

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## BAPTISM (3): DYING TO SIN

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### Romans 6:3

In our last lesson, we saw that baptism is a pledge, a pledge to God by which you make Him King of your life. You are saying to God, that by His grace, you are going to remain faithful to Him, faithful unto death. This is the exhortation that we find in Revelation 2:10 where Jesus says, *...be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.*

### The concept of death in baptism

As a matter of fact, baptism is a commitment to death. At baptism, there is a dying that is involved. And this is another aspect of baptism that what I want to share with you. Would you turn with me to the book of Romans 6:3. This is what Paul writes.

*Romans 6:3. Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*

Did you know that? That by being baptized into Christ Jesus, you were actually being baptized into His death? At baptism, we are united with Christ in His death on the cross. Christians are people who have died. This notion of death is a very important one in Romans 6. It is mentioned in every verse from v. 3 down to v. 13. This means that in eleven consecutive verses, Paul speaks about death.

Now, earlier in the Scriptures, we can see already that baptism symbolizes or represents death. We can find this in the teaching of the Lord Jesus. Take for example Luke 12:50 where Jesus says, *I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am constrained till it is accomplished!* When Jesus speaks of His baptism, He is making reference to His own death. He is saying, 'I have a death which I must die.'

### A spiritual death

In Romans 6, Paul is talking about a spiritual death. And in v. 6, he explains what he means by dying in the context of baptism. *...that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* The dying in baptism has to do with the crucifixion of the old sinful man that we were before baptism. When we are immersed in the water at baptism, we are proclaiming to the world that we are identifying ourselves with Jesus in His death. Our old man, our old way of life without God, the old sinful life is immersed, crucified, as we identify with Christ in death.

Why this stress on death? Why is this death so important? The reason is very simple. We can get the answer from 2Corinthians. 5:17: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* If the old does not pass away, if the old man has not been crucified, then the new cannot come. And therefore, you cannot experience the life of that new man that Romans 6 talks about. Unless the old goes, you will never fully experience what it is to be in the resurrection life. Death is total and final, just as your commitment to God must be total. This is why the Scripture speaks of a total commitment. Because in death, you are totally committed. When you make a pledge of allegiance to God at baptism, understand that it is a pledge of loyalty unto death. You cannot be a half dead Christian.

## **The destruction of sin**

So baptism is a symbol of death, of death to sin. I want to explain to you the meaning of this basic element, but very important element of the Christian life. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of ‘dying to sin’? If you don’t understand what that means, you haven’t understood what baptism means. Because you see, baptism has to do with the destruction of sin.

Let’s read again Romans 6:6: *...knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, **that the body of sin might be destroyed**, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* Remember that Romans 6 deals with the life of the new man. And the whole chapter begins with baptism. The point of talking of baptism is to talk about one very practical aspect that results from the step of baptism: it is the freedom from the dominion of sin. Paul is a very practical person. He says that at baptism, our old self is crucified with Christ. And as a result of this step, *the body of sin* (i.e. the body that is under the control of sin) is *destroyed*. The human body is seen here as the seat of sin and as the instrument of sin. It is that which contains sin. So that’s what happens at baptism. When we are united with Christ in baptism, the body of sin is destroyed.

Now, there is a problem with this understanding of baptism. I see that my body still exists. It didn’t disappear after baptism. So how can Paul say that the body of sin is destroyed at baptism? Well, the word ‘destroyed’ here does not mean ‘wiped out’. This is obvious when you look at the original Greek. The Greek word, translated as ‘destroyed’, is the word *katargeo*. It comes from 2 words, *kata* and *argos*. And *argos* comes again from another word, *ergon*, which means ‘work’. If you put an ‘a’ (alpha) privative in front of *ergon*, we have something which does not work. It doesn’t function.

Paul uses this word, *katargeo*, ‘destroyed’, to refer to the action of making something inoperative. It doesn’t work anymore. You put something out of use. To use a military term, we can say that it is to neutralize the enemy. You put the enemy out of action. The enemy may still exist, but it is no longer a threat to you.

