

# Born to Win

## Water Baptism #1

by Ronald L. Dart

There is something truly satisfying about the Christian rite of baptism. I've baptized a *lot* of people in my time, and I never tire of seeing the joy on the faces of people who are simply starting their life over again with a clean slate, and the feeling that they have of knowing that they got a fresh start and that they can put all that past behind them with God and go forward. It's a tremendous thing to see. It's been so long since I was baptized myself that I kind of lost touch with the feeling. I don't know exactly how they feel, but it's very obvious in the working of the face and the tears running down their cheeks that this is *the turning point* of their life, and it means more to them than anything that they could ever explain to anyone else.

And I suppose that might be one of the reasons why one of our listeners asked me if I would do a program about baptism. And so I thought, "Let's do a program about baptism."

One of the most fascinating things about baptism to me is that Jesus himself was baptized. When you consider the meaning of Christian baptism, it's the idea of washing away our sins. It's a matter of cleaning up a sinful life, of repenting and putting the past behind you. Why on earth did Jesus need to be baptized? Well, he did. Baptism was a widely-practiced rite in those days, and there is in the New Testament more than one baptism. In fact, we find two sharply different baptisms there: the baptism of John and the baptism of Christians. In Matthew 3, we'll talk about this for a moment, beginning in verse 1. John the Baptist begin his ministry in the wilderness of Judea, and his message was:

### Matthew 3

KJV

<sup>1</sup> Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Now, if you'll recall, John the Baptist was born just a little while ahead of Jesus [**Luke 1**]; and both of their births were, of course, miraculous. John was actually selected by God to be the forerunner of the Messiah—to be a voice crying in the wilderness. And so he cries:

### Matthew 3

AKJV

<sup>2</sup> [...] Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

<sup>3</sup> For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare you the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. <sup>4</sup>And the same John had his clothing of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

What a man. What none of us knew until the Dead Sea Scrolls came to light, is that the formulas you see here—that is, the quotation from Isaiah ("The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare you the way of the

Lord, make his paths straight.’) along with the unusual diet of John the Baptist—these things have overtones of the Qumran community. The Qumran community is that narrow little group of people who, in the first century (and really going back into the second century BC, as a matter of fact) had established what...I suppose the best way to understand it would be a monastery down there. They were a very *austere* sect, and they had practices of baptism; and, of course, a very tight community and very limited diet and so forth. And their *key message* was that there was to be a voice of one crying in the wilderness. And John comes along and says, “I’m the guy.”

Now, this is not to say that John, preaching there in the region of Qumran right by the Jordan River, was one of this community. (Because, actually, there is no indication that he really would quite have fit all of the things that they believed and they taught.) But his style and his message would have been very familiar to the dwellers in the area of the Jordan River at this time.

Well, the account in Matthew 3 and verse 5 says that people from “Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan” were all going down there to hear John preach.

### Matthew 3

AKJV

<sup>6</sup> And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said to them, O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

That’s a pretty acerbic message. Now, you have to understand that while John, I don’t think, was a *member* of the Qumran monastic community, these sentiments are *very* similar to theirs. They considered the entire religious establishment at the Temple in Jerusalem as *totally corrupt*—the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the whole lot. So his message, once again, fits the environment very well. He said to them:

### Matthew 3

AKJV

<sup>8</sup> Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

Basically what he is saying is, “I’m not about to baptize you people until there is actually some evidence in your life that you have turned your life around.”

### Matthew 3

AKJV

<sup>9</sup> And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say to you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

Now, this is a theme that Paul will later repeat—that being Jewish isn’t good enough; there has to be a *changed life*.

And what is interesting about John’s baptism in this case is that it’s not like Christian baptism. It is not a baptism of washing away sins as Christian baptism is. In the Qumran community, you had to qualify for baptism. You had to qualify by purifying yourself, and living a clean life, and *bringing forth fruits fit for repentance*. And so (in their idea) you had to clean up your life, qualify for baptism, become *good enough* to be baptized. Christian baptism requires nothing but repentance and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior. And it, in itself, is the cleansing act.

