

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

In Lesson 9 we looked at the teaching of the apostle Peter. About seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus, he stood up in Jerusalem and spoke these words.

Acts 2: 38

'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'

This is God's commandment to everyone who hears about His Son. Peter talks about two things that people must do.

1. Repent: - In the last lesson we learned that this means to be sorry for our sins and to seek the way back to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Peter told people that their repentance must be followed by baptism. Without this they would not receive the promised gift of eternal life when Jesus returns to the earth. Without baptism their sins could not be forgiven.

Baptism means 'to be buried under water'. When someone is baptised, they go down under the water, and come out again.

Why does God ask us to be baptised when we want to become disciples of the Lord Jesus?
Look at these words from the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 3:1-2,5-6

'In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.".....

People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River.'

John the Baptist was a man sent by God to prepare people for the coming of Jesus. He insisted that they confess their sins and then be baptised. From this we can understand that baptism is a kind of washing. It is not a washing of our dirty skin. It is the washing away of our sins. Of course we can see when our skin is dirty. We cannot see when our sins have made us dirty inside.

When we come out of the water we cannot see that we have had our sins washed away. But this is just how God sees us. When we have been baptised, he sees us as people who are clean inside, without sin. When we wash ourselves, it is because we know that we are dirty.

John insisted that people told him, or confessed, that they had sinned. They acknowledged that sin had made them dirty inside and that they needed to be made clean. Then he baptised them to make their hearts and lives ready for the coming of Jesus. They were clean inside.

In the Bible, the apostle Paul in Romans chapter 6 tells us about baptism.

Romans 6:3-5

'Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.'

When we are baptised it is as if we are buried with Jesus. We cannot live under water, we would drown if we stayed there! So going under the water and coming out again is like dying and coming back to life. It is a witness before God that we believe our sins are forgiven through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Paul also told us something else about baptism. He said that before we repent and are baptised we are slaves to sin. Sin is our master; we have to obey it. It rules our lives. We cannot save ourselves from sin and death. We need to accept the

salvation God provides through the Lord Jesus. When we repent and are baptised, we are freed from sin.

Romans 6:6-10

'If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.'

'Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.'

We are freed from sin and have chosen to serve a new master. We have chosen to serve God.

We have chosen to obey his commandments in our lives. We have chosen to follow the example of Jesus as our master and to be his disciples. This is not easy, but we know that God will forgive us when we fail. He will do this because we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus for our sins.

So baptism is the beginning of a new life. The old life has died in the water and the person who has been baptised comes out to begin a new life as one of God's children. The person who has done this tries to follow the teaching of Jesus and put God first in his life at all times.

If you have a Bible please read the whole of Romans chapter 6 for yourself.

Questions

- 1 What is baptism?
- 2 What did John ask people to do before he would baptise them?
- 3 What is washed away in baptism?
- 4 Whose death do we remember when we are baptised?
- 5 In the old life, whose slaves are we?
- 6 In the new life, whose slaves are we?