

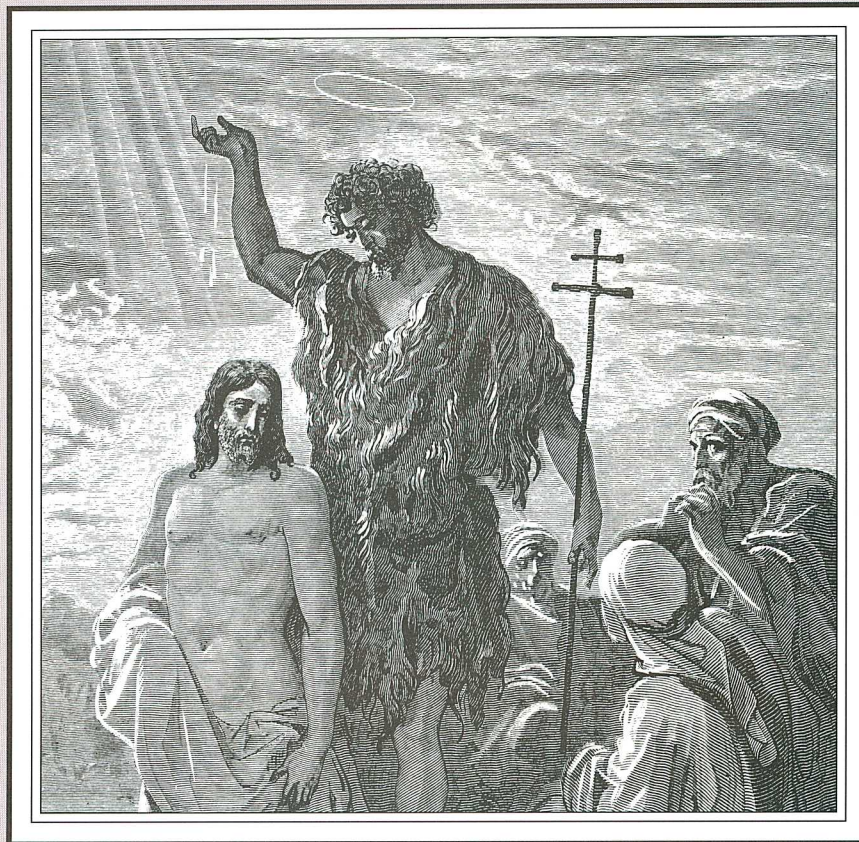
# God with Us

## Christ in all the Gospels

### THE CRISES OF CHRIST: HIS BAPTISM

by Desmond Ford

*The baptism of Christ teaches us that Jesus came to die, came to rise again, came according to providence, and came to call us to baptism.*



**L**

et's look at Christ's baptism. It is 1) A baptism of death, 2) A baptism of resurrection, 3) A baptism of providence, and 4) A baptism of what's required of us as Christians.

Let's also remember we are looking for, 1) Lessons on the nature of sin, 2) On the nature of Christ, and 3) On the atonement.

Jesus left Galilee and went to the

Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John kept objecting and said, "I ought to be baptized by you. Why have you come to me?"

Jesus answered, "For now, this is how it should be, because we must do all that God wants us to do." Then John agreed.

So Jesus was baptized. And as soon as he came out of the water, the sky opened, and he saw the Spirit of

God coming down on him like a dove. Then a voice from heaven said, "This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him."

(Mt 3:13-17 CEV)

#### **Gospel in Baptism**

There's the gospel in a nutshell.

Jesus is baptized in the flooding, muddy, dirty, turbulent waters of the Jordan. Such water has long been the



symbol of death. Jesus goes down into death—but not for long. He is buried by the waters but he comes up again.

This is the symbol of resurrection. And as he comes up, what happens? The heavens are opened.

The death and resurrection of Jesus opened the silent heavens for you and me.

As Jesus comes up, the Spirit of God comes down like a dove. Calvary is followed by Pentecost.

Right at the beginning of his ministry, the end of his ministry is acted out. His baptism is a miniature of the launching of the Christian era at Calvary and Pentecost. Jesus went down into death. He came up again. The heavens were rent. The Spirit came upon the church at Pentecost.

### **Baptism of Death**

There is something very strange about the baptism of Jesus. Baptism is a sign of the confession of sins. What sins did Jesus have to confess? He was familiar with the sins of the world around him, but he never acknowledged any sin in himself. "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (Jn 8:46 NIV). "I always do what pleases him" (Jn 8:29).

