

Down to the River

INTRODUCTION

- A. The following article appeared in *The Boston Globe* on Sunday August 14, 1983: Natick police yesterday ruled accidental the drowning Friday of an unemployed Dorchester man who apparently lost his balance and fell into deep water while begin baptized in Lake Cochituate.
1. John E. Blue, 37, was pronounced dead at Leonard Morse Hospital in Natick shortly after the 11:30 AM accident.
 2. Harold G. Branch of the church said he was baptizing Blue in waist-deep water near Rte. 9 when the two men lost their balance & fell backward. Police said the lake bottom drops off sharply immediately behind the spot where the two men were standing.
- B. John Blue apparently wished to do the right thing, submitted to baptism, & died as a result.
1. Did Blue really need to be baptized? Wouldn't it have been much easier & far less dangerous for Blue just to pray that God forgive him of his sins and allow Jesus into his heart?
 2. Of course, many groups teach exactly that. We will often hear that all one needs to do in order to obtain salvation is to pray the "sinner's prayer" & he can be baptized later, if he so desires.
- C. What is all the fuss over baptism about?
1. We can find many different answers.
 - a. Roy Lanier, Jr., writing in the January 1994 issue of *The Spiritual Sword* writes, "Just as both sowing and reaping are prior to eating bread, so both belief and baptism are prior to, essential to, salvation" (p 24). Roy Lanier says that baptism is essential.
 - b. Frank Stagg, a Baptist scholar, writes, "Water baptism is not saving. Many passages which are concerned with salvation make no mention of baptism" (*New Testament Theology*, p. 233).
 - c. Who is right? Is Roy Lanier right in saying that baptism is essential? Is Frank Stagg correct in saying that water baptism has nothing to do with salvation?
 2. In a very real sense, I don't care if it's Lanier or Stagg that's right. I don't care what you think about baptism. But, I'm greatly concerned with what the Lord says about baptism.
 - a. It is only those who do the will of God who shall enter heaven.
 - 1) "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:21).
 - 2) It's not the one who does the will of this scholar or that scholar or this church or that denomination who shall enter heaven—it's he who does the will of the Father.
 - b. The will of the Father is now recorded in Scripture.
 - 1) "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord" (1 Cor 14:37).
 - 2) It matters not what I think about baptism; it matters not what you think about baptism. It only matters what God thinks about baptism.
- D. This morning, we want to explore the New Testament teaching concerning baptism to understand the will of the Father.

BAPTISM FOLLOWS JESUS' EXAMPLE

- A. Jesus left us an example to follow.
1. Christ left "you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Pt 2:21).
 2. "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1)—Paul only holds himself up as an example to the extent that he follows Jesus; it is Jesus whom we ultimately are to follow.
- B. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist.
1. Jesus asked John to baptize him because "thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3:15).
 - a. "Righteousness" refers to doing the right thing.
 - b. That Jesus wanted to be baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" means that his being baptized, although he had no sin, was the right thing to do.
 2. In being baptized, Jesus is complying with the command of his Father.
 3. Further, Jesus knew that he would command all his followers to be baptized; Jesus wasn't willing to ask his disciples to do something that he himself was unwilling to do. Thus, he submitted to John's baptism.
- C. When we are baptized, we are following the example Jesus left for us. Have you followed Jesus' example?

BAPTISM WAS COMMANDED BY JESUS

- A. Jesus commanded the apostles to baptize.
 - 1. “Go . . . and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).
 - 2. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:16).
- B. The case of the Ethiopian eunuch is quite interesting.
 - 1. As Luke narrates the episode, he writes, “As they [Philip and the eunuch] were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’” (Acts 8:36).
 - 2. How did the eunuch know that he needed to be baptized in water?
 - a. When Philip arrives on the scene, the eunuch was riding in his chariot, reading from Isaiah, but he informs Philip that he needs some guidance in understanding the passage.
 - b. Luke then writes, “Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35).
 - 1) Luke says that Philip preached “the good news about Jesus,” not about the need to be baptized.
 - 2) What conclusion can we draw other than the fact that preaching about Jesus includes the preaching of baptism? The preaching of Jesus Christ cannot be separated from what he commanded.
- C. Have you submitted to the command of Jesus to be baptized?

