

Bible Study Lectures

by accepting Christ we “are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”

Ancient Israel failed in their observance of God’s holy Sabbath. The true Israel of God are to be tested in this great truth also. In Matthew 24 we have the words of Christ advising His followers. He spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem, which actually occurred in AD 70, 39 years later. And in speaking of the necessity of their flight from that city, Christ said, “But pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day.” Thirty-nine years of prayer that one Sabbath might not be desecrated. This is Christ’s view of the importance of Sabbath observance in the Christian dispensation. Thus a true Israelite is one in harmony with the commandments of God.

That the term Israel includes the thought of character is portrayed by the words of Christ in John 1:47: “Behold an Israelite in deed in whom is no guile!” And the same chapter that describes the result of the final message that produces a people keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, uses a similar expression to the words of Christ: “And in their mouth was found no guile; for they are without fault before the throne of God.” Revelation 14:5. The greatest miracle of these days is the work of Christ and His gospel in gathering a people out of “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,” and lifting them from the pit of sin and transgression, and making them Israelites in deed, without guile, and ready to meet Christ at His coming.

39. CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

A Necessary Expression of Faith

ABOUT 2,800 years ago, there lived a prominent leader, a captain of a vast army. He was a favorite of his king; a mighty man of valor; but he was a leper. Notwithstanding his high national position, his popularity, his victories in war, his leprosy remained. It was something beyond his power to, remove. This man’s name was Naaman, his king the King of Syria, and his history is recorded in the fifth chapter of the Second Book of Kings.

A RAY OF HOPE

Rich in this world’s goods, Naaman would have given thousands of pounds’ worth of silver or gold to be cured of his leprosy.

But in his day a cure for that dread disease could not be bought from doctor or nurse, nor could it be found in medicines of any description dispensed by man. But a ray of hope shone from another source yes, a ray of light emanating from the great Sun of Righteousness, with “healing in His wings.” One great fact was as true then as now.

The mighty God of the universe ruled, and was mightier than the deadly grip of leprosy.

Naaman’s wife had a servant girl from the land of the Israelites. She was a captive girl, but knew well the power of her God. She directed attention to Elisha, the prophet of God, living then in Samaria. Possessed with a supreme desire to be clean from his leprosy, Naaman drove in his chariot to the door of Elisha. A wise move indeed.

The prescription for the cure of Naaman’s leprosy is recorded in 2 Kings 5:10, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times.” Poor Naaman could see no wisdom in this divine prescription, and was filled with rage. Had he not better rivers in his own country? The waters of Abana or Pharpar were surely better. Why the command, “Go wash in Jordan”? He failed to comprehend that God, the great healer of bodies and souls, was not dependent on the virtues of water to heal. The promised blessing awaited Naaman’s obedience to an inspired command. Not in the flowing waters of the Jordan lay the virtue to heal; but a simple demonstration of faith and obedience, that could be given only by his going into the water as commanded, brought the promised blessing. To “wash in Jordan” in the way specified, was the way of obedience and healing. Naaman’s servant speaks: “If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst you not have done, it? How much rather then, when he said to thee, Wash, and be clean?”

Naaman saw light. “Wash and be clean.” No other remedy, but simple obedience to heaven’s message. He obeyed. His obedience to the plain message of Heaven through the prophet of God, brought its reward. It always does; it always will.

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LEPROSY OF SIN-CAN IT BE WASHED AWAY?

Like Naaman of old, we find no man-made cure for the leprosy of sin. "Nitrate and soap" are powerless to remove its foul stains. Jeremiah 2:22. I once read of an advertisement extolling a wondrous preparation for the removal of all stains in cloth. It was "sure to do it, never known to fail." But I am thinking now of other stains—stains that have struck into the very textures of life, and have left their black mark on the character. And who has not known the sting of sin? While the heart sickens at the enormity of sin's guilty stains, we hear the sweet words of hope as found in Isaiah 1:18. "Come now, and let us reason together, said the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." God has a remedy for sin's scars as surely as He had for Naaman's leprosy; and like Naaman we must believe in the remedy, and act accordingly.

The remedy is found in Christ, by virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection. He asks us to believe this, and He requires a simple though commanded demonstration of our belief in the efficacy of the atoning sacrifice of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection on our behalf by being "buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Romans 6:4.

