



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #27: "Following Jesus in Baptism"

True Story told by Ps. G A Coon:

Down in the island of Grenada, West Indies, a baptism had been planned for a Sunday morning. A quiet spot had been chosen for the sacred service. About thirty-five young people were planning on baptism that day.

A 73-year-old lady, Sister Prone, planned on being baptized at the same time. However, she was very ill. I believe it was a heart ailment. She had questioned me a few days prior to the time arranged for the baptism, as to whether it might jeopardize her health, should she be baptized.

I had explained to her that she need have no fear. That obedience to the command of our Lord to be baptized would not jeopardize her health. I assured her she could move right ahead in her plans for that Sunday's baptismal service.

The morning of the baptism, I drove to her home, and backed my car right up next to the entrance of her house. She would not need to take any unnecessary steps to reach the car.

As soon as she had walked those few steps, and had been helped into the back seat of the car, I thought I detected illness. But as I drove down the road toward the baptismal site, I was concerned as I looked through my rear-view mirror, and saw her sort of crumbling in the back seat. Immediately I turned to the Lord in silent prayer. I prayed, "Dear Lord, You have given us a command [Matthew 28:18-20]: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Dear Lord, You wouldn't give me that command without protecting Sister Prone in obeying it. So I ask You to protect and restore our sister." At that instant she began to recover her strength. She straightened up as we drove to the baptismal site, which was some three miles distant. So I was accepting this command as a promise.

We had prepared two small tents for dressing rooms, one for the men, and one for the ladies. I helped Sister Prone out of the car. She looked improved. Still, I led her slowly and cautiously to the dressing tent. As I turned at the entrance of the tent, my thoughts went up to God once again.

The baptism was in the Caribbean Sea. In spite of our efforts to secure a peaceful spot for the baptismal service, the waves beat high. It was with some misgiving that I led the first candidate for baptism down to the water's brink. I had already concluded that the only way I could perform the sacred rite, was to step with the candidate into the shallow edge of the water, and watch for a wave. Then lower the candidate as the wave rolled in. Then raise him before the water washed back. By doing this, I was able to carry out the rite without any serious difficulty or fear of physical injury to anyone.

But it was with difficulty that I baptized all thirty-five young people. I had saved Sister Prone until the last, hoping in my heart that she would choose to wait for another day when the sea might be calmer.

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After the last of the young people were baptized, I prayerfully walked up to where Sister Prone stood, attired in her baptismal robe. I remarked, "Sister Prone, the sea is very angry today. Would you like to be baptized today, or would you prefer to wait until another day when the sea is less angry?"

Eagerly I listened for her reply, hoping she would decide to wait. But no, nothing of the kind! I had, days before, assured her of divine protection. And she had believed. She had felt the strengthening power of the Lord in her body on the way to the scene of the baptism. Now she replied, without the slightest hesitation, "No, I will go ahead and be baptized now."

THE COMMAND—A PROMISE

Again, as I led her gently to the brink of that angry sea, I thought of such commands as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20, and Acts 2:38, to baptize, as promises of protection. My mind then turned to the night of that dreadful storm on Galilee. In my heart I prayed, "Dear Lord, Thou who didst calm the boisterous Sea of Galilee [Mark 4:39], speak "Peace" to this angry sea." And I believed He would do just that. Jesus did speak "Peace, be still," though in an inaudible voice; for, believe it or not, as we stepped into that furious sea, it suddenly became as calm as a kitten. I slowly lowered Sister Prone under the water. Then gently lifted her up. I had no trouble. No problem. There was no incident. I slowly walked her back to the shore, and on to the dressing tent.

Standing there at the entrance of the tent, I suggested that as soon as she was through changing, I would take her back home in my car.

"No," she kindly answered, "I will find my own way."

Feeling she had not completely understood my willingness to take her home, I reaffirmed my readiness to see her back home. But again there seemed to be a carefree tone in her voice, as she replied, "Thank you. I'll find a way." She insisted that I not wait for her. So there was nothing left for me to do but to reluctantly return home without her.

AFTERNOON MEETING

At service time at the big tent, when those baptized were to be welcomed into church fellowship, I wondered if she had made it back safely, and if she would be there with the others. As I sat on the rostrum, my eyes glanced in the direction of the assembled group in the front seats. And there, sitting with the group, was Sister Prone!

I could not contain myself. I just had to blurt out, right before the whole congregation: "Sister Prone, how did you get here?"

Imagine my amazement when she replied with a smile, "I walked."

"Walked!" I countered. "Walked three miles?"

"Yes. You see, the Lord healed me in the baptismal waters."

I learned several lessons from that experience. One was, that when God gives us a command to do anything, that very command itself is a promise of its fulfillment. Every Bible command is a promise!

God loves the rite of baptism. He loved the obedience of elderly Sister Prone enough to heal her right on the spot!

We are not inferring that the Scriptures teach that healing necessarily follows baptism. No, not at all. But what I am saying, is, that God loved her baptismal obedience so much, that in this specific instance, He saw fit to heal her instantly.

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This fit into the statement made from heaven, by the Father, when Jesus was baptized, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:16, 17.

