

BAPTISM AND BENEFITS

THIS IS THE SUNDAY WHEN WE CELEBRATE THE BAPTISM OF JESUS. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS MARKS THE BEGINNING OF HIS PUBLIC MINISTRY. THIS EVENT IS DESCRIBED IN THE GOSPELS OF MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE. JOHN'S GOSPEL DOES NOT DIRECTLY DESCRIBE JESUS' BAPTISM, BUT REFERS TO IT INDIRECTLY.

MOST MODERN THEOLOGIANS VIEW THE BAPTISM OF JESUS BY JOHN THE BAPTIST AS A HISTORICAL EVENT TO WHICH A HIGH DEGREE OF CERTAINTY CAN BE ASSIGNED IF RELIGIOUS TEXTS ARE TAKEN AT FACE VALUE. **ALONG WITH THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS, MOST BIBLICAL SCHOLARS VIEW BAPTISM AS ONE OF THE TWO HISTORICALLY CERTAIN FACTS ABOUT HIM,** AND OFTEN USE IT AS THE STARTING POINT FOR THE STUDY OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS.

THE BAPTISM IS ONE OF THE FIVE MAJOR MILESTONES IN THE GOSPEL NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF JESUS, THE OTHERS BEING THE TRANSFIGURATION, CRUCIFIXION, RESURRECTION, AND ASCENSION. MOST CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS VIEW THE BAPTISM OF JESUS AS AN IMPORTANT EVENT AND A BASIS FOR THE CHRISTIAN RITE OF BAPTISM

BASED ON THIS CRITERION, GIVEN THAT JOHN BAPTIZED FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, AND JESUS WAS VIEWED AS WITHOUT SIN, THE INVENTION OF THIS STORY WOULD HAVE SERVED NO PURPOSE.

THIS IS HISTORY FOR US AS BELIEVERS AND FOLLOWERS OF JESUS. WE MUST NOT FORGET THAT **BAPTISM IS ONE OF OUR TWO SACRAMENTS, THE OTHER BEING COMMUNION.** IN CONFIRMATION ALL THE YOUTH, IF YOU ASK THEM WILL TELL YOU WHY THESE TWO ARE SACRAMENTS. THERE ARE THREE ELEMENTS OF SACRAMENTS. ONE, IT IS COMMANDED BY JESUS, MATTHEW 28:19, "*Go into the world and baptize*" AND IN LUKE 22:19 "*Do this in remembrance of ME*". TWO EARTHLY ELEMENTS ARE USED IN BAPTISM, WATER AND IN COMMUNION BREAD AND WINE. THIRD, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, GOD IS PRESENT AND INITIATES AN ACTION.

REMEMBER BAPTISM MAY BE CALLED A RITUAL OF THE CHURCH, BUT IT IS MUST NEVER BECOME JUST THAT – A RITUAL IT IS A SACRAMENT. THERE ARE MYSTERIES OF OUR FAITH THAT WE MAY NOT KNOW OF OR BE AWARE OF ALL THE DETAILS, BUT BY DEFINITION OF FAITH FOUND IN HEBREWS 11, "*...The conviction of things not seen*", WE ACCEPT GOD IS DOING SOMETHING, JUST LIKE IN COMMUNION WE ARE BEING FORGIVEN.

WHEN JESUS WAS BAPTIZED BY JOHN, THREE THINGS HAPPENED. THE HEAVENS OPENED, THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME ON JESUS LIKE A DOVE, AND A VOICE FROM HEAVEN SPOKE "YOU ARE MY SON IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED". A LARGE **ELEMENT OF BAPTISM IS OBEDIENCE.** AFTER HIS BAPTISM JESUS BEGAN HIS MINISTRY. WHEN WE ARE BAPTIZED IT OPENS A DOORWAY FOR SOMETHING DYNAMIC TO TAKE PLACE IN OUR LIVES, WHERE WE ARE OFFERED THINGS TO USE IN MINISTRY AND WE HAVE AVAILABLE AN ENDLESS RESOURCE FOR DAILY LIVING AND MINISTRY! WHAT JESUS RECEIVED THAT DAY, WE TOO RECEIVE IN BAPTISM. ON THE INSERT YOU CAN SEE ALL THE "ACTIVITY" GOING ON BECAUSE OF BAPTISM.

