

The Baptism (Part 3)

by Ron Bailey

The baptism of Jesus refers to his death on the cross, where he became one with human condition and suffered for our sins, and through faith in Christ, we are made new and clean through the application of redemption.

Duration: 55:43

Topics: "Baptism"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of thorough obedience to God's word. He uses the story of Naaman, a man with leprosy, who was instructed by God to dip himself seven times in the River Jordan for healing. However, Naaman initially expected a grand gesture or a big miracle, but God simply asked him to take one step at a time. The speaker highlights the need for faith and obedience in every aspect of our lives, comparing it to learning to walk and taking one step at a time. He also cautions against being deceived by appearances of confidence in preachers, emphasizing that their confidence comes from God's gift and not from a lack of doubts or struggles.

Transcript

When I came up, I had on my heart that I wanted to kind of spend some time sharing this, the whole thing about the baptism, as I call it. And we've spent sort of two days looking at the baptism, Jesus' baptism. Jesus, we said, when he referred to his death on the cross, called it a baptism.

He said, I have a baptism to be baptized with, and I'm straight, narrowed in, constrained. I'm shut up to this one thing until that thing is done, until it's finished. There are other things I want to do that I can't do.

And we've been spending some time trying to get a glimpse, really, of just what that cost him, of what it meant to be absolutely immersed into our human condition, to become so completely one with it that you could not tell where the join was. And I say for any who weren't with us, that in ancient times, they used to use the word baptism when they were dyeing cloth. So, they'd take something like white linen, they would baptize it into a purple dye, and the white linen cloth became purple cloth.

And there was no way of saying where one ended and the other one began. The two had become absolutely one, indistinguishably one. And what happened with the Lord Jesus among the cross? He referred to his death as a baptism, and at that moment in time, by the Spirit, he became absolutely one, indistinguishably one, with what the human race had become, in its separation from God, in its alienation from God, in the burden of its sin.

And you catch a glimpse of all the pain of that in Psalm 22. And we also caught a glimpse yesterday in Isaiah, in chapter 21. So, I want to move on a little bit today, if we can, and think about the consequence of his baptism, and the way that it begins to touch us.

There was an old book written in the times of the Puritans, and it had a wonderful title. The old Puritans used to give wonderful titles to their books. And, mind you, Hymns of Eternal Truth is also a wonderful title for a book.

And the first person who said that there were hymns of eternal length actually only showed you their ignorance, because not Mickey, he was quoting when he did it, it wasn't him. Because eternal isn't a quantity, it's a quality. Eternity has no length.

It's an entirely different dimension, it's an entirely different quality. But this old Puritan book had this wonderful title, and it was called Redemption Accomplished and Applied. Maybe some of you have seen that on somebody's shelf.

I don't know that anyone reads it anymore. But it's a wonderful title, Redemption Accomplished and Applied. What Jesus did upon the cross has to be applied by the Spirit.

You know that wonderful chorus we were just singing about, from heaven he came, and then he from the earth to the cross, from the cross to the grave, and the grave to the sky. And I always want another line. I always want the next bit, because the only reason that becomes real in us is because from heaven he came again by his Spirit, and applied the redemption that he had accomplished.

It's so often we fall short of the next little bit of it. We're very conscious of what he accomplished, we are conscious of where he is. But he now appears in heaven for us.

And what he did, he did for us. And he died for us. And he became a curse for us, it says so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith.

Everything he did, everything he accomplished, was so that it would be applied. One of Bethany's wonderful hymns says, O thou who camest from above, the pure celestial flame to impart. He didn't come to prove a point.

He didn't just come to bear the penalty of the sin of the world. He came to do something which would make it possible for God to give his eternal life quality, not quantity, his eternal life to us now here, so that we should share it. So I want to think a little bit today, if we can, about how what he did becomes our inheritance, how what he achieved becomes our blessing, how what he accomplished is applied by the Holy Spirit.

I'm going to do it by going through an Old Testament story. It's always the way at weekend conferences and things that you have a slightly different congregation on Sunday morning, because you always have some folks on the Sunday morning who won't have been at some of the other meetings. So I want to try and do something this morning that will stand on its own feet.

It's part of what I'm saying, but if you haven't been with it, you shouldn't feel left out, because we can catch up together. And one of the things I was saying the is that Bible words don't have definitions in the sense of dictionary definitions. They have histories.