In Galatians 3:27, we are told: "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

A MEMORIAL

Baptism is a memorial of Christ's death, His burial, and His resurrection. So says Romans 6:1 to 6. The Bible says, "Christ died for our sins." 1 Corinthians 15:3. The same Scripture (verse 4), states that "he was buried." Then it continues, "that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

1 Corinthians 15:1 to 4 states that the gospel, in a nutshell, is Christ's dying for us, buried for us, and risen again from the grave for us. And Romans 6:1 to 4 states that this is the reason we are baptized. Romans 8:11 makes clear that, in a special sense, baptism and rising to a new life, represents Christ's resurrection.

History tells us that for eleven centuries after Christ ascended to heaven, many leaders of the church baptized by immersion, in remembrance of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. We are told that as late as 1,000 years after Christ ascended to heaven, even some faithful Priests still obeyed the Scriptures in regard to the commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. As they led the candidate for baptism down into the water, they said, "This is in the likeness of Christ's death." As they placed his body under the water, they said, "This is in the likeness of His burial." And as they lifted him from the water, they said, "This is in likeness of Christ's glorious resurrection."

RESURRECTION POWER

Holy Scripture tells us: "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." Romans 8:11. What a promise!"

REQUEST FOR PRAYER

Mrs. Beed had been given up to die of cancer. Incidentally, Mrs. Beed had several other incurable diseases, too, according to the doctor's report. They had found that her case was hopeless. And since they needed the bed space in the hospital, they released her, to die at home.

Providentially, one day we were led to the home of the Beeds. We had never met them before.

Mr. Beed asked us, point blank: "Do you believe in divine healing?"

"Yes, Mr. Beed, we do."

"Would you anoint my wife, according to the directions of James, chapter 5?" he asked.

"Yes, we shall be happy to do so," we replied.

"But knowing that to all Bible promises there are conditions, and not knowing anything about Mrs. Beed's Christian experience, we felt reluctant to go through a form of prayer, only to disappoint the man, his wife, and ourselves as well. So I did something I had never done before in all my ministry. I asked, "Would you be willing to be taught God's Word before we unite in the healing service? There are conditions to be observed. There are truths to learn. There are messages we need to receive. Would you be willing that we study some of these things, unhurriedly, before engaging in that very special and solemn service?"

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"Mr. and Mrs. Beed readily agreed to this. So instead of praying immediately for her healing, we studied the Word of God. We taught her the gospel. We returned again and again to her home. Detecting that she seemed more eager to learn God's way than to rush into the healing service and perhaps be disappointed, we continued our studies with her for a week. Then two weeks passed. And before we were through, we probably spent a total six weeks or more. As we say, we never before, or since, have held a person so long in a Bible study class before participating in a special healing service. But we felt that in this case, it was the only thing to do.

BAPTISM

During this period of Bible study, we read to Mrs. Beed about creation and our Maker. We read to her what God tells us about His holy worship day. We explained that He wants us to have the joy and delight of keeping this day holy as He commands.

When we came to the topic of baptism, she asked, "Would you be willing to baptize me?"

"Yes, indeed, we would."

"And I would like to unite with the Sabbath-keeping church," she added.

"So we set a date. She would be baptized on a Sabbath morning.

"Poor, sick, helpless Mrs. Beed, was slowly and carefully helped into the baptismal tank by two strong deacons. But the water was so cold she gasped and cried, "Oh!" (Something had gone wrong with the water heater, I think. Or maybe someone had failed in his duty.)

Instantly, the Holy Spirit impressed me with the promise that seemed to fit her fears. "Sister Beed," I smiled and spoke softly to her. "Don't be afraid. The Lord says: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee" (Isaiah 43:2)." With that, I offered the baptismal prayer, and gently lowered her body beneath the water.

HEALED

"As I lifted her, Mrs. Beed uttered a shout of joy! Her body seemed to take on a supernatural strength. Sometime later, she called me on the telephone and exultantly exclaimed: "Pastor, I was healed in that baptismal tank!"

"Mrs. Beed, how do you know you were healed?"

"I felt healing passing all through my body the moment I was lifted from the water. But to make sure I was not deceived in believing this, I returned to my doctor. He informed me there was not a sign of the cancer." Mrs. Beed said, "Why, I can run up and down stairs like a teenager!"

How our Lord must love baptism!

Baptism, representing, as already pointed out, the gospel of Christ's death, burial, and particularly His resurrection, is most significant. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is our hope. Jesus said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." John 14:19. The Apostle Paul states that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of saving faith. "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." 1 Corinthians 15:17.

It is essential that we express our faith in His resurrection, Romans 10:9 says: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

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Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we would have no hope. Every Old Testament prophecy, or promise, of Christ's resurrection would have been proven false had not Christ risen from the dead. Remember how Jesus spoke to the men of Emmaus, telling them that it is foolish not to believe these prophecies? (Luke 24:13-35)

The prophecies are also promises; "the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again." Acts 13:32 and 33.

The baptismal text states: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Romans 6:4 and 5.

Talk about promises—these are baptismal promises!

Here is another promise right from the lips of Jesus Himself: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Mark 16:16.

Here is a promise of the Holy Spirit to those who are baptized: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." And to show that this promise is for us, too, he added: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2:38 and 39.

We can see that the commands of God are really promises; almost every word of God in creating the world was a command. This is the very basis of our claiming Bible promises. At creation, God said, "Let there be light." The Apostle Paul, in speaking of this event, said, "God.... commanded the light to shine out of darkness." 2 Corinthians 4:6. So the commandments of God frame the very thing He commands.