

The Glorious Results of Being Baptized for the Dead

*“For just as all
men die by virtue
of their descent
from Adam, so all
such as are in
union with Christ
will be made to
live again.”*

*—I Corinthians
15:22, Williams New
Testament*

FEW WILL DENY THAT THE

entire human race is either dead or dying. Paul explains in our opening verse that this began with the first man, Adam. This was due to Adam's disobedience of divine law. (Gen. 2:16,17; 3:17-19) Essentially, the entire 15th chapter of I Corinthians presents the assurance that the dead will be given the opportunity for a full restoration to life by means of a resurrection.

Paul explains why this is so: “For since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Christ Jesus] came also the resurrection of the dead.” (vs. 21) Here we

are reminded that it was the man Christ Jesus who redeemed the world from death, which is in keeping with Jesus' own words when he said that he would give his flesh "for the life of the world."—John 6:51

The apostle used the word "ransom" to describe this feature of God's plan for the recovery of man from the condemnation of death. He wrote: "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."—I Tim. 2:3-6

The Greek word in the New Testament which is translated "ransom" signifies "a price to correspond," a "redemption price." The man Christ Jesus, who the Scriptures declare was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," corresponded with the perfect man Adam, who was created in the divine image. (Heb. 7:26; Gen. 1:26,27) It was Adam who brought death upon himself and upon his entire progeny by transgressing the divine law. The perfect man, Jesus, gave himself in sacrificial death, and in so doing he was a price to correspond. That sacrifice provided redemption for Adam and hence all those whose descent came from him—the entire human race. This "ransom for all," as Paul described it, opened the way for all to return to life.

Paul wrote in another place: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 6:23) A similar thought is expressed in John 3:16,17: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”

Jesus further explained, “He that believeth on him [Jesus] is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:18) These texts reveal that the whole world, by heredity, is under condemnation to death, and that release from this condemnation and the opportunity for restoration to perfect life has been provided through Christ. However, this restoration depends upon the faith and acceptance by the individual for which this loving provision has been made.

During this present time, those who, on learning about this provision of God’s grace, accept it upon the conditions of obedience and full dedication to do the divine will, are said to be “justified,” reckoned righteous in God’s sight. Paul wrote, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:1) Those who have not come to Christ in full faith, supported by the complete dedication of their lives to do the will of God by following in the footsteps of Jesus, do not enjoy at the present time this “peace with God.” These are still alienated from him through sin—still under condemnation to death.

There is no other way of salvation from death than through Christ. Speaking of Jesus, Peter said, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) The reason there is no salvation from death except

through Jesus is that he is the only one who shed his perfect human blood on behalf of the sin-cursed and dying race. Shed blood is, in the Scriptures, a symbol of life poured out, and Jesus “poured out his soul unto death,” that Adam and all his progeny might have an opportunity to live.—Isa. 53:12

When we accept by faith the provisions of Christ’s shed blood, and devote ourselves to the divine will, we find that there is more to it than merely believing. Paul wrote: “Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” (Phil. 1:29) There are many scriptures to indicate that it is the privilege of Christians to suffer with Jesus. In his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”—II Tim. 2:11,12

“FOR THE DEAD”

Appropriately, Paul mentions this aspect of the divine will for all believers in connection with his discussion of the resurrection of the dead. There were apparently some in the church at Corinth who did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. He points out that if Christ was not raised from the dead then there is no hope that any of the dead will be restored to life. He shows, on the contrary, not only that Jesus has been raised from the dead, but that all, through him, will be brought back from the dead and have the opportunity to be restored to perfect life.—I Cor. 15:12-22

The apostle shows clearly that this will be accomplished by Christ’s rulership, and that he will reign until all enemies are put under his feet. Even death

itself will be destroyed. When that glorious work is complete Christ's kingdom will be turned over to the Father, that he "may be all in all."—I Cor. 15:24-28

To this Paul adds these words: "What shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die."—vss. 29-32

Here we are reminded that true believers in Christ—those who are actually following in his footsteps at the present time—suffer and die with him. This, Paul explains, is on behalf of the "dead" world of mankind, indicating that in some manner the dead will benefit from the sufferings and death of the followers of Jesus. This, indeed, is one of the important features of God's grand design for giving life to the world of mankind. It is brought to our attention in a number of ways in the Scriptures. One of those is through the promise which God made to Abraham, that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed.—Gen. 12:3; 22:18

Paul identifies this promised seed of Abraham as being Jesus, and adds, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ... And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:16,27-29) Here it is evident that those who are baptized into Christ and who are faithful, will inherit with him the promise of blessing all the families of the

earth. Since these “families of the earth” which are to be blessed are either dead or dying, it is logical to think of those who are baptized into Jesus Christ as being, symbolically speaking, “baptized for the dead.” It is through this baptism that they prove worthy, and are prepared for, that great future work of blessing all the families of the earth.