And when the Bible uses the words, what we really need to do is, in our reading of the Bible, try and remember how the Bible has used that word previously. And sometimes there are certain points in the Bible where a word is used in a key place, and it really gives you the key to understanding what is in the mind of the person who uses that word. Let me give you an example.

When the Lord Jesus was speaking to the people of his day, he brought against them two accusations. He said that the people of that generation would rise up in judgment, sorry, they would come to judgment, and the people of other generations would rise up in judgment against them. He said the people of Sodom and Gomorrah will rise up against Capernaum in this generation.

And then he said this. He said of some nations, he said, the people of Nineveh, he said, repented at the preaching of Jonah, and the great of the Jonahs here. And the queen of the south, not a And he said to the people that he was speaking to, you have not repented and you've not come.

These Gentiles, who weren't in the covenant, who had no blessings, who had no history, who had no promises upon their life, they repented and they came. And he summed up the failure of the people in two statements. You didn't repent and you didn't come.

But what's interesting is that by using the word repentance about the people of Nineveh, and using the word come of the queen of Sheba, he actually tells you what was in his mind when he uses the word repentance. If you want to know what the Bible means by repentance, what Jesus' mind means by repentance, you need to read the story of Jonah and find out what the people of Nineveh did. Because the way that the people of Nineveh responded to Jonah is what Jesus calls repentance.

I don't know what you call repentance, but when he used the word repentance, he meant what the people of Nineveh did. Now there's a little Bible study for you to think about. But there's another occasion when he was talking again about a contrast, and he spoke of Elisha.

And he said, during Elisha's time, I'm putting it my own words, there were many lepers, he said, in Israel, but none of them were cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. Now that's interesting because I think that gives me a definition of what he means by cleansing. I want to know what he's got in his mind when he talks about being clean.

But I want to say to you, part of the purpose of the baptism that Jesus underwent on the cross was so that you could be clean. What do you think I'm talking about? What do you think Jesus is talking about? Well let's go to 2 Kings chapter 5. 2 Kings chapter 5, and we'll look at this story of Naaman, the Syrian, wonderful story, and see 2 Kings chapter 5, and I'll read it first of all, just in case you're not read it for a while and it's not familiar to you. Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance to Syria.

He was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies and had brought a great captain out of the land of Israel, a little maid, and she'd waited on Naaman's wife. And she said to her mistress, would God, my Lord, would the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy.

And one went in and told his lord, saying, thus and thus, saith the maid that is in the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, go to, go, and I will send the letter to the king of Israel. And he, that's Naaman, departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment.

And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, now when this letter is come to thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, am I God to cure and to make alive that this man does send to me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore, consider, I pray you, and see how he seeks a quarrel against me. And it was so when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that they are the prophet in Israel.

So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, go and wash in Jordan seven times. Thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

Clean, notice this word, clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, behold, I thought he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not the barren and farfet rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage.

And a servant came near, and spake to him, and said, my father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, which thou might have done it, how much rather than when he said to thee, wash, and be clean. Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God. Then his flesh came again, like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Did you notice three times you have the word clean? Clean, clean. Something else that's very wonderful about this passage, I was saying the other time we were together, that if you were trying to find out what the word baptism signifies, it's a bit difficult to find out what it meant in Old Testament terms, because in your English Bible you'll never get the word baptism in the Old Testament. But I was saying that in those days of the New Testament, the most commonly used Bible wasn't Hebrew at all, it was Greek.

And in the Greek Bible, the word baptism is used on two occasions. It was used in Isaiah chapter 21, which is where we were last night, when Isaiah tells about a time when he was baptized in terror. He was overwhelmed with terror by what he saw.

And the only other time that the word baptism is found in the Old Greek, in the Old Testament, is here in the story of Naaman. And you can look at the very last verse we read, verse 14. It says in the Greek Old Testament, he went down and baptized himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God.

And flesh came again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. The reason I'm saying this is because when the word baptism was used to a Bible reader of the first century, the only time they would have heard the word Bible, baptism, in the Bible would have been in Isaiah, and here in the story in 2 Kings about Naaman. And they would have known exactly what it meant, and they would have known the things that surrounded it.

When they thought about baptism in terms of Isaiah, they would have thought of this sense of overwhelming, of absolute concentration, of focus, of tremendous intensity, of pain, of suffering, of something very costly. That's one of the pictures. The other picture they would have had immediately would have been this one of Naaman, the man who baptized himself seven times in the River Jordan.

