



HOLY BAPTISM FOR THE WORLD – STUDY # 4 INTRODUCTION

“Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink,...” penned the author Samuel Taylor Coleridge¹. This illustrates the truth that though the earth is 70% water we need *fresh* water to live! It is a simple truth but it is the simple truths that bring us life and salvation.

Though God is everywhere by virtue of his *omnipresence* that doesn't benefit me. God benefits me giving me life when and where his Word of promise is proclaimed to and for me. One of those places where God promises his blessings is found in the womb of Holy Baptism. To speak of Baptism as a *womb* is a term borrowed from the early church. How fitting this term is for wombs give life and the womb of Baptism gives the life that never ends. The blessings of Holy Baptism is the subject of this study.

Turn to Ezekiel and read 34:11-16, 20-24. Who is this Shepherd to come at a future date who will rescue God's people? If there is any doubt you may want to let Scripture interpret Scripture by turning to Jn 10:1-21. The Shepherd is: Jesus Christ.

FORGIVENESS: WON, DISTRIBUTED, RECEIVED

The forgiveness of our sins was won for us on Mt. Calvary.

This forgiveness is distributed to us through God's promised select means. These means would be: Word, water, bread and wine, and holy Absolution.

This forgiveness which is offered or distributed to us through the means just listed above are received by you and me through faith, or trust, or, acceptance, or belief, or any other *passive* adjective you can think of ☺.

BLESSINGS FOUND IN WATER

In the fifteen hundreds the Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León spent his entire life searching the south-eastern United States for the alleged fountain of youth. He never found it. Tragically Ponce de León and many Christians today need to realize that though water is everywhere it is only water with the promise of God added to it that gives life; and gives it abundantly!

Now turn to Ez 36 and read vs. 24-27. How does Ezekiel speak of new life *through* water?

vs. 25 says that the water which is to be sprinkled upon a person will *make* that person clean!

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,”

>>http://etext.virginia.edu/stc/Coleridge/poems/Rime_Ancient_Mariner.html<< [Accessed November 12, 2009]

Certainly the operative *power* in Baptism comes from the Word. In this context and with this promise God attaches his Word to the water to create new life. The new life delights in following God's law (see vs. 27) as a *response* to salvation; not in order to *obtain* salvation.

The Holy Spirit continues to lead Ezekiel in his prophesying. After proclaiming the giving of the gift in ch. 36 the Holy Spirit then shows Ezekiel and his readers the *results* of being washed with clean water; i.e., Holy Baptism.

Turn now to the 37th chapter of Ezekiel and take the time to read this chapter.

Who are, or, what do the *dry bones* symbolize in this chapter? Unbelievers, those who live apart from Christ.

What did God breath into the nostrils of Adam in Gen 2:7? Did God breath oxygen into Adam's nostrils, or did he breath the Spirit of God into Adam's nostril's?

Luther's *Small Catechism* speaks of it with these words:

103 How did God first create life?

God created all living things, both plant and animal, by His word alone, from nothing. He created humanity specially, from dust, then gave *His own breath as life*.

What verse(s) in Ezekiel 37 say the same thing as Gen 2:7 and our *Catechism*, question 103? To help you in your search focus your attention on Ez 37:1-14. See vs. 5-6, 9-10, 14.

When speaking to the Pharisee, Nicodemus, Jesus alluded to Ezekiel in his conversation found in Jn 3:1-11. In what verse(s) does Jesus allude to Ez 37? Vs. 8 in particular. Jesus is saying that the “wind,” or “breath” of God chooses to blow over the waters of the font in Holy Baptism. Baptism is a re-creation of life. The same three elements used in Gn 1:1-3, Word, water, Spirit are the same three elements used in Holy Baptism to create new life!

The word for “wind” in English is *pneuma* in Greek. The Hebrew equivalent of *pneuma* is transliterated as “ruach,” which in Hebrew means, “wind,” “spirit,” or even “breath.”

In Ez 14 God says, “... I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.” Notice, that in Baptism and all of salvation we are completely passive. We are not active at all in the process of being born again. I mean, after all, who of us chose or decided to be conceived in our mother's womb? Anyone? I should say not.

NUGGETS N' NICODEMUS

In John 3:1-10 we have Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus. It was very natural for Nicodemus to approach Jesus with his question for both Nicodemus and Jesus were members of the Pharisees. There were two main ruling parties in Israel at the time of Jesus; the Pharisees who believed in the resurrection and the Sadducees who did not—that is why they were sad-u-cee. ☺

One would expect that he who is the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25) would naturally be a member of that party that believed in and confessed the resurrection; i.e., the Pharisees.

