

## **A Christadelphian's Faith - 36**

# **Baptism**

*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).*

This was Peter's message to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem, fifty days after Jesus' death and resurrection. We have seen in this series that to 'repent' means to change our minds – to see everything in a new way, realizing how far away from God our lives have been, being truly sorry for that, and wanting to please God from now on. This was how the crowd in Jerusalem felt when Peter faced them with the fact that their nation had crucified the Son of God. They wanted to be freed from this terrible guilt, so the next step was to be baptized.

Three years or so earlier at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Jesus himself had been baptized. This was not because he needed forgiveness (he had never sinned) but because he wanted to show the us right way:

*John tried to prevent him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness." Then he allowed him (Matthew 3:14–15).*

### **A New Birth**

Soon after Jesus was baptized, his fame began to spread because he was healing many people by the power of God. A visitor came to see him, a high-ranking scholar and teacher of the Jewish Law who could see that Jesus

was unique. He came to Jesus at night-time, making kind comments, but Jesus went straight to the point:

*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).*

Even though this man, Nicodemus, was keeping God's Law, Jesus told him that without this 'rebirth' he would never see the Kingdom of God. He had to make a new start, and become a follower of Jesus. So do we.

The sign or symbol of this new birth is baptism. It is essential, Jesus continued:

*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5).*

Being 'born of water' happens at baptism. Being 'born of the Spirit' starts when Jesus' teaching begins to change our characters.

*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life (John 6:63).*

Then when Jesus returns as King, our bodies too will be changed:

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able even to subdue all things to himself (Philippians 3:20–21).*

So if Nicodemus really wanted that blessing, he needed to be 'born of water': in other words, be baptised. It is the same for us. That is one of the things that baptism means – it is the start of a new, spiritual life.

## Life Out of Death

Baptism is also a picture of us sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus. After his own baptism, Jesus tended to concentrate on teaching the crowds while his apostles did the physical act of baptizing those who believed (see John 4:2). Then, after his death and resurrection and before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told them to extend the work of preaching and baptizing worldwide (see Matthew 28:19).



The way that baptisms were done is made very clear in Acts 8:38–9: *They went down into the water...they came up out of the water.*

This happened in a desert, where all travellers would carry drinking water. If a few drops were sufficient they could have used water from their flask, but they clearly went down into the water. This is because baptism is like burying

an old life and then being raised to a new life, just as Jesus literally was. Paul says:

*Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).*

Baptism is not a supernatural ritual that works like magic. It is a symbol of us being associated with Christ in his death and in his resurrection.

## Being Washed 'Clean'

This is one more meaning of baptism. Sin is like being 'dirty' in God's sight, but He wants to forgive us, or make us 'clean'. When we ask for baptism we are telling God that we accept this, we want to be 'clean'. Before his conversion, the Apostle Paul (then called Saul) was a fierce persecutor of the followers of Jesus. But Jesus appeared to Saul in all his resurrection glory and Saul was convinced. He was sent to a Christian named Ananias who said this to him :

*Now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).*

Some time after his great speech in Jerusalem, Peter wrote this:

*Baptism... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21 ESV).*

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