

Weekly Newsletter: 18 March 2025

Reflection: Rejoicing in the Blessing of Covenant Baptism

By Joe Barnard

The session has recently started a book, *Covenant Baptism* by Jason Helopoulos. This is part of an effort to retain - and rejoice in - a significant aspect of our church identity. At Holyrood, we baptise infants not due to tradition, but due to a particular understanding of God's relationship to His people. We believe that baptism is much more than a sign of a personal profession of faith. Baptism calls attention to God's covenant promises to His people. Since Abraham, God has declared that His covenant love extends through multiple generations. He is not just the God of Abraham himself, but also the God of Issac, Jacob, and of all of the spiritual children that come after.

Now, it would be wonderful to see a recovery of covenant baptism across the wider congregation. For some, this theology will be excitingly new. For others, it will be a matter of reburnishing something perhaps not put to use for a long time. Either way, we would all benefit from embracing anew the promises of God and seeing more deeply the way in which baptism is a visible sign of God's relationship to us in Christ.

In order to help us think about this topic, I've included below two links for talks available on YouTube on the topic of covenant baptism. One is by Dr. Ligon Duncan, an old friend of the congregation. The other is an interview with Jason Helopoulos, whose book the session is currently reading. Both are edifying and insightful.

Let me offer some advice as we venture together into the deep waters of covenant theology. First, it's important to know that the Bible is not a box of separate pearls. This is how a lot of people read it. We imagine that particular verses are disconnected from each other. One effect of this misunderstanding is that we often try to formulate our theology on various issues by means of using "proof-texts". We look for single verses that prove a point.

There is a better way of reading the Bible. The pearls that are found in the Bible (and there are countless) are meant to be threaded together as a necklace. Thus, interpreting the Bible is a matter of both understanding isolated statements, but also of stringing them together into something holistic and beautiful.

Covenant is the word for the thread that holds the Bible together. If you want to see the big picture of what God is communicating through the Bible, then covenant theology needs to be a topic of focused study.

But, second, let me warn you that thinking about covenant baptism will feel like going uphill for modern Christians. This is the case for a couple of reasons. On the one hand, individualism is ingrained in our worldview. This can hinder our ability to understand the Bible's teaching on baptism. We naturally think that baptism is mainly about *me*. That's not the case. Baptism is most importantly about God, secondly about the church, and thirdly about the individual. To get the order of priority wrong is to miss the meaning of the sacrament.

On the other hand, modern people care way too much about experience. This often means that we prioritise the experience of baptism over the truth of baptism. The more dramatic the occasion of baptism is for the individual, the more we like the method being used. We want baptism to be an unforgettable event like getting married or having a child.

No doubt, for many, baptism will indeed be unforgettable. Still, it's important to know that the truth of baptism matters more than the experience of baptism. Here marriage provides an analogy. A lot of people today overthink the event of marriage and underthink the meaning of marriage. They spend thousands of pounds on creating the most special day imaginable without reflecting much at all about nature of the bond resulting from the marriage ceremony.

We can make a similar mistake with baptism. The most important aspect of baptism is not the experience of the sacrament, but the truth of the sacrament. Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant union between Christ and His people. This union is what we need to focus the most attention on as we observe baptisms in the church.

Keeping this in mind, take some time this week to explore the wonderful truths of covenant baptism. Doing this will not just be an investment in your own relationship with God; it will be an investment in our church family as a whole.

The interview with Jason Helopoulos: <https://youtu.be/U4hzNYkK8bY?si=deKUCCjQqK231x7f>

The talk by Ligon Duncan: <https://youtu.be/AkqeQUFsBpg?si=xUZhxZd7I5XQoKAH>

Women's Bible Studies – Online tonight!

We're meeting this evening at 7pm on Zoom to continue our studies in the last couple of chapters of Luke's gospel as we prepare our hearts for Easter. Contact Liz@holyroodevangelical.org if you would like the Zoom codes and don't already have them.