BAPTISM FURTHER EXPLAINED

The water immersion authorized in the Scriptures for Christians is merely a symbol or picture of the true baptism, which is not into water but into Christ, and more specifically into his death. Paul states: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ... For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”—Rom. 6:3,5

What was the “likeness” of Jesus’ death? The apostle further explains: “In that he died, he died unto sin once: ... Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin.” (vss. 10,11) Jesus never had been a sinner. His death “unto sin” was, therefore, a sacrificial death on behalf of the sin-cursed world of mankind. Our being planted with him by baptism into death is likewise a sacrificial death. Paul wrote: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”—Rom. 12:1

Referring to his baptism into sacrificial death, Jesus said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50) The Greek word here translated “straitened”

has the meaning of being constrained or preoccupied. The reference by our Lord is evidently to the closing hours of his ministry, when he would be arrested and put to death. Thus his baptism was to be, in a literal sense, a "death baptism."

When two of his disciples asked to sit, one on his right hand and the other on his left hand in his kingdom, Jesus said to them: "Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" —Mark 10:35-38

These two disciples said that they could go through the experiences to which Jesus referred, so he said, "Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized." (vs. 39) The word baptize means "to bury," and the reference in these various texts is to a burial of our wills into the will of God. It was God's will that Jesus should die sacrificially for the sins of the world, thus the burial of the Master's will into the will of his Heavenly Father also signified his baptism into death. Similarly, it is the will of God for the disciples of Jesus to follow their Master into death, to be baptized with his baptism, which Paul explains to be a baptism into death.

Jesus' sacrificial death provided for the cancellation of the sentence of death resting against the Adamic race; no other sacrifice is needed for this. However, the world, made free from condemnation, needs to be enlightened concerning the sacrificial work of Christ. In addition to this, mankind needs to be lifted up out of mental and moral degradation, and be cleansed from all the lingering effects of sin, in order to be restored to the perfection lost

in Adam. The faithful followers of Jesus who are planted together in the likeness of his death are to participate in this work of enlightenment and restoration.

RECONCILING THE WORLD

Reconciliation can be defined as the process of settling or resolving differences, contradictions, or conflicts so that two or more parties can be restored to favor with one another. Paul wrote concerning mankind's reconciliation with God: "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." —II Cor. 5:18-20

It is indicated from this passage that the sacrificing followers of the Master participate with him in "the ministry of reconciliation," the work of reconciling the world of mankind to God. This work originates with God, the great Author of the plan of salvation for the lost race. His plan was put into operation through Jesus: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Then we, the followers of Christ, are brought into the picture as Christ's representatives in the work of reconciliation for which he made provision. We are given, or have "committed unto us," the "word of reconciliation."

Verse 21 reads: "Him [Jesus] who knew no sin he made to be a sin-offering on our behalf; that we

might become the righteousness of God in him.” (II Cor. 5:21, *Revised Version Improved and Corrected*) Here we have the explanation of the basis upon which we, who are by inheritance members of the sin-cursed and dying race, can be used by God in the work of reconciliation. It is because Christ, first of all, made provision for our reconciliation, and upon the acceptance of this provision we are made the “righteousness of God in him.” We add nothing to the value of the blood by which we are reconciled, but the power of that blood effects our reconciliation, and God reckons us as righteous, and gives us the privilege of participating with Christ in the work of reconciliation for others.

Paul continues in chapter 6, the first verse: “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.” How marvelous is God’s grace which the apostle urges us not to receive in vain! This privilege of being workers together with him is a work which embraces two ages in God’s plan of salvation—the present Gospel, or Christian Age, and the coming Messianic Age. Christ commissioned his followers to go into all the world and preach the Gospel [Greek: a good message]—the word of reconciliation. (Matt. 24:14; Acts 1:8) This work requires sacrifice, the laying down of our lives in service to the Lord. It is this that is involved in our baptism into death with Christ, our suffering and dying with him.

Then, as we have seen, the work of the approaching Messianic Age, when Christ’s body members have all been gathered and prepared, will be to reconcile and restore the rest of mankind to life. Paul wrote: “In an approved season, have I hearkened unto thee,

and, in a day of salvation, have succoured thee; Lo! Now, a well-approved season, Lo! Now, a day of salvation.”—II Cor. 6:2, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*

The expression, “Now, a well-approved season,” does not apply to the lifetime of individuals, but to a period in the plan of God—the present Gospel Age—when the Heavenly Father accepts the sacrifice of his people and assigns them a role in his plan as workers together with him. In this text, Paul quotes in part from Isaiah 49:8,9: “Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.”