God breaks the shackles of sin for those who follow the part of simple faith and obedience. Naaman was healed, not by the water of the river Jordan, but by the Lord whom he obeyed by his washing in the river. So with baptism, the virtue is not in the water, but in faith in, and obedience to, Christ, demonstrated by our burial in the water as commanded.

So we read "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 3:21.

FAITH IN GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

The ordinance of baptism is the expression of our faith in God's plan of salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It is the evidence of a good conscience toward God. Simple faith and obedience are well pleasing to our heavenly Parent, and always bring their reward.

On the other hand, to reject the command of God regarding baptism is to do so to our eternal detriment. To ignore or reject baptism would be an expression of indifference, disregard, and disbelief toward Christ, who commanded, "Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Matthew 28:19. Luke 7:29, 30 clearly shows that those who rejected John's call to repentance and baptism rejected not merely the message of a preacher, but "rejected the counsel of God against themselves; being not baptized of him." That baptism, which Jesus, the superintendent of the universe, Himself requested, urged, and received, saying, "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:13-16), men, in our day as in His, reject to their own detriment, "against themselves," as the Scripture puts it.

People today might reason along the lines of Naaman and question the wisdom and necessity of baptism. But Christ says, "Ye are My friends, if you do whatsoever I command you." John 15:14. In 1 Corinthians 15:2-4, Paul refers to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as the basis of salvation. He wants to know if you believe that, and if you are prepared to let the world know that you believe it.

He tells you how to give evidence of your belief, and expects you to act accordingly! Do you inquire how? You will find full instructions in Romans 6:1-15. You yourself must participate in a very literal death to self and sin, followed by a complete burial in the waters of baptism, and a rising to newness of life.

If this death to sin is genuine, sins being not only confessed but forsaken, and completely buried in the waters of baptism, and the "newness of life" with Christ continues, it is accepted of Heaven as a demonstration of our faith in the efficacy of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It becomes in the words of 1 Peter 3:21, "the answer of a good conscience toward God."

40. BAPTISM

What It Is, and What Must Precede It

THE following are additional thoughts on the subject of baptism from Pastor Mitchell's mission address on Sunday night:

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A knowledge of the etymology of the word “baptize” as well as its use in Scripture, is to know that its meaning is immersion or complete burial in the water. It is derived from the Greek word “baptizo,” coming from the Greek word “bapto,” which means to overwhelm or completely to dip or immerse. Tertullian uses the word “dipped.” This is the real meaning of baptize. Neither in Scripture, nor in the Greek classical literature is “baptizo” ever translated “sprinkling” or “pouring,” but always either “baptized,” “buried,” “dipped,” “immersed,” “covered,” “planted,” “was hed,” “plunged,” or “overwhelmed.” These are the only definitions which are given the word “baptize” by Greek lexicographers.

SCRIPTURAL PRACTICE

Christening by pouring or sprinkling water on the head is not baptizing. “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism,” explains Paul in Romans 6:4. John 3:23 reads “And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.” Here, you notice, the people went to the place where there was “much water.” Little water is all that is used in christening, which contrast reveals how far the practice of sprinkling has strayed from the apostolic command and practice of baptism. Christening with a few drops of water is not synonymous with baptism, but something entirely different, and absolutely foreign to the Scriptural command and practice. There is nothing in christening that signifies the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Christening is emblematic of nothing in the gospel plan, and therefore is a meaningless and worthless, though harmless, ceremony, except for the fact that many people being satisfied with this useless infant sprinkling are thus robbed of the desire to seek the true baptism as commanded and taught in Scripture.

