

Reverend Dow Chamberlain: What Happened When You Were Baptized?

Observance Of The Baptism Of Our Lord

Sermon preached at Seeker's Church 12 January 1997

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What Happened When You Were Baptized?

*On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands on them, The Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues, and prophesied.
– Acts 19:5,6.*

Introduction

1. I doubt that more than one person in the entire congregation of St. Peter could read
 - more than being poor, they were isolated mountain folk
 - just to get water they had to walk more than a mile
 - but St. Peter was a living, growing congregation
 - their witness constantly produced new converts
 - because there was no river nearby
 - they would travel to the District Rally on Easter Monday

- and their new converts would be baptized in the baptismal pool in the city church
2. This one dear lady started attending St. Peters
 - now she had completed her months of catechism and probation
 - her great day had arrived
 - she was to be baptized
 3. On this particular Easter Monday we had a visiting minister from the states with us
 - he wanted to get some photographs of a Jamaican baptism
 - so the woman entered the pool
 - the practice there was to ask the questions right in the water
 - Do you renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of this world and refuse to be led anymore by them?
 - Will you be baptized into this faith?
 - then came the plunge
 4. As she came up out of the water
 - our US visitor snapped his flash camera
 - not one of those wimpy electronic strobes we have these days
 - this was one of those big bulbs that really popped
 - of course she had never seen a camera, much less seen a flash
 - and when the light blinded her
 - she was absolutely overcome with ecstasy
 - she began to dance and shout and clap her hands
 - she had seen the Lord
 - Thank you Jesus! Thank you Jesus! Thank you Jesus!
 5. On another Easter Monday a young Hindu woman was baptized
 - she had come to faith in Christ through the witness of a fellow patient from our congregation in the TB sanitarium
 - when she told her family she was going to become a

Christian, they were furious

- when threats didn't work, they tried pleading
- finally her father told her he would give her a motorcar if she would give up her new belief

6. On that Easter Monday he drove the motorcar that was to be hers to the church

- when she went forward to be baptized
- the whole family walked down the aisle to witness the event
- still hoping she would change her mind
- and when she came up from the water
- her father and her whole family turned on their heels and walked out the door
- she was dead as far as they were concerned

7. Well, what happened when you were baptized?

- I was just two weeks old when I was brought to church and baptized
- the family dwelling quarters adjoined the church
- you walked through a door in our living room right into the nave
- and Daddy baptized me
- no lights flashing, no dramatic decision for discipleship
- but the church claimed me for Christ
- *and I believe Christ claimed me too*

A. All who are part of the Church have our own stories about baptism

- we heard three stories in our scripture lections this morning
- as we listen to these stories
- what is that God wants us to hear today?

1. What I note as the common theme in each lection is the presence of the Holy Spirit

- the Spirit moves over the waters

- the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove
 - the Spirit empowers the believers in Ephesus
 - what might this common theme mean for us?
2. What makes this particularly important
 - is that the presence of the Holy Spirit in these stories
 - signifies something unique to the Christian gospel
 - the stories want us to understand that Christian baptism is very different
 - from the baptism of John the Baptist or the baptism practiced by Jewish rabbis
 3. We all know that Jesus no more than John were the originators of baptism
 - in the first century Gentiles who wished to become Jews were baptized
 - their baptism was the final act of initiation
 - John took this tradition and pushed it in a new direction
 4. The purpose of John's baptism was for persons to renounce their former sins
 - and through the cleansing of baptism
 - be ready for the coming of the new age which would be ushered in by the Messiah
 - all who were thus prepared would survive the great a terrible day of the Lord
 - and they would live forever with the Messiah in his kingly rule over all the earth

B. But the narrative in Acts more than being just a story

- is the writer's careful way of doing his theology
- he carefully separates the meaning of John's baptism from baptism in Jesus' name
- what distinction is he trying to make?

1. Obviously the story tells us that many followers of John

- were absorbed into the followers of the Way
 - but the other point is that baptism in Jesus' name is not about remission of sin
 - baptism in Jesus' name is the means by which the Holy Spirit
 - or the same divine presence which was in Jesus
 - this divine presence enters the life of the baptized
2. The gift of the Holy Spirit comes to empower the baptized to prophesy
 - we realize that in the Hellenistic world
 - prophecy always occurred in the context of ecstatic speech
 - so Luke notes they spoke in tongues and prophesied
 - but ecstatic speech is not what is at stake
 - what matters is the gift of prophecy
 3. The primary claim of the followers of Jesus
 - is that through Baptism in his name
 - God poured out upon the Church a new revelation of the Spirit
 - so that the voice of prophecy which had been stilled in Israel
 - that voice was now renewed
 - that just as the early rains fell in planting season
 - and the latter rains which came in the spring to bring the harvest
 - in the last days God sent forth Jesus to revive the spirit of prophecy
 4. The new gift of prophecy which came by being baptized in Jesus' name
 - meant that the latter rains would produce a great harvest for the kingdom of God
 - every person baptized in Jesus' name
 - is filled with the Spirit that was in Jesus
 - and by that Spirit
 - proclaims the good news which brings hope and salvation to all humankind

C. But what is prophecy?

– it's not what Jeanne Dixon does

1. Prophecy is remarkably mundane and ordinary
 - prophecy is simply reminding ourselves and one another
 - that present choices always produce consequences
 - we make choices, and our choices make a difference
 - and whilst we have the opportunity
 - our gracious God invites us to choose life that we may live
2. And prophecy is about more than personal or individual decisions
 - if individual choices have consequences
 - if we can choose the good or choose the evil
 - is it also true that communities and nations have choices
 - and that social choices have consequences
 - and that because present choices have consequences
 - the decision we make as a nation are in fact moral issues
 - and what we choose to do does make a difference
3. Our baptism tells us we are children of God
 - this means we are more than a collection of impure hydrocarbons destined for oblivion
 - we are not victims of inescapable fate
 - our baptism tells us that as children of God we have choices
 - and the gift of prophecy comes to us to tell us what the consequences of our choices are
4. And if you wonder what I try to do as a prophet in Richmond
 - it is simply this
 - I don't try to tell legislators what they ought to do, or what they should do
 - my task is much simpler than that
 - it is simply to look at the decisions being made

- and remind decision-makers of the likely outcomes of their decisions
- and then ask them: Are these the consequences you want?
- if you don't want these consequences
- you had better make different choices

Conclusion

1. What happened when you were baptized?
 - the church told you who you were
 - you are a child of God
 - and as God's child you have choices
 - and the gift of God's Spirit to you in your baptism
 - means you can't play games with yourself or others
 - imagining that evil choices produce good outcomes
2. Baptism proclaims that what happens is neither magical nor inevitable
 - our baptism reminds us God's spirit is with us
 - God with us is to help us realize we have choices
 - in our baptism we die to the futility of this age
 - and are reborn into the kingdom of eternal life through Jesus Christ
 - and in God's kingdom we are set free to choose the way that leads to life.

AMEN