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Yes, the sun had set but this darkness also betrayed the unbelief or darkness of Nicodemus' heart. Nicodemus at this point in time did not believe that baptism forgave sins.

What is Jesus saying to Nicodemus in Jn 3:5? It certainly is a hard word so don't let that deter you from what Jesus is saying! What *is* Jesus saying in vs. 5?

Jesus is unequivocally saying in vs. 5 that if you are *not baptized* you will *not* go to heaven. That is the grammar of what Jesus is saying when he says, "...*unless* one is born of water and the Spirit, he *cannot enter* the kingdom of heaven.

But we have a clear example in the Scriptures of a person who did make it to heaven and there was no chance of his being baptized. Time did not permit it! Who is this person! The thief on the cross Lk 23:39-43.

So, what *is* Jesus then saying in Jn 3:5? For a cross reference read Lk 7:29-30. The Pharisees, of which Nicodemus was one, rejected God's purpose for themselves by rejecting Baptism. The Pharisees thought they were without sin. That is why Jesus is putting the hammer down on them and Nicodemus in Jn 3:5. If you will, Jesus is holding Nicodemus' feet to the fire ☺. And this is what our *Catechism* teaches as well with these words.

251 Is it possible for an unbaptized person to be saved?

It is only unbelief that condemns. Faith cannot exist in the heart of a person who despises and rejects Baptism against better knowledge [as did Nicodemus and his ilk]. But those who believe the Gospel [as the thief on the cross did], yet die before they have opportunity to be baptized are not condemned.

Do you know of people, or denominations that, if they don't reject baptism as least *postpone* baptism? Is this a good thing? Why or why not?

Would we postpone inoculating a newborn against measles, mumps, rubella, etc? We would postpone these inoculations until say age twelve or later only if we didn't believe these inoculations protected us against horrible diseases. On the other hand, if we believed these inoculation protected us against such terrible diseases—and they do—we would and do have our infants inoculated as-soon-as-possible. How much more so with Baptism which recues us from sin, death, and the power of the devil!

Which person of the Trinity always accompanies the Word, whether it is proclaimed over water or in sharing our faith? God the Holy Spirit. Where is this person of the Trinity alluded to in Jn 3:1-10? vs. 8. For a refresher you may want to review the above discussion of the Greek and Hebrew words for "wind."

Up to this point in Nicodemus' life he rejected baptismal regeneration. In vs. 10 is Jesus expressing pleasure or displeasure with Nicodemus for not understanding that Baptism does indeed forgive sins? Please explain your answer.

Jesus is gently but firmly rebuking Nicodemus for his denial of baptismal regeneration. In other words, Jesus is telling Nicodemus to spend less time on the golf course and more time with the prophets.

SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS ON GOD'S GIFTS

Who is Jesus telling to share the Good News in Lk 24:44-49? all the baptized / believers.

In Mt 28:16-20 who does Jesus say is to be responsible for baptizing and teaching? Focus in on verse 16. The eleven apostles, or today, the pastors.

This may be difficult to understand even when seeing vs. 16. So I encourage you to take a look at 1 Tim 3:1-7 which speaks of the qualifications for the pastoral office. The qualification listed in these seven verses are applicable to *all* men except perhaps for which one? vs. 2, "able to teach". Teaching is a notable prerequisite for the Pastoral Office and it is expressed in Mt 28:20. For further study see Col 3:16 vis-à-vis Jam 3:1. "Teachers," in James is another way of referring to pastors.

Of course, in a time of emergency *any* Christian may and ought to serve the neighbor by administering Holy Baptism. If time permits pray the Lord's Prayer and confess the Baptismal Creed, i.e., the Apostles' Creed.

Many of our friends from the southerly reaches of our United States say Baptism does not save due to Mk 16:16. Is St. Mark saying that Baptism does not save? Or, is Mark saying, "Don't think you can place trust in Baptism while rejecting faith in Jesus?"

CLOSING THOUGHT

We began this study pointing out that 70% of the earth is covered with water. But it is only *fresh* water that benefits us. Drinking salt water is only a delusion and ultimately brings death. So we intentionally seek fresh water that we live!

There is a fountain of youth and of course it comes from God. From the Scriptures can you say where this fountain of youth is seen? Need a hint: Turn to Jn 19—which verse? v. 34.

Though God is everywhere it is only where God promises *forgiveness* that benefits us. Seeking God apart from where he has promised to be found and forgive our sins is only delusion and ultimately brings eternal death. So we intentionally seek out the living *fresh* water, that fountain of youth that gives more life and youth than Ponce de León could ever have imagined!