Jesus, the true pattern for Christians, was, according to Matthew 3:13-16, baptized not on the banks of the Jordan by a few drops of its water being sprinkled on His head, but by His going right into the waters of the river, where He was baptized by John, as is proved by the fact that He, “when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water.” Matthew 3:16. Describing the baptism of the Ethiopian by Philip, Acts 8:38 tells of their going down, “both into the water.” The Ethiopian churches of Abyssinia, which were founded by Frumentius during the fourth century, never fell under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church (which church led the way in adopting sprinkling instead of immersion) until the seventeenth century. And it is interesting to note that the Christian churches of Ethiopia which were not influenced by the European drift from apostolic doctrine, always observed the practice of baptism by immersion. In fact, baptism by immersion was the practice in European and other countries for thirteen centuries of the Christian era, even by the Roman Catholic Church, as is taught by their historians. In some of the oldest Roman Catholic cathedrals in the most ancient of European cities, built in some cases as early as the fourth century AD, there are still to be seen immense marble baptismal fountains, in which believers were immersed centuries ago. In reply to questions asked by visitors the priests always reply: “These baptismal lavens were used in the early centuries by this church to immerse the converts as they came into the church. We no longer use them; we practice sprinkling now.”

The Greek Catholic Church still practices immersion. Here is an interesting statement from the pen of Charles S. Longacre after his travels through thirteen countries in Europe: “In visiting the Greek Catholic churches in Rumania and Yugoslavia, we found that the Greek Catholic Church, which is the established church of those countries, and antedates in origin even the Roman Catholic Church, has always practiced and does still practice, baptism by immersion. The Greek Catholic Church uniformly practices trine immersion.” Dean Stanley, the famous English churchman and historian, puts the historical facts in a few words: “Immersion was the invariable practice of the primitive church. It was the almost universal practice of Christians for thirteen centuries.”

AGE FOR BAPTISM

Referring to the correct age for baptism, it must at least be the age of intelligent understanding. A whole-hearted surrender and intelligent, obedient service to Christ, however, are of more importance than age. Luke 3:21-23 gives the age of Christ at the time of His baptism as “about thirty years.” I have read of persons of a hundred years and over, even up to 111 of years of age, being baptized.

During the years of my ministry I have baptized men and women of ages ranging from the early teens to around the eightieth year or over, but never an infant.

Now I will cite some necessary prerequisites to baptism which show that God never intended that infants should be baptized.

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First. Matthew 28:19, 20 places the command to “teach” before baptism. Instruction in the fundamentals of the gospel being a necessary preparation to baptism excludes those not of the age of understanding.

Second. Mark 16:16 shows that believing is an essential that precedes baptism: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” The Ethiopian of Acts 8:36, 37 asked, “See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?” And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart you may.”

Third. The third essential that must precede baptism to repentance is a reformation and the forsaking of sins. Peter said, “Repent and be baptized and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Acts 2:38. An infant has no sins of which to repent, and therefore needs no baptism.

Fourth. The fourth essential is obedience. The Holy Spirit is promised to those who repent and are baptized. But Acts 5:32 states that God gives the Holy Spirit “to them that obey”; therefore obedience is a necessary prerequisite to baptism, if we expect God to accept our baptism, and fulfill His promise in giving the Holy Spirit. In order for baptism to have any value and virtue to the souls to whom it is administered, these four necessary steps must precede it.

ONE IMMERSION

Now we may say a word about trine baptism as practiced by some. Some, because of the command to be baptized into the “name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” think that this necessitates a threefold baptism. But this is unscriptural. Ephesians 4:5 says, “one baptism,” or, to make it plainer, one immersion, for immersion is the true meaning of the original text. One immersion, not three, is the requirement of Scripture. The fact that, as Romans 6:5 teaches, baptism is to be “in the likeness” of Christ’s death and resurrection, proves that it is a single immersion, for Christ had but one burial and one resurrection. This is true of single immersion, and none other; and no other mode is taught anywhere in the sacred canon of Scripture. The words of Francis Ridley Havergal apply very fittingly to baptism: “We may be quite sure of three things. First, that whatever our Lord commands us, He really means us to do. Secondly, that whatever He commands us is for our good ways. And thirdly, that whatever He commands, He is able and willing to enable us to do, for ‘all God’s biddings are enablings.’”

41. BAPTISM A DEFINITE COMMAND

Vital to Those Who Accept Christianity

SPEAKING on the importance of baptism, in the mission tent on Wednesday night, Pastor Mitchell said:

During the years of my contact with men and women as an evangelist, missionary, and minister of religion, I have come in contact with various shades of opinion regarding the doctrine of baptism. I have met some who were satisfied with the christening they received as infants. Others feel that so long as they have been born or baptized of the Holy Spirit, that is all that is necessary. And though Bible students may hardly believe me, yet it is a fact that I have met a belief to the effect that, since apostolic times, the baptism of the Holy Spirit only, is God’s plan. Now it is not my purpose to trouble you with these conflicting opinions, for I am satisfied that those holding these unscriptural views have not studied the Scriptures fully on this subject, or perhaps they have studied under the shadow of preconceived opinion.

