

“Delivered”

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For a series on Baptism

Colossians 1:1-14

June 24, 2018

We've been thinking about baptism. If you are baptised, I hope this short series is helping you experience more deeply that truth: you are baptised! Like your natural birth, your baptism birth happened only once. Yet your natural birth launched your whole life. So too, your baptism shapes your whole life in Christ.

If you are not baptised, please consider it. You do not *need* to be baptised. You are already embraced by God, and you are welcome. Still, baptism is a precious gift. It roots you in who God is, what God has done, and what God continues to do, for you and for us all. So I'm thinking that baptism might be something for you.

In this series, I have been riffing on the phrase, “Signed, Sealed and Delivered.” In old real estate law, that's what needed to be done to close a property sale. Once the deed was signed, sealed, and delivered, the deal was done.

EUC: That makes it a great metaphor for love. “My love for you, it is signed, sealed and delivered. Last week, we heard Cowboy Copas sing it, country-style. James Brown did a cover of Cowboy Copas's song, with soul!¹

“Signed, Sealed and Delivered” makes for a great love song. So it is perfect for talking about baptism.

God signs you. That's about your mission. In baptism you are marked with the sign of Jesus, his cross. So you can be a sign of Jesus for others, a “living signature” of God's always-presence, God's abundant grace, and God's abiding love.

God signs you, and God seals you. That's about your identity. Baptism tells the basic truth of who you are. No matter what identities others might put on you, or what you might think of yourself, this is who you really are: God's beloved, filled with God's delight.

God signs you, God seals you . . . and God delivers you.

¹ You can hear James Brown's version here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36ukNvBGm-Q>. For information, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signed_Sealed_and_Delivered

II

When you give something to someone — a property deed, a letter, a speech, your heart — you deliver it.²

“Deliver” has a more basic meaning, though. “Deliver” means “to make free.”³ You are delivered when you are rescued from something that threatens you or imprisons you. We pray this: “Lead us not into temptation, but *deliver* us from evil.” You are delivered when you are set free and released.

God has delivered you.

Last week, we heard from a letter Paul wrote to Jesus’ people in the city of Ephesus. Today we hear the beginning of another letter, one he wrote (along with his colleague Timothy) to folks living up the road from Ephesus in the town of Colossae.

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

III

This Colossians letter has a message: Jesus is enough.⁴ Our faith rests on this. Our love grows from this. Everything that needs to be done, Jesus has done. This is our hope. Jesus is enough.

Jesus has freed you. You are delivered. He has done enough.

Listen again to how that beginning bit of the letter we heard concludes:

*[God the Father] has delivered us from the power of darkness,
and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.
He is the one in whom we have redemption,
the forgiveness of sins.*

² “Deliver” can also be about when someone is handed over. Jesus was *delivered* to the court that tried him, *delivered* to the governor who condemned him, then *delivered* to the cross for execution.

³ Through Middle English and Old French, “deliver” comes from the Latin *de libero* (“to set free”).

⁴ “Colossians . . . appears to have been written for one purpose: to convince its recipients that Christ is sufficient for their spiritual liberation and life. They should therefore resist the temptation to engage in practices that purport to supplement, but actually supplant (as far as Paul is concerned), their participation in Christ’s death and resurrection.” Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 471f.

Those two sentences drip with freedom.

- “*Delivered from the power of darkness.*” We had been held captive to forces and fictions, evil influences and deceptive delusions. This captivity looks different in each person, but the verdict is the same: no one is free . . .
- . . . except that we are “transferred” into Jesus’ new kingdom. God has carried us across the border, where we are met, not with fences and separation, lies and cruelty, suspicion and hatred — yes, I know the news.⁵ Jesus welcomes us with love.
- In Jesus we have “redemption.” “Redemption” happens when a price is paid to secure a captive’s release. Jesus paid the price for us who were broke.
- So we have “the forgiveness of sins.” Forgiveness frees us from guilt and condemnation for wrongs we have done and cannot undo. Freedom restores love.

IV

We’re going to sing about this.

[EUC: No not with James Brown. With Charles Wesley who, I admit, is harder to boogie to.]

Charles Wesley wrote “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” to celebrate an anniversary. A year earlier he was sick in bed. He was in turmoil, questioning his faith in God. Friends came and cared for him: his body and his soul. He immersed in his Bible, and God moved him. Trust in God was returned to him, and his body was restored to health. He wrote this song a year later to celebrate it. He called it “For the Anniversary Day of One’s Conversion.”⁶

Those who put together our Voices United hymn book wanted to include Wesley’s song, but they had to choose. His original composition had 18 verses! They had to pick which to include. They did a good job, but I do think they made a mistake. They left out a very important verse.⁷ So we’re going to sing the song using the words printed in your bulletin [and on the screen] to get that verse back in.

It’s verse 4. *He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean;
his blood availed for me.*

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trump_administration_family_separation_policy

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O_for_a_Thousand_Tongues_to_Sing

⁷ Voices United, #326.

That is freedom.

Dying on his cross, shedding his blood and giving his life . . .

- Jesus broke sin's power to enslave you;
- Jesus cancelled your unpayable debt;
- Jesus set you free from captivity to evil;
- Jesus washed your guilt's stain away;
- Jesus did this for you!

So you are free. You have been delivered.

V

Back to "Signed, Sealed and Delivered." When it came to selling land, the deed was first signed, then sealed, and then delivered. That order makes sense.

But with Jesus, and with what we celebrate in baptism, the order flips.

You are a sign of God's love, God's grace, God's power and God's peace. You are a living sign — you have this mission with Jesus — because he has signed you. So you are baptised.

Jesus signed you because he had already sealed you.

He has sealed you in who you truly are. You have your identity in Jesus. You can be a sign because of who you are, who Jesus sealed you as: God's beloved in whom God delights. So you are baptised.

Jesus sealed you because he had already delivered you.

He broke Sin's power to enslave you. He broke guilt's power to condemn you. He broke Evil's power to shame you, victimize you, twist and wreck you. So you are baptized.

You are delivered. And so you are sealed. And so you are signed. You are baptised.

So let's sing! Sure, we are a few less than a thousand. But we can celebrate our Redeemer with so much joy that we might be mistaken for such a choir!