Why is Jesus baptized? Some say, "He did it as an example to us." Others suggest it was to mark the beginning of his ministry, or to receive the Spirit. These are only partial truths.

Don't forget, John was surprised. "John kept objecting and said, 'I ought to be baptized by you. Why have you come to me?'" Jesus should have been the baptizer—not the baptized. Baptism symbolizes penitence and confession.

### **Identified with Sinners**

Please note, 1) Jesus' baptism is a sign that he has not just come on a goodwill mission of healing, teaching, and preaching. His purpose in coming is to die.

Jesus came to identify with sinners. He came to substitute for a fallen race. He came to effect a vicarious atonement.

So, Jesus vicariously repents and publicly confesses for the whole human race. Because you and I have never made a perfect confession in our lives. Our nature is so sinful, so twisted, we hide from ourselves our worst sins and never confess them.

We are twisted people. When I go jogging, I look for shortcuts. I'm supposed to be out there for exercise!

Other people see our sins and failures, but we rarely see our own. We're not go-

ing to own up to them before God. How can we tell God about our sins when we're hiding them from ourselves?

We are so stupid we think God does not know!

### **Jesus Our Representative**

When our Lord Jesus Christ was baptized, he was baptized for the whole world. He confessed for the whole world. He was penitent for the whole world. Everything our Lord did was representative.

There is not a private act of Christ's in the book. Not one. Everything he did has an infinite significance, and an infinite depth. The essence of the gospel is that it represents him as representing the world.

God could have dealt with us one by one. One by one, as we came into the world, he could have presented before us the Tree of Knowledge and said, "Make your choice. Stay away from it and live forever. Eat it, and die." God didn't do that. God dealt with us on the basis of representation.

Adam represented the human race. If Adam had been a victorious overcomer, so would all his successors have been. His children, his grandchildren. You and I would have been, because he represented us.

But Adam failed. He threw us all into the Jordan. We were ruined on the principle of representation.

Through Jesus, we are saved on the principle of representation. You cannot understand the story of Jesus unless you see that. Because he was the representative of the whole world, the Bible says, "We are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Cor 5:14).

[Please note, it does not say, "If one died for all, everybody need not die." If it was only the principle of substitution, that is what it would say.]

Never forget. You died on the cross of Calvary in your representative, Jesus.

How can God forgive my sins? "Lord, I paid for them. I died back there at Calvary. I've paid for my sins of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. When Jesus died, I died in him. He was my representative."

### **Whole World Justified**

Therefore, the whole world has been justified in Jesus. Sadly, not all the world knows.

The essence of true religion is not to tell people, "If you are good, God will love you." That's a hopeless sort of affair. When are we going to be good enough? Is 80

percent goodness sufficient? Eighty-five percent, 90, 95, 99.999 percent? That's a hopeless thing.

No, no. We are to tell people that they were redeemed 2,000 years ago. They have been reconciled to God by the death of God's Son. Because of that, whosoever will, may come.

We do not come in our own righteousness. We don't have any. We have only filthy rags for garments (Isa 64:6). Our "whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores" (Isa 1:5-6 KJV).

If you heard something described like that for sale it would not be a good recommendation for an investment. "Nothing good in it from top to bottom. Inside or out!"

The good news of the gospel is that you've been reconciled to God! You come to God in the righteousness of Another. Jesus took the sin of others. We take his righteousness. A beautiful, divine exchange!

It's like a princess marrying a pauper. She gets his debts, he shares in the kingdom! That's the way the gospel works. That's what the gospel is about.

Christ's baptism tells us that the gospel is not only about Jesus' teaching, healing, and preaching. The gospel is about our Lord Jesus Christ identifying himself with a sinful human race.

### **Baptism of Resurrection**

Jesus' baptism is also a sign that, 2) Jesus' ministry is not only a ministry of death, but also of resurrection.

Sometimes my wife Gill wisely advises me, "Don't preach too much on that topic—it's depressing." I need that counsel, because I see and feel very keenly the bitter realities of life.

Over many years, I watched my first wife, Gwen, die of cancer. It was a terrible experience. I have visited many people dying in hospitals. I answer letters from many people in deep travail. I feel very strongly the evil of the world.

The baptism of Christ is not just going down and being drowned. It is Christ going down and coming back up again!

The truth of the resurrection gives us hope in a hostile world.

### **Gospel of Hope**

The Bible calls God a God of hope. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and



peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13 NIV).

If there is no God of hope, there is no hope at all. The death of hope leads to the hope for death. Zero at the end of life means that it is zero all the way along. Nothing has value if there's no hope.