JESUS POINTS THE WAY

Now I propose to show that the Bible commands baptism as a definite part of the duty of all who accept Christianity. My first scripture contains the words of Jesus Himself, as found in Matt 28:19, 20. Notice them carefully: “Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Note that this command to baptize is for “all nations,” and that it includes all time, “even unto the end of the world.” It is evident then that baptism was not to cease with John, or with apostolic times. Further, the baptism referred to here must of necessity be baptism by water, for that is the only baptism delegated to the ministry of men. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is of God. Though it is the privilege of Christian ministers to be “filled with the Spirit,” yet with reference to our obeying the command of Christ to baptize, the baptism we conduct and administer must of necessity, in the words of Ephesians 4:5, be confined, to “one baptism.” But this baptism of water

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is for all nations, and for all time, and is closely associated with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which baptism is worthy of being discussed separately.

A further record of this world-embracing command of Christ is found in Mark 16:15, 16, where baptism is definitely associated with salvation. Baptism is cited here as a prerequisite to salvation: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

PETER AND PAUL

The second time baptism is commanded in Scripture is the command of Peter. On the authority of Christ, and by His instruction, Peter commanded baptism to the multitudes that heard him preach. Acts 2:37, 38 tells of the multitudinous gathering on the day of Pentecost inquiring, "What shall we do?" "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." And like the command of Christ that was for all nations and for all time, "even unto the end of the world," Peter continues in Acts 2:39 by referring to the promise of the Holy Spirit, associated with baptism. He said, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Baptism by water, commanded here by Peter, and the promise of the Holy Spirit were according to God's plan to continue right along through the Christian dispensation to the end of time.

The third time baptism is commanded in Scripture is the command of Ananias. Instructed by the Lord, Ananias commanded baptism, to Paul. Acts 9:6-19 records the miraculous conversion of Paul. Truly Paul, if anyone, was converted. And he cried out, as all truly converted men will do, "Lord, what wilt You have me to do?" The Lord instructed him to "go into the city, and it shall be told thee what you must do." Then by means of a vision, Ananias, a servant of God, was instructed to visit and instruct Paul. Paul tells the thrilling account himself in Acts 22:10-16. He outlines the instruction received from Ananias, and then, as verse 16 states, he was to commence his career as a Christian by being baptized. "And now why tarry you? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." This was the answer to Paul's question, "Lord, what wilt You have me to do?"

SALVATION AND BAPTISM

The fourth reference to a command for baptism is found in Acts 10:47, 48. This is several years after the wonderful ingathering of souls on the day of Pentecost, and Peter finds himself under the direction of God called to instruct the Gentiles. He gives them the same command regarding baptism as he gave on the day of Pentecost.

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The scripture explains itself. It reads; "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." Here definite reference is made to water baptism, the candidates having already "received the Holy Ghost."

The final reference to baptism, made by Peter, is found in 1 Peter 3:21, written in AD 60, in the later years of Peter's ministry. But here he is still emphasizing its importance, and he links salvation and baptism together: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us."

A fifth reason why men and women should be baptized is found in the words of John 3:5: "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." That being born of water refers to baptism is definitely taught in Romans 6:1-11, and Acts 10:47, 48; also Colossians 2:12 and 3:1. Surely no Christian will look with indifference upon Christ's words of John 3:5, which place the utmost importance upon being baptized, or born of water, as well as of the Spirit.

AN AGE-OLD QUESTION

Now notice the following similar questions asked by different persons on different occasions. First, the cry of the multitude on the day of Pentecost, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Acts 2:37. Second, Paul's cry from the newly converted heart as recorded in Acts 9:6 and 22:10, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" "What shall I do, Lord?" And, thirdly, the cry of the jailer of Acts 16:30, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" In each case as shown by the context of the various chapters, baptism followed as the reply to these questions.