Of course, these stories that you have in the Bible are absolutely true, but they're not just there as histories. They're there because God has recorded things that he wanted to use in our understanding, so that later on when God uses a word, you think, yeah, I remember that story. I remember the things that are implied.

Let's just follow this story nice and gently. You've worked hard these last two days because I know you've had a lot to listen to and think about, so we'll take this nice and gently this morning. Here's Naaman, and this is how the Bible describes him.

Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria. That means that Naaman was effectively the field marshal of the Syrian armies. He was not just a soldier, he was the king's right-hand man.

He was the one upon whom the king depended for his conquest and for his defense, and he was a man of tremendous political importance. He wasn't just a soldier, he really was a man, a key man in the land. He's the captain of the host of the king of Syria.

And it says here he was a great man, which almost certainly signifies that he was very, very wealthy. And in fact, a little bit later on you'll see a gift that he brings with him there in verse 5. And he goes, goes to the wrong place to begin with, so he goes to the king of Israel and he takes with him in verse 5 10 talents of silver, 6,000 pieces of gold, 10 changes of robes. This is a, this is a king of ransom.

This is a fortune that he actually takes with him. It didn't just spare coins in his back pocket, this is an enormous amount of money that he's actually taking with him. Naaman is a very, very wealthy man.

He's a man of tremendously importance, tremendous importance politically, and he's a man who really has some muscle, I mean political muscle, he has military muscle, he's got some financial muscle. He is a man of tremendous resources, this man. It goes on to say in the second half of verse 3, verse 1, sorry, that by him the Lord had given deliverance to Syria.

It's an interesting thing, Syria isn't God's people. But God had actually used Naaman to do his will. Naaman had done the will of God for the king of Assyria.

This is a man who, I don't know, I don't know what his experience of God was at this time, but this is a man, what I'm trying to give you is a picture of a man of tremendous resources. He's a man of tremendous importance, of tremendous political power. He's a man with terrific wealth.

He's a man who's actually served God. He's done the will of God. He really is a man to be reckoned with.

He was a mighty man in valour. This is not an armchair general. This is someone who's been on the field of conflict.

He's led his troops from the front. This man will be battle-scarred. He's been through one or two things.

He's a real man's man. He's a tremendous picture of a man in his prime with everything he could want. He's got political importance.

He's got the confidence of the king. He's seen these victories that God has given him in his life. He's got tremendous wealth.

He's got tremendous courage. And then you've got this last thing in the last few words of the first verse. But he was a leper.

And everything else paled into insignificance because of this. Because everything that he had done, and everything that he was, was undermined by the fact that he was a leper. He had leprosy.

It's a disease which still exists today, although I think the doctors reckon that Old Testament leprosy doesn't sound as though it's exactly the same as the leprosy that we have today. There are some similarities, although some things are different. And we know some of the effects of leprosy.

One of the effects of leprosy was it's a disease which slowly cripples a person. I don't know whether you've had any contact with Norman Meaton and his work with the Nepal Leprosy Mission. We had a sister in the church that I was part of, and loving her for one time, who went to work in India with lepers.

And she was an occupational therapist. And she was helping lepers to learn to earn their living when often their limbs were terribly disfigured. But the reason that their limbs were terribly disfigured was really, it was really awful.

One of the things that happens with leprosy is that as the disease begins to get a grip on the person, the person loses their sensitivity. They no longer feel pain. And these terrible afflictions that people came into her clinic with, they had no fingers on their hands, because what they'd done is they picked up a hot pot out of the fire and didn't realize it was burning.

And it had burned their fingers so badly that in the end they'd have to be amputated. And they had no toes, because the rats had eaten them away during the night and they hadn't even woken. They're terrible things.

Slowly the sensitivity of the body loses. It's a progressive disease. You hardly know you've got it the first that begins.

It begins with just one or two little white spots here, or a bit of the skin that's a bit scaly. The word leprosy, the word we, that actually comes from a Greek word, it means scaly. So the first thing you can observe is just a little bit of a skin condition.

Just that's all it is, nothing to worry about. And that's how it begins. And slowly it has all these terrible effects and slowly as it works its way into the body it begins to bend and twist the bones, takes out the substance and the carrying power.

It's death on the installment plan. Stage by stage this disease eats into a person and slowly destroys them. And not only that, it has tremendous social implications in these days because people sensed that leprosy was contagious.