John continues to address the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and he says:

**Matthew 3**

*KJ2000*

<sup>10</sup> And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

<sup>11</sup> I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire;

Now, you should know that fire is not always looked upon as punishment in the Bible. In fact, rather more often, it is a cleansing agent—a burning away of impurities as in the smelting of silver, where you melt it down completely and the dross that comes up to the top of the silver you skim off, leaving nothing but the pure silver below. The imagery that he chooses here is of a threshing process, where the wheat stock and the wheat plant is brought in. The whole head of the wheat is then threshed to separate the wheat and the grain from the chaff. And the burning up of the waste and the corruption, leaving only the pure wheat behind, is the image that John the Baptist is drawing here. He continues to say: vs. 12,

**Matthew 3**

*AKJV*

<sup>12</sup> Whose fan is in his hand [*That's for the purpose of separating the chaff from the wheat.*], and he will thoroughly purge [*or clean*] his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

This warning is directed straight at the Sadducees and the Pharisees—that when all is said and done only that which is *pure* will be left and the impure will be *burnt* away.

Well, one day, as John was baptizing in the Jordan, a remarkable thing happened. Standing on the shore waiting to be baptized was Jesus of Nazareth. John knew him. He not only knew him, he knew what he was all about. On another occasion, as he saw Jesus walking along the banks of the river, he said to his disciples nearby—looking at Jesus, pointing to Jesus:

**John 1**

*AKJV*

<sup>29</sup> [...] Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.

John knew that Jesus was he that was to come—the Messiah. And here he was, coming down to John to be baptized. Well, John put up his hand and said, “No”...

**Matthew 3**

*KJ2000*

<sup>14</sup> [...] I have need to be baptized by you, and come you to me? <sup>15</sup> And Jesus answering said unto him, Permit it to be so now: for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. [...]

And so John permitted him to be baptized. It's interesting that Jesus says simply that baptism (that is, the immersion in water—the cleansing process of it) is required to fulfill all righteousness.

### Matthew 3

KJ2000

<sup>16</sup> And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up immediately out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

<sup>17</sup> And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

You know, this is interesting, because it is the first physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament; and it is *not* in the image of a man. Now, man is made in the image of God, and the manifestations of God and the explanations of God in the Bible are *always* in the form of a man. But the Holy Spirit? Well, it's like wind; it blows through the trees, you can see the trees move, but you can't see the Spirit. It's invisible. And when the Spirit is seen it is like a dove, not like a man. (And it's from this, by the way, that Christian iconography always pictures the Holy Spirit as a dove.)

Now, did you notice that Jesus went *down* into the Jordan to be baptized, and that he came *up out* of the water afterward? Does that suggest anything to you regarding the *method* of baptism?

I've read some interesting debates about baptism over the years: whether full immersion is necessary, or whether sprinkling or pouring is good enough. There really is no question as to the means of baptism in the New Testament. Oh, I know that a lot of people will argue the point, and I've seen the arguments written on it. But candidly, I think most reputable scholars and historians *all* know that, in the first century, baptism—that is immersion, sticking you under the water—was a common Jewish custom; that, in fact, Christian baptism in the first century was by immersion—*full* immersion—and not by sprinkling or pouring. And here you have a situation where John says that John was baptizing in the Jordan...

### John 3

AKJV

<sup>23</sup> [...] because there was much water there[...]

You had to have enough to get people under the water. You don't need much water to sprinkle or pour for baptism. And notice it says that Jesus went *down* into the waters to be baptized. And when they were through, he came *up* out of the waters. I think I saw a painting somewhere that showed the baptism of Jesus; and Jesus and John are standing waist-deep in the water, and John is pouring water over Jesus' head in a form of baptism. Well, it's not very historically accurate, and it really doesn't make a whole lot of sense; because pouring water over someone's head doesn't require you to be standing waist-deep in water, does it? The fact is, they needed a lot of water to get somebody's body *under* the water. And some forms of baptism required living water—that is, moving water—not a tub full somewhere, but water actually running in a stream; that was in nature, as it were.

The Greek word by the way, *baptizó* [βαπτίζω, Strong's G907], means "to immerse". It means to stick it under. So why then doesn't everybody practice baptism by immersion? Well, I think historians and theologians know that, sometime in early church tradition, one of the early church fathers made a value judgment that since baptism is only symbolic anyhow, that full immersion was not really necessary—that the symbolism of purification by water could be fulfilled by sprinkling or pouring a little water on the head.

So it was a judgment, a judgment call. Now, this was especially important back then where infant baptism or the baptism of the sick and infirm were concerned; because baptism is considered to be absolutely *essential* to salvation. And so if you have a person who is sick or infirm and is utterly *impossible* to get that person under the water, well then the best thing to do is to sprinkle or to pour, and to baptize him that way.

