

“BAPTISM OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT”

John 3:1-5, I John 5:1-12, Acts 19:1-10

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Bob Beasley, pastor of Gregory Drive Alliance Church of West Chatham, Ontario, Canada, shares this interesting incident. He says, “Our three-year-old daughter, Rena, sat with us during the baptismal service last Sunday night, which was a new experience for her. She exclaimed in surprise, ‘Why he pushed that guy in the water? Why, Dad, why?’ My wife tried to explain briefly and quietly, but Rena just wouldn’t be satisfied. Later that night we tried to provide an answer that a child’s mind could comprehend. We talked about sin and told Rena that when people decide to live for Jesus and ‘do good’ they want everyone to know. We then explained that water symbolizes Jesus’ washing people from sin; when they come out ‘clean,’ they are going to try to be ‘good.’ A moment later, we realized we’d have to work on our explanation a bit. Rena had immediately responded, ‘Why didn’t Pastor Bob just spank him?’”¹

If only a spanking would make each one of us just and right in God’s sight! The discipline practice of spanking a child tries to help them understand that what they did or said was wrong. Some of us needed more spankings than others to help us to get on the right path to proper living. And for some, it didn’t make a difference, except to get them angry at their parents.

However, while they may change the character of a child, spankings do not change the condition of the soul with regard to salvation from sin. When we do wrong against God by disobeying His commands and doing our own thing, there is more that is needed in order to clean up the life of that person. There needs to be a transformation of the heart, mind and spirit.

And that is what Jesus talked to Nicodemus about one late night. Nicodemus was a

¹ PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002) pg. 112

Pharisee who recognized something special about Jesus. He recognized Jesus as a “Rabbi,” or “*a teacher who has come from God...*” but he wanted confirmation about his understanding of Jesus. But instead, Jesus teaches him about the need for regeneration and repentance. Jesus tells him “*...no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again*” (John 3:3).

Being born again is starting over. It’s giving up the old way of life and beginning brand new in Christ. It is confessing your sins and repenting of all that you have done wrong against the Lord our God, and seeking His forgiveness. Being born again is the willful-emptying of our lives of the “old nature” and allowing God to fill us with His “new nature.”

In his devotional, *Peace For Each Day*, Billy Graham explains it like this: “The Bible teaches that our old nature is totally corrupt. From its head to its feet ‘*there is no soundness in it*’ (Isaiah 1:6). Its heart is ‘*deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*’ (Jeremiah 17:9).

“The Bible also teaches that our old nature is a self-nature. It is incapable of being renovated. The Bible teaches that when we are born again, we put off the old man - we do not patch him up. The old self is to be crucified, not cultivated. Jesus said the cleansing of the outside of the cup and the platter leaves the inside just as dirty as before (Luke 11:39).

“In being born again, you can decide right now to wipe out your sinful past and make a new start, a fresh start, a right start. You can decide now to become the person that Jesus promised you could be.” (April 24, pg. 119)

He continues, “The Bible teaches that unless we have experienced the new birth, we cannot get into the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus made it even stronger by saying we **must** be born again. There is nothing indefinite, nothing optional about that. He who would enter the kingdom of God must be born again.

“Salvation is not just repairing the original self. It is a new self created of God in

righteousness and true holiness. Regeneration is not even a change of nature or a change of heart. Being born again is not a change - it is a regeneration, a new generation. It is a second birth.

“The life that comes from the new birth cannot be obtained by natural development or self-effort. Man does not by nature have this holiness that God requires for Heaven. ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh’ Jesus says in John 3:6. In the new birth alone is the beginning of such a life to be found. To live the life of God we must have the nature of God” (April 25, pg. 120).

So Jesus tells Nicodemus that if we want to enter into the Kingdom of God, we must give up the old nature within us, and take on the new nature of God that He has for us. Therefore we must be “*born of water and the Spirit*” (John 3:5).

