

Baptism - the Entrance to Life

Once upon a time there was a king, who one day felt unwell. He requested that a minstrel be called to sing for him. The king welcomed the minstrel, mentioning a few of his favourite songs. "Oh Your Majesty," replied the minstrel, "those songs are rather old fashioned; I have brought some songs that I am sure you will enjoy." At that he performed the songs he had brought. At the end of the evening, the minstrel approached the king to claim his fee. "No," said the king, "there is no fee. You performed according to your wishes, not mine."

That little story presents an important principle. If we wish to receive God's blessings, we must do as God teaches and not as we want to do.

Obedience and Humility

Naaman was a military leader in Syria but he had a big problem – he was a leper. We meet him in 2 Kings 5. He heard that there was a prophet in Israel who could heal him, so he travelled there accompanied by his servants and taking gifts for the prophet.

Elisha the prophet did not personally greet the man. Instead he sent a messenger telling Naaman to go to the river Jordan and wash in the river seven times. Naaman was outraged! He turned his chariot and entourage around to return to Syria. But then some of his servants urged him to comply:

My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not

have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'? (2 Kings 5:13).

To his credit, Naaman listened; he showed a humble spirit and with all those servants watching, he went into the water – seven times as he had been told. On coming up out of the water after the seventh time he found that the dreaded disease had gone – he was healed!

But notice the point – first of all he had to put pride to one side and show a humble obedient spirit. Otherwise he would have remained a leper.

Washing Away Guilt

The Apostle Paul was initially a zealot who persecuted Christians, throwing both men and women into prison and hounding others to their deaths. He presided over the stoning to death of Stephen (Acts 8:1 and 22:4, 19). But later he himself became a Christian and he understood what terrible things he had done.

What could be done? The past cannot be undone, and that burden of



guilt lay heavily on Paul. But a disciple called Ananias came to Paul and told him what to do:

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

Notice the words ‘wash away’, as if that burden of guilt was like something unclean, like the leprosy of Naaman, that could be washed away.

After his resurrection, Jesus commanded his disciples to go and preach the Gospel, and those who did believe had to show their faith by being baptized.

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

More Examples

Philip preached in the region of Samaria. On seeing the miracles of healing that he did, people also listened to his preaching;

When they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized (Acts 8:12).

After these events, Philip was told to go to the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. There he met an Ethiopian official returning home from Jerusalem. As he rode along in his chariot he was reading from the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 53.

So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are

reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him (v30–31).

Philip joined the man in his chariot and explained that marvellous chapter to him, showing that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus had been foretold hundreds of years before. Here are a few words from that chapter:

He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities... by his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray... and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:3–6).

No doubt there were many other passages that Philip explained too. He may have discussed Psalm 22, a Psalm written 1000 years before the time of Jesus (and long before crucifixion had been thought of) but which presents the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in some considerable detail.



Clearly Philip had discussed baptism with the man because:

As they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:36–37).

There follows a description of exactly how Philip baptised the man.

Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water... (Acts 8:38–39).

It was not a matter of sprinkling a few drops of water on the man; it is about going down into the water and then coming up out of it. For a few moments the Ethiopian disappeared under the surface of the water and then reappeared again.

A Death... and Life

Why must believers be baptised? God tells us the meaning and importance of baptism, for example here in the words of Paul:

Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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. For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:3–5).

Baptism, therefore, is a 'picture' of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. By that act of obedience and faith we can show to God that we want to be associated with the work of Jesus. We show that we believe Jesus defeated human nature in his own life; that he presented an unblemished life to his Father; that God raised him from the dead to immortality; and that if we accept Jesus as our Saviour, we can stand before God, covered by his faultless life.

Jesus is 'the way'; we can either gratefully accept God's offer or we can ignore it. The choice is ours.

One day Jesus received a visitor; he was called Nicodemus, and this is what Jesus said to him:

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).

Baptism is a turning point in our lives. We will remember the event and the date. It is the starting point of a life which is God-centred, where each day we try to follow the example of Jesus.

The more we do this, the better our lives will reflect the life of Jesus. This is a life of hope, looking forward to the return of Jesus and life in the Kingdom of God:

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:2–3).

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