We would have no right to praise or condemn anything if there's no value. People should never struggle for a good cause because if there is no God, there is no right and wrong. You don't have a case. Everything is just chance if there is no God.

Thinking becomes merely itching. Values are only feelings.

But Jesus died and rose again! He went down into the waters of baptism—and came up again. There is a God. A God of hope. Hope!

When the early church was being persecuted, Peter wrote two letters. They are all about hope. They say, "If you are in trouble, hope. Hope!"

Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is so good, and by raising Jesus from death, he has given us new life and a hope that lives on. (2 Pe 1:3 CEV)

What we don't see we hope for. Hope is faith in the future. One Scripture says we are saved by **faith** (Eph 2:8). Another says we are saved by **hope** (Rom 8:24).

If we did not have hope we would die very early. Usually, when things look very dark, we hope there is something bright around the corner. Whether you are a student, a patient in a hospital, someone on a lower rung at work—you are saved by your hope.

In many ways, life down here is rather dour. We all anticipate something better. If you believe in Christ, your hope is well founded. Jesus went down into the water of baptism—and came up again!

We may go down in life, but we will come up again! Every clock tells a story. You can get very run down, but you can be wound up again. Jonah got very down in the mouth, but he came out all right.

Jesus' baptism is about death **and** resurrection.

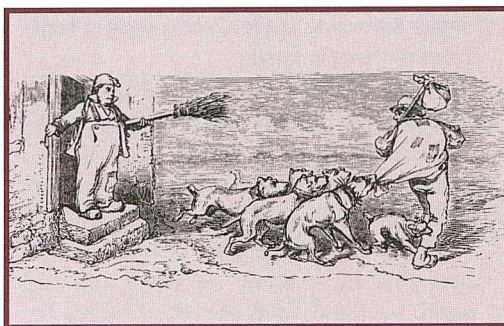
### Baptism of Providence

The baptism of Jesus is a sign that, 3) Life is not by chance, not a fluke. Life is a providence.

Jesus did not say one afternoon by happenstance, on the spur of the moment, "I

wonder what my cousin John is doing? I think I'll go and see." Oh, no. This was something planned from eternity.

When the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17 KJV), he hadn't just looked over his shoulder and seen Jesus. It wasn't a case of "Aha! Look what Jesus is doing now." No, no, no. This was something planned



from all eternity.

The concept of chance is really atheism. There is no chance in the life lived in the circle of the will of God.

I don't mean a perfect life. None of us has that. I mean a life where the heart is intent on doing God's will. There is no chance in such a life.

What a wonderful comfort, dear friends. When the doctor says, "You've had it," it's a wonderful comfort to know that nothing happens by chance.

Jesus faced a most awful death at Calvary. It was the second death, the death of separation from God. This is the death that is yet to come for everyone who rejects God's grace. Yet, in the face of that death Jesus could ask, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (Jn 18:11 NIV).

He didn't say, "The cup that Judas has given me." He didn't say, "The cup that Caiaphas has given me." He didn't say, "The cup Pilate has given me." He said, "The cup **my Father** has given me."

Jesus read the Old Testament aright. That can only be done by the Spirit of God. On its own the Old Testament is a sealed book. But Jesus read it aright by the Spirit of God. And Jesus saw himself and his life, death, and resurrection there.

There is no such thing as chance if you are in Christ. No chance. The baptism of Christ was not a fluke event. It was something anticipated from all eternity—and God testifies to that.

### Tempted Not to Die

Christ's baptism tells us something about our

next topic—temptation.

The great temptation for Christ was to avoid the cross. His temptation is not our temptation. He was tempted not to go down into the river of death.

All the temptations that the devil brought to Jesus—as we'll study in a moment—were to divert Christ from the cross prefigured in the baptism. His going beneath the waters pointed to his going down into the cold waters of death.

The devil was saying in tempting Jesus, "Look, if you're the Son of God, let's work a few wonders. That will make people believe. When you throw yourself down from the temple's pinnacle, and people see angels swoop down and save you, they will bow down at your feet. You won't have to die on a cross to win them. Just do a few wonders."

In the religion business, people sell out to this all the time. I'm ashamed of much that comes over Christian TV and radio. There are many good things. I listen to Dr. Charles Swindoll—I thank God for him—and Dr. Charles Stanley. I thank God for him, too. Dr. John MacArthur also. I don't always agree with their theology, and they don't always agree with mine. No one's infallible. But I thank God for these good men.