And that is the importance of baptism for each one of us. The word baptism comes from the Greek word, *baptizo*, meaning “to dip.” The term was originally used in the dying of cloth, where the cloth was dipped into the dye, going in with one color and coming out a completely different color. It inferred a complete change in the cloth. The cloth took on a new nature after being dipped into the dye.

Christians use this term in demonstrating the difference in the life of the person after coming to faith in Jesus Christ. When the person repents of their sins and gives up their old nature, baptism is used as a sign to all those around them that they have changed by the grace of Jesus into a new creation through Him. They go into the water, are buried with Christ, washed clean of their sins, and then raised to new life in Christ Jesus, a new person.

The apostle John speaks of this change in his first epistle letter to the church in Asia. “*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the*

Father loves His Child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out His commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep His commands. And His commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (I John 5:1-5).

It is in baptism with water that we proclaim to the whole world that we are turning from the things of this world and turning toward the things of God. Baptism of water demonstrates the decision of the one to claim Jesus as their Savior, and the promise they make to follow Him from that point on. The baptism of the person makes the claim that they are seeking to follow Jesus with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. The water of baptism does not make the transition of the person’s life, however. It is the sign that the transition has already happened, and the person is now claiming the Name of Jesus as their Savior. It’s not the service of baptism that matters, but the change of heart, mind, and spirit that makes the difference.

It is then that we can become baptized by the Holy Spirit. By making a claim of faith in Jesus Christ, we are entered into the adoption of God the Father, and we become His child. Once we have repented of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross for every one of us, we are able to stand before the Lord our God pure and holy. Only then will the Holy Spirit move into us and begin empowering us to continue the work of Jesus in our world. Without our confession of Jesus Christ as our Savior, and the regeneration of our lives through Him, the Holy Spirit will not move into us to give us His guidance and strength. Jesus in us as Savior and Lord is absolutely essential before the Holy Spirit can begin His work through us. Every child of God has access to the working of the Holy Spirit in them. Every person accepting Jesus as their Savior, and making Him their Lord, is now able to become a tool in the belt of the Father, to do

His work and accomplish His goal of saving the world from their sins.

And then we come upon an interesting situation in Acts 19. Listen to the first 10 verses today. This is Acts 19:1-10. (READ Acts 19:1-10).

Last week we saw that Apollos began his ministry of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Ephesus after Paul had gone to Jerusalem. Now, having made his way over to Achaia to continue making disciples of Jesus, Apollos has left the church open to variations in the faith. Remember that Priscilla and Aquila had heard him discuss Jesus with the Jews, and they had “*explained to him the way of God more adequately*” (18:26).

But Apollos only knew the baptism of John (the Baptist), and it could be that while he was telling other Jews about Jesus in Ephesus, left them only with the understanding of the baptism of repentance.

So when Paul had gone “*throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples*” (18:23), he returns to Ephesus and finds twelve men who proclaim to be followers of Jesus, but only know about the baptism of John. They “apparently made (John) the Baptist the focus of their devotion. Luke calls them ‘disciples,’ just as he speaks of Simon of Samaria as having ‘believed’ (see 8:13), of the Judaizers as ‘believers’ (see 15:5), of the seven sons of Sceva as exorcising demons ‘in the name of Jesus,’ and of Sceva their father as ‘a Jewish chief priest (see 19:13-14). Luke’s practice is to portray the spiritual condition of his characters by their actions without always evaluating it. Here it seems both from their statements and from how Paul deals with them, that we should consider these men as sectarians with no real commitment to Jesus at all.”² They called themselves followers of Jesus, but were not actually following Jesus. Their words and actions showed them to be no different than the other Jews around them.

² The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981] Vol. 9, pg. 493)

So Paul presents them the gospel of Jesus Christ, telling the men that “*John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.*’ *On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 19:4-5).

These 12 men became fully informed of Jesus Christ as the One who is the Savior of the world, and then they believed. And their belief led them to be baptized with water, and “*when Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied*” (19:6).