YOU HAVE HEARD THE STORY OF MY FRIEND WHO HAD NOT HAD HIS DAUGHTERS BAPTIZED BECAUSE OF THE FAITH THEY GREW UP IN. I ASKED HIM "DON'T YOU WANT TO GIVE YOUR DAUGHTERS EVERY ADVANTAGE IN LIFE?" HE ANSWERED "SURE" "WELL, BAPTISM IS LIKE THAT" IN 1 PETER 5:8 IT SAYS "*Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.*" **SO WOULD YOU RATHER "FIGHT" SPIRITUAL BATTLES WITH A BUTTER KNIFE OR A SWORD?** WOULD YOU RATHER YOUR GIRLS GO THROUGH THEIR DAILY LIVES WITH THAT "SWORD" WHICH IS DESCRIBED IN EPHESIANS 6:17 "*...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*", AS PROTECTION ALONG WITH OTHER EQUIPMENT? IN HEBREWS 4:12 "*For the word of God is **alive and active**. Sharper than any double-edged sword...*" **THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS IN BAPTISM, THINGS BEYOND WHAT WE CAN IMAGINE OR PICTURE!** THEY ARE NOT JUST IDEAS OR CONCEPTS, THEY ARE THINGS FOR LIVING A LIFE OF JOY DESPITE ANY AND ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.

WHAT ARE THE REAL "BENEFITS" OF BAPTISM? WHAT'S SO HELPFUL TO OUR DAILY LIVING?

THE FIRST "BENEFIT" IS BEGINNING A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST. IN MATTHEW 28 AND MARK 16 JESUS COMMANDS US TO BAPTIZE AND IN JOHN 14:15 JESUS SAYS "*IF YOU LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS*". OUR LIFE SHOULD BE ONE OF DAILY OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST. REMEMBER IN JOHN WHEN JESUS GIVES US A "NEW" COMMANDMENT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. OBEDIENCE IN THIS CULTURE IS NOT LOOKED UPON FAVORABLY. WE HAVE "RIGHTS" AND DON'T HAVE TO BE SUBJECT TO ANYONE! I HAVE SAID MANY TIMES, "**THE BIBLE SHOULD NOT BE LOOKED UPON AS A BOOK OF DON'T DO THIS OR DON'T DO THAT. THE BIBLE IS A BOOK FOR LIVING A LIFE FREE FROM GUILT, GOSSIP, AND GREED. WHEN WE READ AND USE WHAT IS IN THE BIBLE FOR OUR LIFE, OUR LIFE BECOMES ONE OF JOY AND SERVICE.**

THE SECOND "BENEFIT" IS WE DEVELOP OUR PUBLIC FAITH. BY THAT I MEAN **WE BECOME A WITNESS** AS JESUS TELLS US IN MATTHEW 10 WHERE WE CONFESS JESUS BEFORE OTHERS. WATER BAPTISM IS AN OUTWARD SIGN OF AN INWARD TRANSFORMATION, A WORK OF MYSTERY GOD PERFORMS IN BAPTISM WHETHER ONE IS AN INFANT OR ADULT. THE METHOD OF BAPTISM VARIES, AND THAT IS ALL RIGHT. GOD WILL BE PRESENT NO MATTER WHETHER IT'S DONE IN A RIVER OR AT A BAPTISMAL FONT.

The young son of a Baptist minister was in church one morning when he saw for the first time baptism by immersion. He was greatly interested in it, and the next morning proceeded to baptize... you guessed it... his three cats in the bathtub. The youngest kitten bore it very well, and so did the younger cat, but the old family tom cat rebelled. The old feline struggled with the boy, clawed and tore his skin, and finally got away. With considerable effort the boy caught the old tom again and proceeded with the "ceremony." But the cat acted worse than ever, clawing and spitting, and scratching the boy's face. Finally, after barely getting the cat splattered with water, he dropped him on the floor in disgust and said: "Fine, be a Methodist if you want to!" HUMOR CAN SHOW US THE METHOD IS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS DOING BAPTISM!