BAPTISM PLACES ONE INTO CHRIST

- A. One needs to be in Christ.
 - 1. It is “in Christ” where all spiritual blessings can be found: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3).
 - 2. It is “in Christ” where one finds the forgiveness of sins: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7).
 - 3. It is abundantly clear from these passages that it is only “in Christ” that one has spiritual blessings, including the forgiveness of sins.
 - a. If I were to tell you that I had hidden 5 million dollars in my office & whoever found it could keep it, would you look here in the auditorium or would you look in my office?
 - b. Why would you look in my office rather than here? Because I said that’s where the prize is & the clear implication is that it’s only there.
 - c. Therefore, when God says there are spiritual blessings “in Christ,” we need look nowhere else for those spiritual blessings. Spiritual blessings can only be found “in Christ.”
- B. How can one get into Christ? The only way to get into Christ is to be baptized into him.
 - 1. “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27).
 - 2. “All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Rom 6:3).
- C. If I want spiritual blessings (including the forgiveness of my sins), I absolutely must be baptized into Christ.

BAPTISM IS FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS

- A. Baptism remits one’s sins.
 - 1. “Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38).
 - 2. If one wants to have his sins remitted—i.e., forgiven—he absolutely must be baptized.
- B. Some religious groups teach that “for the forgiveness of your sins” really means “because of the forgiveness of your sins.”
 - 1. According to this view, one is baptized because his sins have already been forgiven.
 - 2. However, the Greek term “*eis*” means “into.”
 - a. The word is often used in a geographical sense, meaning to enter a place:
 - 1) “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to [*eis*] Jerusalem” (Mt 2:1).
 - 2) Likewise, when one is baptized “into the forgiveness of sins,” he is baptized into a state where he has the forgiveness of sins.
 - b. The term also expresses purpose:
 - 1) “It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that [*eis*] you may approve what is excellent” (Phil 1:9-10).
 - 2) Baptism “for the remission of sins” means, therefore, that the forgiveness of sins is the purpose of baptism.

3. In thinking of baptism for the remission of sins, one must also carefully consider the words of Jesus.
 - a. When he instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus said of the cup, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for [eis] the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28).
 - b. The Greek grammar is precisely the same in both Mt 26:28 & Acts 2:38.
 - 1) If we are to be baptized because our sins have already been forgiven, then Jesus Christ died because our sins were already forgiven!
 - 2) Is not the very idea that Jesus died because sins have already been forgiven beyond ludicrous?
- C. How many good people have been taught that Paul was saved while on the road to Damascus?
 1. It was, after all, on the way to Damascus that Jesus appeared to Saul & called him to be an apostle. How could Saul have left such an encounter with the risen Christ & not be forgiven?
 2. Those who claim that Paul received salvation on the Damascus way overlook a couple important texts.
 - a. When Saul asked the heavenly voice who was speaking, the Lord replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do" (Acts 9:5-6).
 - 1) Jesus informs Saul of Tarsus there he needs to do something & that he will be told what that is once in Damascus.
 - 2) Granted, the text does not say that Saul will be told what to do to obtain salvation, nor does Jesus mention baptism. But, that conclusion seems unmistakable in light of what Ananias told Saul:
 - b. "Now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).
 - 1) Saul had been praying & fasting for three days (Acts 9:9-11). If praying & fasting could save a person, I would think three days worth would get the job done!
 - 2) Yet, even after that encounter with Jesus, Saul has his sins. In fact, he is told to be baptized in order to have his sins washed away.

BAPTISM IS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION

- A. Not only is baptism necessary in order to have the forgiveness of sins, but baptism is likewise necessary to have salvation.
 1. "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:16).
 - a. This passage does not teach the idea that salvation can come to one who has not been baptized. Salvation is placed after baptism; only when one both believes & is baptized can he be saved.
 - b. But, many object saying, "The verse does not say he who does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned."
 - 1) The idea is that since Jesus only mentions unbelief (and not a refusal to be baptized) as causing condemnation, the unbaptized will not be condemned.
 - 2) But, baptism follows faith: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."
 - 3) If one does not believe, he will not submit to baptism.
 - a) Without faith, one cannot please God (Heb 11:6), whether or not he is baptized.
 - b) An atheist isn't going to be baptized because he believes he has no need to be. It is only those who believe the words of Jesus who will submit to baptism.
 2. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5).
 3. "Baptism, which corresponds to this [the Flood in Noah's day], 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 Pt 3:21).
- B. Have you been baptized? Have you received salvation?

