

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

Introduction: Story appeared in a newspaper in England: "Mrs. Katie Barrett, 90 years old, will be baptized by immersion at Bethesda Baptist Church next Sunday. "I've been pondering this step since I was 18," she says, "and now I've made up my mind."

There are many groups these days who teach that water baptism is not for the church today. I was merely a symbol which has been done away with in the full revelation of the New Testament.

The first references to baptism in the N.T. are in connection with the ministry of John the Baptist: ***"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (Mt. 3)***

This passage marks the difference between symbolic baptism and real baptism. Baptism is more than a simple rite which people undergo. The rite of water baptism is but a symbol of something else, and that something else constitutes the real meaning of baptism..the reality behind baptism.

"His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear the threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." (Mt. 3:12)

John is saying that when Jesus comes into the world he will baptize everybody in the world with the Holy Spirit or with fire - one or the other. "Look, you have two choices: If you don't want to be baptized with fire, then confess your sins, and be baptized with water as a symbol of it, so that when He comes your baptism may be that gracious outpouring of the H.S. which perfects and fulfills God's plan for men.:

"And while staying with them He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, 'you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.'" (Acts 1:4)

The Holy Spirit was poured out upon these disciples and, for the first time, the body of Christ was formed. That is the purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, to form the body of Christ by introducing every individual believer into that body.

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12: 12,13)

Then why be baptized with water if exercising faith brings us into the body of Christ? What about the thief on the cross? He wasn't baptized with water, therefore water baptism doesn't necessarily do anything for you. So why have water baptism?

Primarily because Jesus commanded it!

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them....in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching

them to observe all that I have commanded you...and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Mt. 28:19,20)

That should be enough shouldn't it? If Jesus commands us to be baptized and we desire to obey His command and fulfill His will, then we should do it, whether we understand why or not.

The early church practiced water baptism and even Paul, called separate from the 12, was baptized, and went to various places, teaching, preaching and baptizing, however he quit baptizing when people began to brag on who baptized them. But the church continued to baptize with water those who believed in Jesus.

Jesus left His church with two symbolic rites: baptism and the Lord's supper. Both are symbols of an inner reality. One is to meditate upon the bread and cup and the other (baptism) is to focus our attention upon the introduction to the Christian faith.

Baptism helps us to understand and grasp what is involved in being made a member of the body of Christ and how it cuts us off from the old life we once lived and introduces us to a new atmosphere, a whole new real of living, so that we enter into a new life.

"We were buried with Christ by baptism into death (Holy Spirit baptism) in order that we might rise to walk in newness of life." (Ro 6)

Therefore what water baptism means is it is your testimony to everyone that you have actually taken, by your inner commitment, the step of renouncing your old life of self-centeredness, and in response to the invitation of the Lord Jesus, having joined yourself to Him, you have begun to follow Him in the fullness of strength which He provides. Therefore you rise to walk in newness of life.

"I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into (unto) Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank from the supernatural Rock which followed the, and the Rock was Christ." (1 Cor. 10)

Israel came out of the land of Egypt a ragtag, motley mob. Out of slavery, no government, hoping for freedom. The thing in common was their desire to be rid of their enslavement. But after passing through the Red Sea, they became a united nation, under the leadership of one man, Moses. From then on Moses was the recognized authority and spokesman for God to the people.

Baptism unites us all to One, it identifies us with the One who is our leader. It brings us into union with Him.

Although they passed through the Red Sea on dry land, yet as a symbol, they are said to have gone through the sea.

To be immersed is to re-enact beautifully what the Scriptures teach about the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a wonderfully expressive way of saying that you have died with Christ, have been buried with Him, and are risen again to walk in newness of life.