BOTH HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY SALVATION

During the present time, those who through faith partake of the provision of life made for them by God through Christ, will, if faithful unto death, be exalted to glory, honor, and immortality. (Rom. 2:7) They are spoken of in Hebrews 3:1 as being “partakers of the heavenly calling.” In II Peter 1:4 they are described as being given promises by which they might become partakers of the “divine nature,” which is the nature of God. In Romans 5:2 these are depicted as rejoicing in the “hope of the glory of God.”

The divine nature is not only immortality, but also the source of life. That is why, as in Isaiah 49:8,9, quoted above, those who are referred to as

being preserved by God through all their trials, as they suffer together with Christ in his baptism into death, are represented as saying to the prisoners, "Go forth," and to them that are in darkness, "Shew yourselves." These are the "prisoners," the vast remainder of mankind, both dead and living who, through Christ and his faithful followers, will be brought out of the bondage to Adamic death. These, however, will not be exalted to the divine nature, as will be the church, but will be brought forth "to inherit the desolate heritages."

This is the heritage of life on earth, and the dominion of earth that was given to Adam, but which he lost through sin. This heritage of earthly life was purchased by the blood of Christ, and the church will join with him in restoring this heritage to all who will obey the laws of that thousand-year kingdom of blessing, during which the dead for whom true Christians are now being baptized will be enlightened and given an opportunity to return to perfection of human life.

How thankful we are that our loving and eternal God has been an ever-present help for his sacrificing people throughout this entire "day of salvation," which we believe is now nearing an end! We are glad that, through the merit of Christ's blood, our Heavenly Father accepts the sacrifices of his people, and makes possible the test of their faithfulness to him, looking to their ultimate exaltation to the divine nature.

As we have seen, even during the time when their death baptism has been going on, the Lord has been using them as coworkers in his great plan of salvation. These will continue to be used as ministers

of reconciliation during the next age, for they will convey the message of reconciliation and restoration to all mankind, until eventually this knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth “as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14

It will be through the church, as ambassadors for Christ, and using the word of reconciliation, that the knowledge of the “ransom for all” provided by Jesus will, in due time, be “testified,” or made known to all.—I Tim. 2:3-6

THE BRIDE

In symbolic language, the Bible speaks of the faithful church as a whole—all those who, during the present Gospel Age are planted together in the likeness of Jesus’ death—as the “bride” of Christ. In Revelation 19:7, Jesus is mentioned as the “Lamb,” because of the sacrificial nature of redemption. We read: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”

This “making ready” at the present time of those who will be united with Jesus in glory and share with him in the restoration of mankind during the Messianic Age, has entailed much sacrifice and suffering. Jesus’ own ministry was predominantly one of sacrifice, which ended in death. The Scriptures urge us to be like him, symbolically to be buried with him by baptism into death.

The adornment of the bride-to-be, in addition to being unselfish love leading to sacrifice for others, is also an adornment of humility and obedience in doing God’s will. It is, in fact, a rich combination of all the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. (Gal. 5:22,23;

II Pet. 1:5-7) It is only when each prospective member of Christ's future bride is thus "adorned for her husband," and the whole brought forth in the "first resurrection," that the marriage of the Lamb and his bride will take place.—Rev. 21:2; 20:6

Then Revelation 22:17 will be fulfilled, for not until then will there be a completed bride class. The text reads: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." We are informed that the "Spirit," God's holy power and influence manifest through his Son, Christ Jesus, and the "bride," the faithful church, will constitute the means by which mankind will be invited to partake of the "water of life." Thus is revealed again the unique position in the plan of salvation occupied by those who are planted together in the likeness of Jesus' death.

No wonder Paul points out how futile would be Christian suffering and death, how empty of meaning our baptism for the dead, if there is to be no resurrection of the dead! However, we know that there is to be a resurrection of the dead, because Christ, "the firstfruits," has already been raised from the dead and exalted to heavenly glory. (I Cor. 15:23) The "first resurrection" will embrace all who have suffered and died with him that they might live and reign with him, but this glorious hope can be realized only through faithfulness "even unto death."—Rev. 2:10

We rejoice in the assurance of divine help for those laying down their lives in sacrifice. One of the greatest incentives to faithfulness is the promise of the Scriptures that our being "baptized for the

dead” world at the present time is to accrue for their ultimate benefit during the next age in God’s plan. If faithful, we will share in the great future work of restoring the dead world to life, enlightening them, reconciling them to God, and giving them the opportunity to live forever. What a glorious outcome is promised in God’s Word! ■