The baptism of John was not enough to transform the lives of these men. Neither is it for us, today. We may claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, but just our words are not enough to demonstrate to the world that our lives have been changed from the old nature of human mindset to the new nature of God’s mindset. We may have even gone through the ceremony of water baptism, and still not be transformed in heart and mind and spirit. Claiming Jesus as our Savior is the only way that we find true regeneration and forgiveness of sins, and it is then that we find the door of our hearts opened for the Holy Spirit to enter into us.

Once these 12 men professed Jesus and accepted Him as their Messiah, the Savior, it changed their lives from being merely spectators to the Christian faith, to becoming actual participants of the new life that Jesus gives to us. Their water baptism and their spiritual baptism was the outward evidence that a change had taken place on the inside first. The Holy Spirit then gave them the ability to speak in tongues and prophesy.

An important feature to see here is that these men were not “rebaptized” but were now baptized into Christ once and for all. Once we are baptized into Christ, we need only recognize that, and confirm that baptism, and recommit our lives to Jesus in order to open the way for the Holy Spirit to come into us and begin His work in us. But our water baptism in the Name of

Jesus is the essential part of the process in order for our baptism in the Spirit to be accomplished.

But the Holy Spirit manifests Himself in a variety of ways. Throughout the New Testament we hear of the disciples of Jesus receiving the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophesying as being the ways that demonstrated the filling of the Holy Spirit. However, there are a number of gifts of the Holy Spirit empowering each one of us to build up the Body of Christ, the church. Paul lists some of them in his letter to the Corinthians, saying, “*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and **He** distributes them to each one, just as **He** determines*” (I Cor. 12:7-11).

Each one of our experiences in receiving the Holy Spirit into our lives might be drastically different than another's experience, but that doesn't mean that it's not real. You may not speak in tongues or prophesy, but the Holy Spirit will work in and through you in His determined way to guide you and use you for the purpose of building the Church. But it is essential to have Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

“Pollster George Gallup Jr. once called a Press Conference to announce the results of a new poll strongly indicating that the United States was on the threshold of a profound religious revival. A reporter asked Mr. Gallup about his own personal religion. ‘I am a practicing Episcopalian and I strongly believe in spreading the Faith,’ he answered proudly. But when a reporter asked, ‘Are you a “born-again” Christian?’ he became apologetic. ‘I do not remember

ever seeing a bolt of lightning,' he said.

“Well, it is important for us to understand that God in His goodness gives us all kinds of experiences when we make our once-and-for-all decision (for Jesus Christ). We needn't feel uneasy because we haven't seen a bolt of lightning. It can be a very gentle, a very tender, a very healing, a very peaceful experience. Have you made that conscious once-and-for-all decision to follow Christ in all things? For some of us who call ourselves 'Christians,' the unfinished business of our lives is to make this decision down at the deepest level of our being. Some of us have not yet understood that the fullness of life we long for will never come until we make that life-transforming decision to say 'Yes!' to Christ.”³

If you've never made a decision for Jesus Christ and you feel the Spirit nudging you to do that, I invite you to come forward during our last song today, and there will be folks here to lead you to that life transforming decision. If you once made a commitment to Jesus, but have never fully claimed Him as your Lord, and would like to recommit your life to Jesus, I invite you to come forward during the last song, too, and I'll guide you in that.

Let's pray. Father, Thank You for giving us Your Son, Jesus, to be our Savior and provide us with forgiveness through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Touch our hearts today, Lord Jesus, that we might fully come to trust in You. It is only in You that we find life. If there is someone here today that needs You in their life and they have never made that commitment, nudge them, Lord. And if there is someone here who needs to recommit their life to You, Jesus nudge their hearts, too, so that they might receive Your Holy Spirit. Move in us today, oh Lord, for we want Your Holy Spirit in us to do Your work today. This we pray this in Jesus' great Name. AMEN.

³ (James F. Colaianni, *Sunday Sermons Treasury of Illustrations*, [Pleasantville, NJ: Voicings Publications, 1982] pg.99-100)