

“Signed”

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)
For a series on Baptism

Romans 6:1-11

June 10, 2018

Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

Anyone remember the Stevie Wonder song, “Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I’m Yours?”¹ It came out about a year after I was baptised. I am sure I was a groovy baby. Still, I don’t remember it. Obviously I’ve heard it since, though, because it came to me this week when I was thinking about baptism! *Signed. Sealed. Delivered.* These three words point to something important about our baptisms. God — the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit — the One to whom we belong, signs us, seals us, delivers us.

“Signed, sealed and delivered,” is an old legal term. When a parcel of land was sold, the deed would have the person’s signature, would carry an official seal, and would be delivered to the other person. That made the deal official. It was done. Everything was taken care of.²

Our baptism tells us that we are taken care of. Everything needed, God has done. We can follow Jesus — love God, love each other, love our neighbours, and love our enemies — because we have been “signed, sealed, and delivered.”

So let’s dig into each of these words: signed, sealed, delivered. What does each tell us about our baptism, and the life in Christ Jesus our baptism creates?

We will start today with the first word, “signed.”

II

We heard that portion from Paul’s Letter to the Romans. He wrote it because of a question: what does God’s grace in Jesus Christ mean for how we live now?

Out of unimaginable love, God in Jesus gave himself for us, we who are caught in sin. In his brutal death on a cross, Jesus enacted his forgiveness of us. It was all grace, all God’s gift, God’s gift of love.

Baptism is about that. Baptism signifies God’s free gift. It celebrates what Jesus has done for that person being baptised.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signed,_Sealed,_Delivered_I%27m_Yours. You can watch Stevie Wonder performing the song here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUj9frKY46E>.

² For the legal background, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deed#Requirements>, and for its common meaning, www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=signed%2C%20sealed%2C%20and%20delivered.

But after the baptism is done, then what? Is God's grace a "get out of jail" free card? Do we keep it in our back-pocket, something we can pull out whenever we mess up? *"Yes, I know that was bad . . . but no worries. God's forgiven me. See! [pointing to forehead] Water! So I'm covered, no matter what I do."*

If we catch ourselves thinking that way . . . then we don't get it. If we are tempted to use God's grace in Jesus as an excuse, even a license . . . it's not. Yes, God's forgiveness frees us. But God's forgiveness frees us *for something*. It is a call. It's God's call to us. God freely forgives us to invite us into a new way of being. It's a new life.

III

This new life has a shape to it. It is Jesus-shaped. In this new life to which God calls you, the Spirit shapes you to be like Jesus. Because it is Jesus-shaped, your new life has the shape of the cross and the empty tomb, the shape of death and resurrection.

Jesus death and resurrection were historical events. They were unique, singular, unrepeatable. That's vital. Jesus already died for our Sin, so we do not have to pay Sin's price again. Jesus already arose and defeated Death, so we do not need to fear Death.

Those were unique things Jesus did — and only he could do them. Yet our baptism brings us into them. They become part of who we are. They are the pattern, the death-and-resurrection pattern, that baptism marks on us.

Baptism is about being joined to Jesus. When the Spirit joins us with him, Jesus' cross becomes our cross. Our sinful self is destroyed. Since we share in Jesus' death, the Sin-power in us is killed. Sin no longer has power to enslave us. Jesus sets us free from it.

Baptism is about being joined to Jesus. When the Spirit joins us with him, Jesus' resurrection becomes our resurrection. Death has no power over Jesus. So Death no longer has power over us. Jesus lives, now and forever. So we walk in this new life, eternally. Jesus lives to God. So we live to God.

Baptism marks us in this pattern of dying and rising.

IV

Imagine it this way: our ownership is transferred.

Sin is not just a collection of bad things we do. Death is not just a biological process. Sin and Death are powers. They have power over us. They claim and control us. We are slaves to Sin, slaves to Death. The whole world is.

Jesus, dying and rising, set us free from Sin. He set us free from Death. They do not own you any more. Because of what Jesus has done, you belong to God. God who is perfect love, from whom is abundant life, in whom is everlasting hope.

So that idea that was floating around, and Paul heard about, and that I've heard floating around these days . . . the idea that somehow God's grace is a free pass, that Jesus' forgiveness gives permission for us to do whatever we want, completely misses the point. Why would you act like you were still a slave to Sin's power? You belong to God now! Why live as if Death still has a claim on you? You belong to God now! They no longer own you. God has you now.

When, on behalf of the church, I baptise someone, what do I do with the water?

I make a shape. A cross.

That's like God's signature on you. God signs you. You belong to God. God signs you, joining you to Jesus. God signs you, so with Jesus you have died and you have been raised.

Imagine it this way: you have left the country where Sin is sovereign. God has brought you into a new country, the country of grace.³ Jesus' cross on you is the proof of your immigration.

Jesus' baptism cross on you was your new birthmark, the mark of your new beginning.

V

But no one can see it. I mean that cross on your forehead, that mark of your baptism. It was put on with water. Even if you were baptised in a river, or in a tub at the front of a church sanctuary, it was still water. You dried off. We don't ink a cross-tattoo on your forehead. We don't brand you with a hot iron. God signed you with water. No one can see it now, can they?

They cannot see it.

They can see you.

God's signing of you makes you a sign of God for others.

With that signature of God's grace in Jesus Christ, God has marked you to be a sign of God's grace in Jesus Christ for others: your neighbours, your colleagues, your classmates, your friends, your family, each other here.

You are signed to be God's sign.

I think God is calling you to be a sign of hope.

³ From Eugene Peterson's *The Message* translation of Romans 6:1-3.

You have been marked with Jesus Christ, his cross, that shape of his death and resurrection. That is hope! God has not given up on this world. God has not given up on anyone. God's love, pouring out with such grace, breaks Sin, defeats Death.

Of course, Sin and Death are still lingering around, still causing terrible mischief. No doubt, you will run into them this week. But they will not own you. Jesus does. They cannot have you. Jesus does. He has signed for you.

So you will be God's signature of hope for someone else.

You're thinking, "*Me? How?*"

God has written it on you. You've been baptised.

Signed.