So anyone who became a leper had to have some kind of quarantine. In Jesus' day of course they weren't allowed to live in the cities and as they walked down the country lanes they had to wear clothes which were torn so that people would recognise from a distance that there was something wrong with this person. And they used to have a bell and they rang it.

And they used to put their hand over their mouth so as not to spread the contagion by their breath and they'd shout unclean, unclean and everyone would scatter out of the way. This man was at the heart of the

nation, but he was a leper. What happens now is he is going to lose the benefit of everything he's ever done and everything he's ever been.

He was a leper. But Naaman was blessed by the people who worked for him. First of all he was blessed by this little serving girl who was actually a prisoner of war.

She'd been taken captive when Syria's armies had come down into Israel and they'd taken her away and she'd served her master and mistress in a foreign country. And obviously she had some affection towards Naaman and she says one day, as ladies love to talk like this, it's fascinating, I sometimes say I think when all the scores are finally reckoned up we may well find that the most effective, the most fruitful area of evangelism was the school gate at half past three. These ladies talked and this serving maid talked to her mistress and they said here in verse three would God that my lord were with the prophetess in Samaria for he would recover him of his leprosy and that this message gets through to Naaman.

And then you can see the relationship he has with the king. Naaman goes to the king and the king says okay whatever it costs we do it. I'll give you a letter and you'll go to the king of Israel and the king of Israel will do this thing.

It's the kind of mistake that people always make isn't it? You expect someone with power to be in a place of importance. You'd expect to recognize his house from all the others at a distance. You'd expect him surely if there's somebody in Israel who is able to do this kind of thing where you expect to find him.

You expect to find him in the heart of government. You expect to find him in the palace. So he goes with the message to the king of Israel and he says here he is.

This is the man recovering him of his leprosy and you can see what a a peevish kind of person this particular king of Israel is. He says the king of Syria is just trying to cause trouble. He's trying to find some excuse to come and attack it again.

What can I do about all this? How do you give it up? There's nothing you can do about this except that in verse 8 it says here and it was so when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes he said to the king saying wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me and he shall know that there is a property in Israel. The man of God. That's what this man is called.

The man of God. It's a wonderful little title isn't it? The man of God. It's so it was when Elisha the man of God.

I wonder what kind of person you are. You know whether you're a man of Lamech or a man of Boks or whether you're a man of God. The characteristic about this man Elisha that people when they thought about Elisha they thought not he's tall or he's short or he's fat or he's bald.

He's God's man. Elisha's God's man. So Elisha is told by God what the situation is and he sends a message to the palace and he says let him come to me.

I'm sure you know this story but it's such an amazing story. So Naaman came. Just look at the paraphernalia he comes with doesn't he? So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariots.

He's got all his resources gathered together. He's going to pay his way into healing. That's what he's going to do.

He doesn't expect to receive something for nothing. He expects to have to make some contribution to it and he's got what it takes to make whatever the cost is. He'll pay it and he'll get what he wants.

He's used to doing this. People are. People who have resources.

People who have resources whether it's mind or intellect or position. They expect to get their own way and do what they want by doing it. They can they can choose their own way.

You know that little chorus many of the children sing that says the name of the Lord is a strong tower the righteous runs into in his face. Do you know that chorus? And it's a great verse. It's from Proverbs and the verse before it says this.

It says a rich man's wealth is his strong city and the high walls are his confidence. It's an amazing picture. You know the rich man the place he feels safe because in ancient times cities were places where you felt safe.

It's not the way now I know but in ancient times you put a wall around you. You kept yourself safe from marauding tribesmen or wild animals or whatever they were and you're in your city and you were safe. And Proverbs by the wisest man that the world ever knew said well for a rich man his wealth is his strong city.

It's the thing that keeps him safe. He feels he's absolutely secure. You know that the thing that everyone in the whole world is looking for is security.

Everyone in the whole world is looking for security. They want to feel safe. They want to feel that they're not vulnerable to things that might happen to them.

Now the rich man he feels safe because he thinks he can pay his way out of whatever happens to him. If the wind blows his roof off he buys another one. If he's sick he's got the money to buy the best doctor in the land.

If he's in danger from attack he can buy his own private security firm or whatever it is. He's got security. His wealth that's his strong city.

That's why he feels safe. I wonder what your strong city is. I wonder where you feel safe.

I wonder what resources you depend upon to make you feel safe. Solomon goes on in Proverbs to say the name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runs into it in his faith.

