuff that brides and grooms say at weddings? Vows. And what do husbands and wives give each other during the wedding ceremony as the sign that they are now in covenant relationship? Ring. And who buys the first ring, traditionally? The groom. When we commit to relationship with one another for the rest of our lives, we give each other rings to wear to remember the promises we made.

God, too, when he enters into covenant relationship with us, gives us baptism as the ring—the sign that He has made relationship promises to us. Our baptism reminds us that He will be faithful to fulfill all that he has promised us.

God started listing promises to his people, that they would receive because they were in relationship with Him, in the opening pages of Scripture. What are the promises God has made to us? Every time God renews his covenant, he repeats his promises. We see them first with Adam, then Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. They have never changed. Because God has never changed. And His covenant, the promise of relationship that He has forged with His people, has not changed. So let's look at these promises God has made. Let's go back to Abraham.

In Genesis chapters 12, 15, and 17 God reiterates that He promises to Abraham that He will always be with him. God will be Abraham's God, and all Abraham's people will be God's people. And all the nations of the world will be blessed through Abraham. Furthermore, this promise God says is for Abraham's children's children. To seal that relationship—the relationship of God with Abraham's family and all nations through Abraham—he asked Abraham to be circumcised. Abraham believed God, it says, and it was counted to him as righteousness, and so Abraham was circumcised. There the order we have is God's initiation and promise—Abraham's response of faith—and the sign of circumcision. Then God has Abraham immediately circumcise his infant son, Isaac. Isaac hasn't believed yet, he doesn't have faith yet, but the sign belongs to the infant son because the promises of God are in covenant with Abraham and his family forever.

You might ask—what does circumcision have to do with baptism? Does anyone know when baptisms started? John the Baptist wasn't the first to do baptisms! People knew what baptisms were before John came around. When someone wanted to convert to Judaism, if it was a guy, they'd be circumcised (sorry, men), and all would be baptized at the same time. The pouring of water was a ritual of cleansing

to show that this person was now in the family of God—they had joined in with God's covenant. John extends that baptism to call people to repentance in light of Jesus coming. And then Jesus himself is baptized! So it was common practice for new converts to be baptized and for their families to be baptized with them as they came into covenant.

Jesus and Paul both have a lot to say in the New Testament about circumcision being an insufficient sign, because it is a sign only on the outside when God wants to mark our hearts. And so Colossians 2: 11-12 connects the circumcision of the heart as the sign of baptism. Baptism is the sign of the New Covenant, the way that we are in relationship with Jesus. Jesus commands us to give the family name in baptism—baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The promise is the same! Right there in Matthew 28: 18-20 Jesus continues, "For surely I am with you always to the very end of the age." When the first converts were called to baptism in Acts 2: 39, it is covenant language that is called forth in baptism, "The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off." This is the same covenant language God used with Abraham years before.

So what does baptism do? It seals us with the promises of God that he makes to us in covenant relationship with us. Baptism seals God's relationship with us, like an engagement ring. When we baptize a child in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we seal them with the family name. Just as we give our family name to our kids, and through the way that we live our life we instruct them in what it means to be a Podawiltz or a Toone or a Krilich—so, too, we extend the blessing of God's name to our children, receiving them into the family of God, and promising to teach them the way of the family of God, everything he has commanded, the family values and ethics.

Look back at your doodle page. See that first name you wrote down? We want you to proudly say one day, "Yes, I am in the family of God" just as proudly as you would say, "I am a Podawiltz." Can you say your family's last name out loud for me? Really loud? Kids, we pray for the day that you say out loud that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. And we believe that in that reception of Jesus, you are saved.

We want to make space for you to publicly say out loud just as boldly and with just as much joy that you are in Jesus' family. Confirmation is our formal time to do that. We spend a year teaching our freshmen the family values of the people of God and then give them an opportunity to say yes, I am living in this way of covenant relationship with God, holding onto his promises. Though some at this point will say, no, I'm not ready to commit to living out my end of the relationship with God. I also hope you parents are listening for the opportunity to let your kids speak a commitment and a belief in Jesus in your home. I know Ryan and Dustin make space in our youth programs for kids to speak out loud that they are following Jesus. Confirmation, Day Camp, middle and high school camp, family devotions, LifeGroups—these are all opportunities and public spaces to publicly respond to the

call of Jesus, to repent and believe. And also for those who haven't been baptized to receive the sign and seal of God's covenant promises to them and be baptized.

When we understand God as a covenant God and baptism as a sign of the covenant, we answer the question, "When should we do baptism?" We can baptize our children, sealing them with the covenant promises and blessings of God. Sealing them with God's family name. That family name at the top of your list? Add "God's" right next to it. We fulfill Jesus' mission when we make disciples as we go—even in our own families—baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything God has commanded. And surely God, our covenant, faithful, unchanging God keeps the promise that he gave Abraham—to be with us always, even to the end of the age. Learning the Bible, how to love others, how to love God—those are the family traditions and family values that come with having "God's" as your family name. While some may grow up to leave the family, our prayer is that the infants we baptize will grow up into that name and be proud to say that they belong to God.

Jesus has made the way for us to be in relationship with God—a relationship that he seals with baptism. The second sign he gave us is a way for us to remember that Jesus has made the way for us to be in relationship with God. And we get to celebrate that as a family today, too. All who have been baptized, who have received God's family name, and have responded as in Romans 10:9-10, confessing with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believing in their hearts that God raised him from the dead, are welcome to receive communion.

This sign Jesus gave us that we might remember that His Spirit dwells in us. We eat ordinary bread, and we dip it in ordinary grape juice to remind us that Jesus gave his body and blood as a sacrifice for us. His perfect life fulfilled our end of the covenant bargain—the vows that we fail to fulfill every time we sin. Jesus was faithful to the covenant vows. When we eat this bread and wine, we remember that Jesus lives within us. And so through Jesus, and in Jesus, we are considered faithful to God's covenant. This was not our work. The initiative, the work, and the perfect response was Jesus' alone. So Jesus calls this way of him living in us the New Covenant. It's a new way of being in relationship with God because it's a way that has already been made perfect in Jesus.

So on the night he was betrayed...