And, of course, with a newborn infant you don't want to stick them completely under the water; so you just sprinkle or you pour on them. Some early church bishop then decided, and many Christians still follow, a non-immersion form of baptism. It's a kind of Christian rite of purification. And since it is assumed that all babies are born *guilty* of original sin, well it's necessary to purify even the babies by a rite of baptism; or else the babies could go to hell, or perhaps to *limbus infantium*, or someplace shy of heaven.

Now, there is not a word in the Bible about any need for or practice of the purification of infants by baptism. So is there any need to baptize infants? No. Truth is, those little babies are just as innocent as they look; and when God looks upon a little child like that, he is just as touched by their beauty and by their innocence as you are. In fact, when God says, "What a pretty baby", he probably means it.

What, then, is Christian baptism all about? Well, in the first place, it's about salvation. In Mark, chapter 16 and verse 14 (this is after Jesus' crucifixion, after his resurrection):

**Mark 16**

AKJV

<sup>14</sup> Afterward he appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat [*Judas had gone out and killed himself.*], and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

This is really almost funny, in a way, because not one of Jesus' disciples—I mean *not one* of them believed that he was going to come back from the dead. But he did. And when those who first saw him came and told the eleven about it, they didn't believe it. And so, whenever they didn't, and he finally appeared to them, he gave them a bad time about the fact that they hadn't believed.

**Mark 16**

AKJV

<sup>15</sup> And he said to them, Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

"We're not going to stop short here, folks, with talking the gospel to Israel or to the Jews, or the lost tribes of Israel. We're talking the gospel to *everyone*." In Matthew 28:19, he says, "Take the gospel to the Gentiles." So the gospel was to go everywhere. He said:

**Mark 16**

AKJV

<sup>16</sup> He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned.

Well, is baptism *required* for salvation? Listen to Jesus:

**Mark 16**

AKJV

<sup>16</sup> He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned.

(And of course, I presume that the one that doesn't believe surely isn't going to be baptized.)

Now, this is serious stuff, here. We're talking about salvation and damnation. And Jesus seems to make baptism a requirement. But I can hear someone out there right now saying, "Well, wait a minute, wait a minute.

What about the thief on the cross? You know, here Jesus is hanging up between earth and heaven and dying, and on either side of him are the thieves, and one of these thieves says:”

### Luke 23

KJ2000

<sup>42</sup> Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

<sup>43</sup> And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto you, Today shall you be with me in paradise.

He seems to pronounce the salvation of this thief who did nothing more than confess him at the *extremis*, at the most difficult time, at the far end—*absolute* end—of his life. How does that work? What about this guy? Well, God is *sovereign*. When you’re God, you can do anything you want to do. He can make any exceptions he wants. You and I can’t do that. I think the wording of this leaves room for a thief on the cross. It leaves room for bedridden sick people and other people to be saved without baptism. But for the rest of us, I’m sorry, we *have* to go under the water.

After his resurrection, and before he finally left his disciples, one evening Jesus...

### John 20

KJ2000

<sup>22</sup> [...] breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive you the Holy Spirit[.]

Now, nothing seems to have happened on that occasion (at least, nothing *observable* took place) and it’s led a lot of people to think that they didn’t actually *receive* the Holy Spirit—that that was just a symbolic act, that they received the Holy Spirit on the feast of Pentecost. But Jesus, later on, would tell his disciples, “I want you to”...

### Luke 24

AKJV

<sup>49</sup> [...] tarry [*wait*] you in the city of Jerusalem, until you be endued with power from on high.

He didn’t say, “Tarry at Jerusalem until you receive the Holy Spirit”, which leads me to think that when he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit”, they did; but that the *receiving* of the Holy Spirit doesn’t necessarily have a lot of outward manifestation—perhaps none. What happened later to them, when they were endued with power from on high is that *this* was the moment where God *empowered* them with the Spirit—which is a little different than receiving the Holy Spirit. Now, the story is told beginning in Acts 2 and verse 1:

### Acts 2

KJ2000

<sup>1</sup> And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Indications are not merely the Twelve, but 120 disciples [Acts 1:15] were together. And it seems pretty plain to me that they were observing the feast of Pentecost. And considering what happened on this day, it is really a marvel that all Christian churches don’t observe the feast of Pentecost. (You ought to give some thought as to why you do or you don’t.) Well, as they were there, all of a sudden...