The righteous man does not trust in his own resources. He doesn't trust in what he can do. He trusts in the provision that God makes.

Can you see that picture? Do you know that the whole... here's another little Bible story quick. Do you know that the whole Bible is actually a story of two cities? It's a story of the city which is Babylon. Which is man's way of saying I do not need God.

Babylon began with the building of a tower. That's where we get Babel and Babylon from. Where people have said we can get to heaven by our own efforts.

All you have to do is bend your back and put a bit more energy into it and build another layer, another story. Ultimately we'll get to heaven this way. We do not need God.

That's Babylon. It's false religion. It's a way of people saying I can get to where God wants me to be and where I want to be by my own strength.

It's an ancient lie. It comes from the one who said I'm going to put my throne by the side of God's. I will exalt him to the heavens.

It doesn't work that way. Only God can make the way into his presence and into his heaven. Only by grace can we stand as we were saying.

So this is this ancient picture. This man named Man. What I'm trying to say is this man named Man had tremendous resources and his instinct is to turn to them.

To turn to his wealth. He goes here with his chariot, pulls up. He's arrived at the door of Elisha's house.

And this amuses me, this story. And verse 10, Elisha sent a messenger unto him. This man is the right-hand man of the king of Syria.

Syria at this time was the superpower of these ancient times. This man is the second most important man in the world, of this world that we're talking about here. He's the second most important man in the world and Elisha doesn't even answer the door.

He sends somebody with a message. It's an extraordinary story. Elisha sent a message unto him saying go and wash in Jordan seven times and thy flesh will come out of thee and thou shalt be clean.

But Naaman was wroth and he went away and he said behold I thought, I think that could be the epitaph for the human race. I thought. I got this all worked out in my mind how God was going to do this thing.

I go, I knew what was going to happen, this is what happens and it doesn't happen the way we think and so we shut our minds to everything else and every other possibility. I thought, I thought, this is what I thought. He will surely come out to me.

I'm the second most important man in the world. Surely he'll come out to me and he'll stand and he'll call on the name of the Lord his God and he'll strike his hand over the place and he'll recover the leper. Can you see that what Naaman had gotten in mind was a big band theory.

It was going to be tremendously spectacular. It was going to be almost like a theatrical event. He would come out the prophet and he'd stand and in the name of his God he'd strike his hand.

You can see, I mean this is the kind of event that Naaman is used to. He's used to spectacle. He's used to being done on the grand scale and the storms arise and says just don't dip in the river Jordan sometimes.

That'll do it. He is incensed. He is so offended and you can see the matter of action.

He's back in the way home. He says, I'm not a barner. These are Syrian rivers.

I'm not a barner who falls for the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel. May I not wash in them and be clean? There's always another way, isn't there, that people kind of think of. Do I have to go God's way? Do I have to go this humiliating way and in the presence of my servants submit myself to this

ridiculous little event and dip myself in this filthy river Jordan seven times? Why can't I get to God by my own reason? Why can't I get to God from my own territory? Look we've got better rivers.

We've got better ways of doing it. Why can't I do it that way? I fought. I fought.

I fought. God has to come to us and we have to have the humility of heart that acknowledges that well God's way is the only way. You know there aren't lots of options.

I remember hearing a story once and this man's first name was Don. And I tell you this because of the way he told his story. And he told a story once on occasion.

He was wanting to do something and he found himself in a real conflict with the will of God. And part of him wanted to do it and part of him didn't want to do it. I'm not telling you what state he was in kind of spiritually other than that.

And he got to this place where he didn't know whether he should do it his way or this way. And he felt God speaking to his heart. And he felt God say to him, Don the trouble with you and me is that we're incompatible and I don't change.

And that's our trouble. By first birth nature, by first birth God and man is incompatible. And he doesn't change.

And here's an ailment. He's got it worked out. But he's got to go God's way.

There is no other way. He's got to obey God. He's got to do what God says.

What is faith? Faith is response to revelation. You don't, faith isn't when you decide to do something because you think it's a good idea and biblical. That's not faith.

Faith is when the will of God finds you and you respond to it in the way that God wants you to. It begins with revelation. It doesn't begin with your decision.

It begins with God giving you some information. It comes by the word and the word of God. It comes by hearing and it comes by the word of God.

But God has to speak to you. God has to make something plain to you and then he waits for your response and that's faith. Well God's spoken to this man but there's no faith here.