Men's Discipleship Group – this Thursday

The men's group is back on this Thursday morning at 10.30am in the church building. All men are very welcome to attend!

Christianity Explored – this Sunday

Christianity Explored continues **this Sunday from 5-6pm** in the church. If you're new to the Christian faith or have questions, please come along – this course is for you! Contact Sam for more details (sampeteralen@gmail.com)

Home Group and Prayer Meeting Plans – March to June

We're excited to be studying the book of Ezra in our Home Groups for the next few months. On two Wednesday evenings, Jon Gemmell is going to do some teaching on Ezra to give us an overview of the book and help us as we study it together.

Please note that on **Wednesday 26 March** all the Home Groups will meet in the church at 7pm for an overview of Ezra and chapters 1-4. Here are the Wednesday plans until the end of June for your calendars!

Date	Prayer Meeting/ Home Groups	In Church or Homes	Comments
19 March	Prayer Meeting	In Church	
26 March	Home Groups	In Church	Jon Gemmell – Overview and Ezra 1-4
2 April	Prayer Meeting	In Church	Focus on UCCF. No meal this month due to DBI event on 4 April
9 April	Home Groups	In Homes	Ezra 1-2
16 April	Prayer Meeting	In Church	
23 April	Home Groups	In Homes	Ezra 3
30 April	Prayer Meeting	In Church	Focus on Hope Pregnancy.
7 May	Prayer Meeting	In Church	Focus on Japan. Meal together at 6pm.
14 May	Home Groups	In Homes	Ezra 4
21 May	Prayer Meeting	In Church	Jon Gemmell - Ezra 5-10
28 May	Home Groups	In Homes	Ezra 5-6
4 June	AGM and Prayer Meeting	In Church	
11 June	Home Groups	In Homes	Ezra 7-8
18 June	Prayer Meeting	In Church	
25 June	Home Groups	In Homes	Ezra 9-10

If you're new to Holyrood, we meet for prayer at 7pm in the church on the 1st, 3rd and 5th (if there is one) Wednesdays of the month. On the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays, we meet across the city in Home Groups. Please let me know (Liz@holyroodevangelical.org) if you're not in a Home Group or have any questions. Thank you!

Delhi Bible Institute Celebrates – Friday 4 April



On **Friday 4 April**, we are hosting an evening with Isaac and Gloria Shaw from Delhi Bible Institute.

We'll be joined by the church family at Edinburgh North Church and will have dinner together 6.30pm. **Please let Liz know (or sign up in the church foyer) if you're coming so that we have numbers for catering.**

Isaac will then share with us about the work in North India and we'll be finished by 8pm. Our gathering will be an opportunity to mark DBI's 70th birthday, celebrate the completion of their Vision 2025, and hear first-hand about their Vision 2045. Keep the date free and come along!

OMF Conference - Japan: across the street and across the world

On **Saturday 26 April** we're hosting the OMF Conference 'Japan: across the street and across the world'. Lorna Ferguson will be speaking about the work in Japan and her plans for her next term there. Jude Tindale will share about the work that's happening amongst Japanese people in Edinburgh.

Doors open at 9.30am for a 10am start. The conference will finish at 11.30am and everyone is warmly welcome.



Church Calendar

For your info and prayers:

- Tuesday: Women's Online Bible Studies at 7pm
- Wednesday: Prayer Meeting at 7pm (refreshments from 6.45pm) in the church
- Thursday: Men's Discipleship Group at 10.30am in the church
- Sunday:
 - Morning service at 10.30am – Joe Barnard preaching (live streamed)
 - Christianity Explored from 5-6pm in the church
 - Evening service at 6pm – Back in 1 Samuel with Jon Gemmell (live streamed)
- Monday:
 - Baby & Toddlers Group 10am – 11.30am
 - Warm Space 12 noon to 3pm



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