BAPTISM ALONE DOES NOT SAVE

- A. Unfortunately, there are some who teach that all one needs to do in order to obtain salvation is be baptized.
 1. Hence, the Roman Catholic Church & other groups baptize infants who have no idea what's taking place.
 2. Some Jesuit missionaries began the process of converting the Huron Indians to Catholicism.
 - a. These missionaries found the Indians slow to accept & comprehend their teachings.
 - b. The bloody Iroquois were in that that region & they would often burst into Huron villages to spread fire & slaughter.
 - c. At those times, the Jesuit priests would go through the streets of town with holy water & sprinkle that water on whomever they met.
 - d. Obviously, such is not Christian baptism.
- B. Baptism follows the believing of the Gospel.
 1. "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:16).

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2. The one who does not believe will not be baptized. He has no reason, as far as he's concerned, to be baptized; even if he submitted to baptism, it would be ineffectual.
- C. Baptism must follow the repentance of sin.
 1. "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2:38).
 2. Unless one repents, he has no need to be baptized—he'll just be getting wet.
- D. Confession of faith in Christ is also necessary for salvation.
 1. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved" (Rom 10:9-10).
 2. If I refuse to confess my faith in Jesus, I cannot be saved.
 3. I find Romans 10 quite intriguing in the discussion as to whether or not baptism alone imparts salvation.
 - a. Notice that Paul says that you must "believe in your heart that God raised" Jesus from the dead in order to have salvation.
 - b. What if I'm a liberal "Christian" who believes that Jesus was a good man, even that he was the Son of God, but that he was never resurrected?
 - 1) I'm baptized; I live a Christian life; I'm active in the church, but in my heart I'm just not convinced that Jesus was really raised from the dead.
 - 2) What then?
 - a) I'll go to hell for an eternity; that's what!
 - b) Does baptism have some miraculous power that automatically cleanses me of sin regardless of my heart, regardless of my motives? Absolutely not!

HOW SHOULD ONE BE BAPTIZED?

- A. Some groups simply sprinkle water on candidates for baptism; others pour a little water over the head; others immerse. Does it really make any difference?
- B. An honest person who could read the New Testament in its original Greek would never ask that question!
 1. The Greek term means to "immerse" or "plunge." There is no other possible meaning of the word.
 2. The ancient Greeks even used the term "baptize" to speak of the sinking of a ship; a sunken ship is totally submerged in water.
- C. The New Testament speaks of baptism as a burial.
 1. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4).
 2. We have "been buried with him in baptism, in which [we] were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col 2:12).
- D. Some might say that the idea of baptism as a burial is simply symbolic, not literal.
 1. For just a moment, let's assume that's correct.
 - a. Then, why, when Jesus was baptized, did he immediately go "up from the water" (Mt 3:16)?
 - b. Why did John the Baptist baptize where water was plentiful (Jn 3:23)?
 - c. Why did both Philip & the eunuch go down into the water (Acts 8:38)?
 2. Baptism is a total immersion in water.

CONCLUSION

- A. Some would object to what we've said this morning by asking, "Where's the grace of God?"
 1. "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8).
 2. Salvation is from grace from beginning to end. Only because of his great grace did God send his Son to die for me; only because of his great grace has God provided a way that we can have salvation; only because of his great grace has God revealed to me his will concerning baptism.
- B. Those who believe that faith alone is sufficient to save would likely object to what we've said this morning because salvation is based upon faith, not works.
 1. It is true that salvation is by faith without works: "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9).
 2. It's obvious, however, that salvation by faith does not nullify baptism.
 - a. Nowhere in all of Scripture is baptism called a "work."
 - 1) But, believing in Jesus is called a "work": "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (Jn 6:29).
 - 2) How can one say that baptism is a work & faith isn't when Scripture calls faith a "work" but never calls

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baptism a work?

- b. It is also abundantly clear that true, biblical faith motivates people to obedience.
 - 1) “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household” (Heb 11:7).
 - a) Because Noah believed what God had said, he built an ark.
 - b) What if Noah had said, “God, my salvation from the Flood is by faith. I don’t need to do anything”? Would God have shown up with an ark before the heavens opened?
 - 2) “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac” (Heb 11:17). Abraham’s faith prompted him to act.
 - 3) Over & over throughout Hebrews 11 we see that people acted because of & in their faith.
 - c. Salvation without works must, therefore, mean that I cannot earn my salvation.
- C. Baptism is not a work, but it is an act of faith.
- 1. I cannot see one’s sins being remitted when he’s in that water. Yet, because God has made that promise, I believe that occurs.
 - 2. I cannot see the blood of Jesus removing every sin when someone is immersed. But, God has promised & I believe.
 - 3. I cannot see one’s name being written in the Book of Life. But, God has promised, God is faithful, & I believe.
 - 4. Do you this morning, in an act of faith, need to be baptized into Jesus?