But I also see and hear a lot of stuff that's terrible. People have sold out to avoiding the cross.

Jesus chose the cross. Jesus chose the *via dolorosa*, the way of the cross, the way of sorrows, the pathway of obedience to God whatever the cost.

Much in religion sells out cheap. Worldly methods are used, and excused if the objective is OK. That's not God's way.

### Baptism and What's Required

Lastly, Christ's baptism tells us what is required of us as Christians. As Jesus was willing to die, so we are to be prepared to die.

A missionary in the nineteenth century was told, "If you go to Sierra Leone, you will die." The missionary answered, "I died 15 years ago."

He meant he had accepted Christ and been baptized 15 years before. He'd signed his life over.

When we are baptized, we are saying, "Lord, I'm yours until death. Or for death. Or unto death. Or in death. I'm yours, lock, stock, and barrel. All I am, or ever hope to be, is yours. With joy I own the



infinite obligation. I am my Lord's."

I'm not a bit scared of death, but I'm very scared of dying. The great secret Jesus taught us was the willing acceptance of the cross.

I've not learned that. But I ask him to teach me. Which is a rather hazardous prayer. You never know what God will do next.

I must be prepared to die rather than compromise.

I've seen situations where people expect you to compromise. They are wonderfully surprised when you don't. (I suppose **terribly** surprised is more accurate.)

But if you've already experienced the worst—if you've already died—there is nothing humans can do to you. If you've signed over your life to Christ to death, you can't be bribed. That's a wonderful freedom.

When you are wholly dependent on God, you are independent of everybody else. You're not dependent on a church organization, your employer, your neighbor. This is a blessed freedom indeed. But there's a price. You have to be prepared to die. That's what baptism means.

### **Baptism and Resurrection**

Our baptism is the corresponding movement to Christ's baptism. He went down into the water—signifying death—but he also came up again. So do we.

We have to be prepared to die for Christ, but we do so in the hope and assurance we will rise again.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2 KJV)

Death is not the end! Joy is set before us!

If death is the end, you and I are nothing but harassed, driven, dry leaves. Eddying specks of dust.

If you take all the space in us, all the space between the atoms, we end up as tiny as the head of a pin! Without Christ we are a pinhead. And a dying one at that. Driven. Eddying. A speck of dust swept away.

But the joy that was set before Jesus is set before us. We are "begotten ... to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pe 1:3 KJV). Death is not the end. The baptism of Jesus reminds us we have joyful hope! ❀

## *The Power of the Powerless*

**T**he deep-sea diver can survive the strange environment beneath the surface because of the lifeline that reaches to the world above. That lifeline brings life-giving oxygen to the diver.

The Christian can also hope to prosper in this strangely rebellious world if intimately linked to the world above.

Paul expressed this principle in one of the most important sentences of Holy Writ:

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. (Romans 8:6 NRSV)

There is no chance of successfully resisting temptation, no hope of fruitful witnessing for Christ, unless we are continually "tuned in" to the things of the Spirit.

**GNU** can help. Once a month, the **GNU** magazine offers spiritual nourishment. But does every reader also receive the **GNU** audio Tape of the Month, with its message of encouragement and hope?

Hundreds around the world do receive the Tape of the Month. Many testify to the uplifting experience they regularly receive from listening to the tapes.

We invite you to share this blessing. These gospel tapes

might make all the difference between victory and defeat, joyous hope and discouragement.

Most of the messages are from me or Roy. Roy is a very fine preacher. I taught public speaking and homiletics for years, so I don't say this idly.

But not all of you have heard Ron Allen, a **GNU** minister in Australia. Ron has a genius of his own that is a channel of blessing for thousands.

Ron is unlike any other preacher you have heard. In his speech he is unadorned, trenchant, down-to-earth. Yet deeply spiritual.

I have just listened to his last two Australian talks, "The Power of the Powerless," and "Whose Son Is He?"

They are magnificent. Though they have no flamboyance or exaggeration, Gill and I both felt we were on Cloud Nine after hearing them.

You, too, should hear them. You should send now for the Tape of the Month. This special ministry will put a song in your heart and spiritual weapons within your grasp. Contact us today!

Tape of the Month is sent to all who monthly donate \$25.00 or more to the gospel ministry of **GNU**. Tape of the Month can also be obtained for \$60.00 per year.

Tape of the Month individual tapes are \$5.00 each.

**Good News Unlimited,** 11710 Education Street, Auburn, CA 95602-2499  
**Phone 916/823 9690**

**Fax 916/823 5338**