What you've got here is a man who, well listen how it goes on. His servants, I told you he was blessed with good servants, verse 13. His servants came and spoke to him, near and spoke to him and they said, My father if the prophet has bid thee do some great thing wouldst thou not have done it? You ladies, I don't know whether this is a peculiarly kind of male problem but if God had asked this man to do something spectacular, heroic, would have cost him everything he'd done.

He would probably have done it because he was this kind of man. He was the kind of man who was ready and willing to put everything on the line. This is the way he lived.

This is the way he was and God says no I don't want any of this. I don't want any of your spectacular gestures. All I want you to do is just simply to obey what I've said to you.

You know so very often in our going on with God it's not giant leaps of faith. It's single steps of simple obedience and it's not often big spectacular things that take us into the will of God. It's quiet obediences.

It's in things that people hardly know about. In the secret of you, in your own relationship with God and nobody knows what it's cost you except you and you just simply obey. Very often people think that faith is, you know you hear people who don't know God say this kind of thing.

They'll say things like, I wish I had your kind of faith and they think faith is some kind of giant leap into the dark. Faith is hardly ever a leap. It's nearly always a step.

Just one step. When Paul is talking about faith and he talks about Abraham, he talks about the steps of our father Abraham. Not the leaps but the steps of our father Abraham.

I love the simple pictures of the Bible. I love the way in which when it talks, when Abraham is spoken to by God and God says to Abraham, Abraham walk before me and be thou perfect. I'm not asking you to do big spectacular things Abraham.

Just walk before me and be thou perfect. I love the way when the same idea comes into the New Testament and Paul says walk in the spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. That there's something and we want the big thing.

We want the big band. We want the big gesture. We want to feel we've really made some kind of obvious contribution to this thing and God says just take another step.

Another reason why I like this picture of walking is because it's a great leveler. It is one of the things you know and I hope you're not deceived by this, but if you get someone who is a Bible teacher or a preacher or something like this, when they stand up and they preach that there's something of the gift that God gives them which comes through which makes them look super confident and the kind of people who've never had a single doubt about everything and whose whole life is absolutely ordered and you think they're just from another planet and I could never be like that. Well it's all fake.

No it isn't fake it's just simply that you need to understand that when someone is doing what God wants them to do it has an aphorism about it which isn't always an indication of what's happening in the rest of that person's life. Let me give you an illustration. What do you think about Paul? What kind of person do you think he was? There's a very old description of Paul.

It's not a Bible description but it's very very old from about the second century or something like this and it's part of an account of someone who was sent to meet Paul at the quayside at a port and they go to meet Paul and they're told to look out for this man who is small, bald, stooped, with bowed knees, a large nose and his eyebrows meet in the middle. You know your typical 20th century evangelist. Six foot two, blue eyes and texture.

Now this is Paul. This is a little runt of a man. I'm not being impolite to him.

When he was in Athens you remember this thing and they said and you remember this phrase says what is this babbler saying they said? Remember that? Well the word babbler is a word that's actually used to describe the little bird, like a little sparrow. It's almost as though the people of Athens, you know that the Greeks loved perfection. They had everything had to be absolutely ideal.

You've ever seen, thank you, am I in tune? Everything gets to be absolutely perfect. If you've ever seen Greek statues, no Greek would ever bald or have a middle-aged spread or a stoop. They're all absolutely perfect and God sends this little runt of a Jew to speak to these people about eternal things, about quality, about straightness, about life and they were experts at rhetoric and logic and experts in the way that you could speak and hold yourself and they've got it all such that and you get this man who's in the marketplace and he's preaching Jesus and the resurrection and they say what is he twittering about? This little sparrow of a man.

And later on when Paul wrote what we've got, the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul actually tells you what some people of the church at Corinth thought about him and what Paul says about this. Paul says some of these people say his letters are weighty but his bodily presence is weak and his speech is contemptible. Now this is Paul.

I don't think Paul was a brilliantly eloquent creature but he was a man of authority. He was a man who spoke and in his writing there comes through the authority because this is a man under God's will, under God's direction and you mustn't think that Paul was some kind of superhero who never had a question and always knew exactly what was taking place at any one time. In his gift, in his ministry, there was a tremendous certainty about the man, absolute conviction, black and white.

But now and again you see little clues to his life and he says well I was often perplexed. It's quite scriptural to be perplexed. You can be perplexed and that's okay for a Christian.

