

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (8-5-1994 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Baptism – part 2

Acts 2:41

Additional Bible Reading: Matthew 3:13-17; Romans 6:1-14

Introduction

Continuing our look at the subject of baptism, today we are going to look at three more aspects – the mode of baptism, its meaning and its value.

The mode of baptism

As we saw last time in our look at the history of baptism, there has been variation down through the centuries in how it has been performed. But the meaning of the Greek work, and earliest practice, point to immersion as being the Biblical mode.

The Apostles wrote in the Greek language. It is interesting to note that all Greek lexicons and dictionaries, even those compiled by people from denominations which do not practice believer's baptism and immersion, all agree that the Greek word does not denote sprinkling. Liddell and Scott (both Anglicans), say that βαπτίζω means to dip in or under water, to plunge, and with reference to ships, to sink. Gingrich (Lutheran), who provides the fullest and most up to date lexicon, essential for research into the New Testament, translates it as dip, immerse, plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm. No mention of sprinkling or pouring. There are Greek words for sprinkling and pouring – but they are never used in reference to Christian baptism.

Also the descriptions in the New Testament suggest immersion. **John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water** (John 3:23). **As Jesus was coming up out of the water** (Mark 1:10). And Paul's teaching about baptism speaks of being buried with Him in baptism, and raised to newness of life. Also quotations from the early fathers, art, and the presence of early baptisteries indicates immersion. Then it began to change because of people who were ill and had water poured on their head. Thereafter the mode was variable.

Interesting that when the Authorised Version was made in 1611, King James I, who drew up a number of rules of procedure, ordered the translators not to upset the relatively new practice of sprinkling (introduced in England in the sixteenth century) with their translation – so they simply anglicised the Greek word into “baptise” rather than “immerse”. More accurate would have been to call it “immersion”. But at least they did not translate it as “sprinkle”.

The meaning of baptism

To be baptised is an act of obedience, showing the subject is following the Lord. But it is much more than that. The baptismal service and baptismal waters remind us first and foremost of that which was right at the heart of the Christian faith – the fact that Christ died, was buried, and rose again. This is the centre of the Gospel. So baptism is a great teaching ordinance, in that it sets forth the essentials of the Gospel. Our only hope of salvation is the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His Resurrection.

Salvation comes, not because of what we do – our good living, church attendance or great effort – but because of Christ’s death for our sins.

At the baptismal service the Gospel is preached, and the person being baptised publicly confesses that in Christ’s death and Resurrection, he has been forgiven, buried an old life, the old person he used to be, and now in Christ Jesus he has risen to a new life, a new person, a new creature in Christ.

Baptism does not make forgiveness of sins or new life happen. That has already taken place. But it is a public and outward visible sign. By faith they made an inward response to the Christ. By baptism they make an outward and visible response. Faith and baptism are the inward and outward sides of response to the Gospel.

It is like the wedding ring – it is not the relationship in itself, but it points to the relationship. It does not cleanse from sin, but it makes the believer more conscious of pardon. It is not new birth, but the occasion when its reality is impressed on us. There is a fresh experience of the Holy Spirit. It does not affect surrender, but it makes surrender more complete.

As Christ identified Himself in His baptism with our sin, so the believer identifies himself in baptism with Christ’s salvation. Henceforth he is committed to walk in newness of life, under Christ’s authority and in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a forward reference, prefiguring the day when the believer will be physically resurrected from the body in the grave at Christ’s return.

According to the 1689 Confession, “Baptism is unto the party baptised a sign of his fellowship with Christ in his death and resurrection, of his being engrafted into him, of remission of sins and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ to live and walk in newness of life.” So baptism sets forth the very essence of Christian experience. It tells us that the person baptised is not just good living, or religious, church going, or has Christian parents. But he has had a personal life-transforming encounter with Christ.

Because of Christ’s death and Resurrection, the person being baptised demonstrates that he has made a complete break with the past sins, and debts of all past sins are forgiven and wiped out, and now he has a new life with new aims, new power, new constraints, and one day it will end in glory with a resurrection body.

Baptism is the outward sign of an inward response and all that follows the Gospel. It is a unique act; there is no other way we can so visibly identify with Christ’s saving work. It is done publicly before the world – like a marriage ceremony. A public and binding commitment is made. Unique badge of discipleship. Public confession before men.

*“I’m not ashamed to own my Lord
Or to defend His cause.”*

Value of baptism

Baptism is an act of obedience. The Head of the Church commanded it, as the Word of God makes plain. It does not bring salvation, but it does bring blessing. God

blesse obedience. **In the keeping of God's commandments there is great reward** (Psalm 19:11). **Blessed are they that do his commandments** (Revelation 22:11).

It is not an empty symbol to the man or woman who responds in answer to Christ's commandments. Many look back at the day of their baptism as a real landmark in their spiritual experience. Their faith was strengthened, their vision was clarified, their experience was enriched, and their consciousness of union with Christ was deepened. Dr John Clifford spoke of the day of his baptism, "accession of great power to my conscience, a quickening sense of obligation, set me in full dependence on God for full hearted determination to obey him." C.H.Spurgeon said, "I lost a thousand fear on the River Lark. I found that in keeping his commandments there is great reward. It was a thrice happy day for me." Colin Field found it "a great anchor in a time of temptation". Many have testified that if they had not been baptised they would have missed out on great blessing and memorable experience, not only at the time but also in the rest of their life. During later inward trials and inward shakings, they were able to look back to their baptism and feel strengthened, assured that they are His.

Baptism is also of value to those who observe the Gospel being proclaimed. They witness a visible sign that Christ has died and risen again. They witness that someone has responded to the Gospel, openly, publicly and unashamedly. They have confessed Christ as their Lord and Master, and committed to henceforth walk in His way and live by His power. The challenge goes out to observers – who is on the Lord's side? On what do you depend for acceptance? On what are you trusting?

Believers who have not been baptised are also challenged. Here is the Lord's will; here is the way He has said we should respond to the Gospel. The excuse that they have never felt led is challenged as they read the Bible – read the plain command. What more special guidance do they need?

Believers who are already baptised are reminded of their own baptism and the vows they made. It is a chance to renew their loyalty, pledge and allegiance.

Value above all in bringing glory to the Lord. This is the way He went, this is His will for our lives, His Gospel is preached, His salvation is set forth and His claims are acknowledged.

Conclusion

Christian baptism is significant in its form, positive in value, wide ranging in ethical implications, understandable in principle, affective in blessing, and brings great possibilities for spiritual power.