

How many of you drive or have had an SUV? It is estimated that one year from now SUVs will make up 50% of the U.S. auto market. That is amazing if you know that only about 5% of SUVs are ever taken off-road. That means you are more likely to see an SUV at Starbucks than on some back country road or near a mountain lake. Some SUVs hardly ever see a dirt road. For those SUV owners who don't want to be criticized by their hybrid driving friends, there is a product called "Spray On Mud" to create the illusion that one time or another their SUV has been baptized in mud. I've never had to personally do this since I live on a dirt road. But fake mudders are fakers. To be real they have to drive their SUV where the dirt is.

When Jesus made his first public appearance at the start of His ministry, He went where the dirt and the mud was. Jesus went to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist. The Jordan is a muddy river. When the Prophet Elijah told Naaman to go wash himself in the Jordan to be cured of his leprosy, Naaman protested that the Jordan wasn't clean like the rivers of Damascus.

This is the same river where John was baptizing people. John called people to repent, to turn away from their sins and to be baptized for forgiveness of their sins. The people responded to John's message. The religious elite didn't because they didn't think they needed to repent. But they did need to repent. So John challenged them to repent as well.

Jesus went to the muddy Jordan to be baptized by John. Jesus didn't need to repent or be forgiven. When John protested that he was the one who needed to be baptized, Jesus answered, *"It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires."* (Matthew 3:15 NLT) No "Spray On Mud" for Jesus. He got into the muddy Jordan River to show that He is one with us. After Jesus was baptized, God the Father said, *"This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."* (Matthew 3:17 NLT) and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. Jesus would fulfill God's requirements by taking on the dirt of our sins and wash them away by His death and resurrection.

Right after that Jesus faced a "Baptism under Fire." The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where he fasted and prayed for 40 days. During that time the Devil tempted Jesus to use His power for selfish purposes, to give the people a sign of His power so they would believe in Him and to lay claim to all the kingdoms of the world. The temptations were for self-service, public recognition and power. They were temptations to keep Jesus from going to the cross. Jesus resisted them by trusting God the Father to help Him and by refuting them with God's Word.

If we are going to follow Jesus, we can expect our own "Baptism under Fire." Jesus doesn't call us out of the world. He sends us into the world, invites us to meet Him in the muddy waters of life. If we are going to continue the work of Jesus, we can expect to go to the same places and

receive the same treatment He got. We are likely to be rejected like Jesus. Since 23% of the general population in the U.S. say they are atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular and another 9% claim to be something other than Christian, we can't expect them to warmly welcome us. We can expect them to challenge us, reject us and even fight against us. Jesus tells us, *"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33 NLT)

Jesus' baptism helps us understand our own. Baptism is God's idea, not just a tradition or ritual of the church. Jesus' final command to His Disciples was to go make disciples of all people and to baptize these new Jesus followers in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God put His name on us in baptism and sets us free from slavery to sin and death. Our sins are forgiven and we are adopted into God's family. So baptism is a sign of God's grace. We don't have to pass a test to be baptized. We don't have to make ourselves good enough to qualify to be baptized. The Spirit leads us to repentance and faith. Baptism, like faith, is the free gift of God. Baptism and faith set us apart as followers of Jesus Christ.

Baptized Christians take on the mission of Jesus. We are tempted like Jesus was to be comfortable, powerful, and satisfied instead of focusing on the life of service and self-sacrifice Jesus calls us to live. Baptized Christians are set apart for a different kind of life that denies much of the temporal things so many people work for. Jesus teaches us to live simply and generously in a culture of excess.

Jesus risked his reputation to bring the Good News to those who needed it the most. Jesus went places where the good people of His day wouldn't go, touched people no one else would come close to help and reached out to help those who needed it the most. Jesus said, *"God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers."* (Matthew 5:10-11 NLT)

What we do matters. We can't fake living as baptized followers of Christ. Jesus set the example for us by walking into the muddy water. If the Son of God was willing to get dirty changing the world, His followers need to do the same. Not sure what to do. Get involved in the lives of others. Jesus said, *"I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me."* Then he added, *"I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!"* (Matthew 25:35,36, 40 NLT) It's time to take our faith out of the church and into the world around us. It is time to engage the world around us for Christ. No "Spray on Mud" for us. Amen.