And I was down but I wasn't out. And you see all these little phrases. These are not superhuman people.

These are people like you and me who are living in the power of God's spirit and God puts his treasure in earthen vessels, not in gold chalices or encrusted with diamonds and that's perfectly perfect. So that people would see that the excellency of the treasure is of God and not of man. The gospel that we have is not the brilliance of Paul's mind.

It's not this... I'm sure he had a fine mind. I'm sure he had the terrific ability to reason and put things in logical order. But when he spoke to the Quintet he said I was determined with you to know nothing but Christ crucified, lest the cross should be emptied of its power by a man's eloquence.

Be careful. You can sometimes win the argument and lose the purpose of what God is doing. How did I get into all this? I've forgotten how I got into all this.

What she says, this big thing, this big thing, but it isn't a big thing, it's just a single thing, I know how I got into it. The level playing field, that every single man or woman is required to walk by faith. And it means in fact that every single one of us has to take just one step at a time because there isn't any other way of walking.

It doesn't matter how long you've been doing it and how expert you are, there isn't any other way of walking other than taking one step at a time. When you learn to walk you took one step at a time and if you took two you fell on your face. And now you've been doing it for 60 years and nothing has changed, you still do one step at a time and if you try to take two you fall on your face.

It's such a wonderful picture of this simple step-by-step obedience. All God says is take the next step. And you say well I can never be like this, I can never even ask you to be like this or to do that, he's just asking you to take a step.

Just one step, that's all, just one step. Take the step, then ask God what he wants you to do next. Okay, here it is.

How much rather than he said to them when he says wash and be clean. So he listens to this, he knows good advice when he hears it. Verse 14.

Then went he down and baptized himself seven times in Jordan. You know the seven in the Bible is a number of completeness. It's a picture of the thing being thoroughly done, being done right through to its absolute conclusion.

And this is a picture of absolute baptism, it's a picture of absolute immersion where this person is going down seven times until he is utterly and absolutely baptized. But we don't doubt about this. This man is absolutely baptized when he's finished this, seven times he's been there.

I was thinking yesterday, right yesterday, that in the old, in Bible days they used to, they had a word bapto which it sounds a little bit like baptizo. Baptizo is a Greek word means to immerse or baptize. Bapto means to dip.

And I was telling you about the way that this kind of recipe for pickling onions and this Greek recipe that said where you take an onion and you bapto it in boiling water, that's to say you blanch it. I think that's the kind of cooking term, I'm not much of a cook. So the first thing is you blanched it in boiling water and that's bapto, you dipped it.

But then you baptized it, you marinated it in vinegar. And the whole idea of baptism is that it's thorough, it's so thorough that all the flavors of the vinegar seep into the onion so that you can't separate anymore between onion and taste. That's the picture of it all.

Well this is the same kind of picture, it's a thorough baptism. Seven times he dips himself in this water. And when God tells us to do something and when he brings his word to us and we obey it, we do have to obey it right through to the conclusion of it and not come short of it.

How do you think this worked out? I think I know how this worked out. I think, I'm almost sure about this, I'm sure, that Naaman, he went to the River Jordan, he went stoned to the River Jordan and he went down under the water and he came up and he had a look to see how things were getting on and nothing was changed. The leprosy was there absolutely unchanged.

What I'm telling you is that God does not cleanse us on the installment plan. He doesn't do it bit by bit by bit. Baptism is a total... I was thinking yesterday, right yesterday, that in the old, in Bible days, they used to, they had a word bapto which it sounds a little bit like baptizo.

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between onion and taste.

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Seven times he dips himself in this water. And when God tells us to do something, and when he brings his word to us and we obey it, we do have to obey it right through to the conclusion of it and not come short of it. How do you think this worked out? I think I know how this worked out.

I think, I'm almost sure about this, I am sure, that Naaman, he went to the River Jordan, he went straight into the River Jordan and he went down under the water and he came up and he had a look to see how things were getting on and nothing was changed. The leprosy was there absolutely unchanged. What I'm telling you is that God does not cleanse us on the installment plane.

He doesn't do it bit by bit by bit. Baptism is a total cleansing. It's something which happens in its entirety.

So he comes up the second time and he looks and still nothing's changed. And the third and the fourth and the fifth and the sixth, the sixth seventh of the way through this process now, and he looks at it and still nothing has changed. Give up.

Tried it six times, nothing works. Well, God didn't say six times, he said completely. Seven times he comes up and you've got this phrase here, and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child.