THE THIRD "BENEFIT" IS, AND THIS IS REALLY IMPORTANT, NOT ONLY FOR THE INDIVIDUAL, BUT FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST, BAPTISM INCREASES OUR CONNECTION TO THE BODY OF CHRIST. IN THE BAPTISM LITURGY THE CONGREGATION TAKES PART AND PROMISES TO SUPPORT THE FAMILY AND CHILD OR ADULT IN THE LEARNING PROCESS OF FAITH. WE AS A BODY OF CHRIST HERE AT CENTENNIAL, WITH GOD'S HELP LIVE AS AN EXAMPLE OF CHRIST, **SURROUNDING THE INDIVIDUAL**

WITH LOVE AND FORGIVENESS SO THEY MAY GROW IN FAITH, AND LAST WE PROMISE TO PRAY FOR THEM. ARE WE PRAYING FOR LAINEY, ANDERSON, OR KEMBER AND THE MANY OTHER CHILDREN AND YOUTH WE HAVE PROMISED TO HELP IN THE WORDS OF THE BAPTISM LITURGY? WE ARE NOT MEANT TO LIVE OUT OUR FAITH ALONE. WE ARE MEANT TO “SERVE” BY BEING THAT EXAMPLE. BAPTISM BRINGS US INTO FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHER BELIEVERS. WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF FELLOWSHIP AND THE PAIN OF LOSS WITH OTHERS.

THE FOURTH “BENEFIT” IS IT PERSONALIZES CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION. AGAIN, IT IS A MYSTERY OF FAITH THAT IN SOME WAY WE ARE CONNECTED TO CHRIST AND ALL HE DID. GALATIANS 3:27 TELLS US *“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ”*. HE IS WITH EACH OF AND EVERYDAY AS WE WALK OUR SPIRITUAL PATHWAY. I AM REMINDED OF THE SONG *“You Never Walk Alone”*. **WE ARE CONNECTED BY JESUS TO GOD THE FATHER.** IT IS A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP LIKE NO OTHER. **BAPTISM IS AN INVITATION BY GOD TO EXPERIENCE ALL THAT HE OFFERS US THROUGH THE CHURCH.** MOST IMPORTANTLY GOD “EQUIPS” US, NOT WITH A BUTTER KNIFE, BUT THE SWORD, THE WORD OF GOD, TO HELP US SERVE, GIVES US PROTECTION, AND GIFTS US TO PARTICIPATE IN MINISTRY.

THE “BENEFITS” OF BAPTISM ARE NUMEROUS AND HELP US, ALONG WITH JESUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, TO LIVE A LIFE WITH MEANING. *ALL ALONG I HAVE SAID RELIGION IS NOT ABOUT RULES AND REGULATIONS, BUT RELATIONSHIPS, WITH JESUS AND OTHERS. BAPTISM CLEARLY SUPPORTS THIS STATEMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS.* BY OBEDIENCE TO JESUS' COMMANDS TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AND BE BAPTIZED WE GAIN A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. BY OUR CONNECTION WITH HIS LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION WE BEGIN A LIFE-LONG WALK OF BECOMING MORE CHRIST-LIKE. BY BAPTISM WE ENTER THROUGH THE DOOR AND INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST WHERE WE ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS. THESE RELATIONSHIPS HELP THE BODY OF CHRIST FUNCTION. REMEMBER IN 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-13 *“The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But **we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.**”* **EACH PART IS IMPORTANT NO MATTER HOW MUCH OR HOW LITTLE ITS FUNCTION. THAT PART SERVES A FUNCTION!!! WE HAVE ALL BEEN GIVEN GIFTS BY GOD TO USE IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE BODY OF CHRIST HERE AT CENTENNIAL.**

BAPTISM IS ONE OF OUR SACRAMENTS, COMMANDED BY JESUS. JESUS KNOWS THE “BENEFITS” WE WILL RECEIVE DAILY AND THROUGHOUT OUR LIFE. **THE QUESTION IS, WHETHER IT BE FOR YOUR CHILDREN OR YOURSELF, “WOULD YOU RATHER “FIGHT” THE DEVIL WITH A BUTTER KNIFE OR THE SWORD, WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD? AMEN.**