**Acts 2**

KJ2000

<sup>2</sup> [...] there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

I've heard it said that a tornado sounds like a freight train coming in the door, and I suppose it was something like that.

**Acts 2**

KJ2000

<sup>3</sup> And there appeared unto them separated [*distributed*] tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

I think you'd have to have a science fiction movie and special effects to show this type of thing, where there's a huge roaring sound. And I think the sound was because of the sudden emergence of *enormous* power in the place. And all across the ceiling you have a shimmering thing of energy that looks like fire. And then it just comes down in a little tongue, as it were, and sits upon each and every person there—I presume upon all 120 of them.

**Acts 2**

KJ2000

<sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues [*languages*], as the Spirit gave them utterance.

<sup>5</sup> And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

<sup>6</sup> Now when this was sounded abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because every man heard them speak in his own language.

All of a sudden, through an *incredible* miracle. And really...you know, miracles are not just *tossed* out there to impress people. Miracles contain their own sense, their own meaning, their own purpose when God performs one. And when you think of what happens here, it's that you have men here from every nation under heaven (just about), and they all spoke in their native tongue. Not Hebrew—but they spoke Parthian, Median...

**Acts 2**

AKJV

<sup>9</sup> [They were] Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

<sup>10</sup> Phrygia, and Pamphylia[...]

And they had dialects and languages from *all over the place*. And they heard these people, who were not learned people, speaking in their own languages “the wonderful works of God.”

Now, this isn't some kind of strange babble. This isn't the tongues of angels. This isn't people up here babbling away in tongues that nobody understands (which is the case with what the modern phenomenon of *glossolalia* is all about). These people had known languages and a discernible message—a message that could be *described*. People understood “the wonderful works of God”.

Now, why did God do that? Well, it was symbolic of the job that he had given these people—that they were to go into all the world and take the gospel everywhere they went. Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 28, verse 19:

**Matthew 28**

NAS

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations [*the Gentiles*], baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit[.]

The commission: Make some disciples and get some results—baptize them. Now, then along comes the Holy Spirit and it *empowers* them with the primary tool that they need. The one thing they could not do without, in order to fulfill that commission, were the languages to speak to all those people.

**Acts 2**

AKJV

<sup>12</sup> And they [*the men who were there*] were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What means this?

<sup>13</sup> Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said to them, You men of Judaea, and all you that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known to you, and listen to my words:

<sup>15</sup> For these are not drunken, as you suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day [*9 o'clock in the morning*].

<sup>16</sup> But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

<sup>17</sup> And it shall come to pass in the last days, said God, I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

<sup>18</sup> And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy[.]

Wow! You know, this suggests to me that the pouring out of the Spirit on this day happened to men, to women, young women, old women, young men, old men. Every one of the disciples of Jesus who was in that place on that day received this outpouring of the languages that were necessary to tell *the whole world* about the wonderful works of God; about Jesus Christ, the Son of God; about his death, his burial, and his resurrection; and about his working as the Savior of all mankind. Well, Peter (coming down in verse 22) said:

**Acts 2**

KJ2000

<sup>22</sup> You men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves also know:

<sup>23</sup> Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

<sup>24</sup> Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be held by it.

Then Peter works his way around to the line that convicted them all. He said:



**Acts 2**

KJ2000

<sup>36</sup> Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

I don't know who those people were that day who were listening to him, but they were convicted. It says "they were pricked in their heart". They realized...perhaps some of them were those who stood around and said, "Let him be crucified! Let him be crucified! Give us Barabbas, away with Jesus!" I don't know. But finally, at long last, they understood what had been done.

**Acts 2**

AKJV

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brothers, what shall we do?

<sup>38</sup> Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

<sup>39</sup> For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

It's simple enough, isn't it? Repent, be sorry for what you have done, show the remorse that you really are ready to turn your life around, and go under the waters of baptism and *wash away your sins*. Do that and you have a promise: You shall receive *the gift* of the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 2**

AKJV

<sup>40</sup> And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

<sup>41</sup> Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls.

When I think about the faces of those that I have baptized, when I think about the joy that was there and the tears running down their face, multiplying it by 3000 is almost more than I can imagine.

More next time. Until then, I'm Ronald Dart.

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*Water Baptism #1*

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