And he was clean. Wonderful. The next time you get the chance, the next time you've got somebody in the church or some friend who has a baby, just brand new baby, and they'll lend you the baby just for a moment, just touch the flesh of the baby.

Just touch the apricot softness. Of the skin, on the cheeks and on the hands. And think of the effect on this.

Remember this man is a warrior. He is battle-scarred, his hands are calloused with holding his sword and his spear. He's covered in scars and he comes up the seventh time and his skin is like a baby.

It's an amazing picture, isn't it? All the scars are gone. It's all brand new. Babies aren't born with scars.

This man's whole past has been washed away. Everything that he's been, everything that's happened to him, every wound that he's suffered, every hurt that we've represented on his body, it's all gone. And it's all brand new.

That's the kind of baptism in the spirit that I believe in. I believe in a baptism which immerses us into the life of Christ and all things are passed away and all things become new. And men and women are not what they were, they're quite new.

Like the scripture says, the only thing that availed, the only thing that counted, not circumcision or anything, the only thing that matters is a new creation. Now, who is it who has the power to baptise us like this? Who is the baptiser? Well, this one, the title of Jesus, he is the one who baptises in the Holy Spirit and fires he who does it. And he does it thoroughly.

The Bible says this of the Lord Jesus, when you see pictures of him, in the book of Revelation it says this, it says, Behold, he who sits upon the throne says, Behold, I make all things new. It's because he is in a place of absolute power, to quote what we were saying last night, he is a king on his throne but he's

operating like a priest. With all the power that God has given to him, he is using it to make things new.

Not to bring judgment and vengeance, but to make things new, to bring cleansing. And he was clean. And this story is in the mind of the Lord Jesus when he says, there was only one letter that was cleansed.

But look what he means by cleansing. He doesn't mean some superficial slushing away of just one or two stains. He doesn't just mean that, well, your sins have spotted you a little bit but they can be washed off and you can have it.

This is absolutely brand new. This is actually almost new birth. This is a man who has had a brand new beginning that you can see in his body.

When Peter was talking to the people of Jerusalem, he'd been to the household of Cornelius and Caesarea and he'd seen these people receiving the Spirit. And he gets back to Jerusalem and the church hadn't quite sorted out how he understands all this at the moment and he's in trouble. He's in trouble because he's a Jew and he's been into a Gentile home and he's explaining why he did what he had done.

He's explaining that he had obeyed the Holy Spirit in doing this. And then Peter, and this is the clinching argument he gives, he says what happened to them in the household of Cornelius was what happened to us at the beginning. It's a fascinating little phrase.

When would you have put Peter's beginning? Would you have put Peter's beginning when the Lord called him from his boats and his nets and he became a follower? Would you have put Peter's beginning when the Lord said you're going to be an apostle, you're going to be a rock. On this rock I will build my church. Would you have put Peter's beginning when Peter saw Jesus in all his glory on the Mount of Transfiguration? Or when Peter said to them after Peter had failed him, Peter feed my flock, feed my sheep.

Would you have said that that was Peter's beginning when he saw Jesus die, bearing the sin of the world? Or when Christ was raised from the dead? Or when Jesus said in John chapter 20, whatever it is, receive you the Spirit. Would you have called that Peter's beginning? The amazing thing is that it's quite obvious what Peter had in his mind when he spoke about the beginning. He was thinking about Acts chapter 2. What happened in the household of Cornelius was what happened to us at the beginning.

The baptism is the beginning. It's a beginning because it's an end. Only God can create things.

Only God can begin things. Everything else is a modification. We try and change things and we try and make new beginnings but there's always some element of the old that creates into the new.

Usually you. The thing common to the new and the old is you. But God can make things new because he can bring the old to an end.

He can really bring what has been to an absolute end in a baptism and start up with a brand new beginning where your flesh comes to you like the flesh of a little child and you're clean. You want to be clean. If in your heart of hearts, if in your understanding you know that although you've responded to God lots of times, like Peter must have done, and God's spoken to you and he's given you promises.

Maybe he's even given you a promise of what you're going to do. You're going to be an apostate. You're going to be this, this, this, and this.

And you have your whole life planned out ahead of you. But have you really begun? Have you begun in the spirit? Paul wrote to the Galatians and he said when you began in the spirit, have you had a beginning that is in the spirit? Are you clean? God wants you to be clean. Let's pray.

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