## **Not wiped out, but neutralized**

So when Paul says that the body of sin is destroyed, he doesn’t mean that it is wiped out. He is saying that the body of sin is neutralized. It is no longer a danger, a threat to your spiritual life. Through this work that Jesus has done in your life whereby you have consigned yourself (i.e. you have committed your old man) to death, this body of sin is no longer a threat. Though it is still there, its influence on you has been neutralized.

This word ‘destroyed’ is also used in Hebrews 2:14 where we read *... that through death He might **destroy** him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.* The Lord Jesus came into this world to destroy the devil. Does that mean that the devil ceases to exist? No. We know in our own experience that not only does the devil exist but that he is highly active in this world. So what does it mean that the devil has been destroyed? Well, it is not that the devil ceases to exist or that he is no longer active, but that he is no longer a threat, a danger to you and to me if we abide in Christ.

We also find this word with regard to death in 2Timothy 1:10. ... *but* (God's grace) *has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior JC, who has **abolished** death...* What does it mean that the Lord Jesus has abolished death? Death is still very much a reality. I see people dying on a regular basis. How can Paul say that death has been abolished? For the Christian, death has been abolished in the sense that it has been neutralized. Death has no longer power over you in the sense that it will not be the final experience in your life. The Christian has eternal life in Christ Jesus.

So Paul tells us in Romans 6:6 that at baptism, when we committed ourselves to Jesus by an act of faith, when we consigned ourselves to death, the body of sin is destroyed through the power of God in Christ. You are no longer at the mercy of sin. Now you have power over sin and to resist sin.

## **Bearing your cross**

We see then that baptism is a symbol of death, which involves the crucifixion of the old man. This notion of crucifixion, of putting to death the old man, has already been mentioned by the Lord Jesus in His teaching. Take for example Luke 14:27. *And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.* If a man wants to follow Jesus, he has to bear his cross. The cross does not merely mean the hardship that one has to endure in life. The cross is always an instrument of death. If you are going to follow Christ, you have to be willing to walk to your own death. You have to come to a point where you put to death your old selfish self.

A few verses later, in Luke 14:33, Jesus explains what He means from a different angle. He says, *So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.* Notice that this verse ends in the same way as v. 27, that *you cannot be My disciple ... unless you do this.* In v. 27, it is to bear your cross. In v. 33, it is to forsake all that you have. To bear your cross involves that you forsake all that you have.

Let's concentrate particularly on this verse, Luke 14:33. There is something here about the absoluteness of Jesus' words that immediately makes us feel uneasy. 'Forsake **all** that you have.' We are confronted with an uncomfortable 'all'. The demand is absolute, complete. It is all. This absoluteness affects the word 'forsake'. It is to forsake something in such a way that it is final, complete. When you bear your cross, you die. And death expresses something that is final, complete. And so, if we want to become His disciples, Jesus asks us to forsake what we have with the same finality.

## **A good-bye forever**

This word 'forsake' is the translation of a Greek word, which means to say 'good-bye'. It is 'to bid farewell'. *Whoever of you does 'not say good-bye to' all that he has cannot be My disciple.* And here, it is a final, a decisive good-bye. It is a good-bye forever.

Of course, good-bye is said in the context of departure. You don't say good-bye unless you are going away. The same Greek word for 'forsake' is used in Acts 18:21 where it is written that Paul is saying good-bye to the people at Ephesus. He says farewell and left them as he goes on his journey to Jerusalem.

Now, in the OT, we find an incident of great importance where the Jews had to say good-bye. They had to depart. This leads me to speak about the Exodus. Exodus means departure. There came a day when God said to Israel: 'You are going to follow Me out of Egypt. You are going to say good-bye to Egypt forever. Leave everything behind and follow Me.'

To say good-bye is something dynamic. If you don't move, you don't have to say good-bye. In Luke 14:33, when the Lord Jesus says ...*whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple*, He is simply saying, 'unless you say good-bye to everything you have, like the Israelites when they left Egypt, there is no way you are going to be My disciple'. Don't limit the meaning of this 'all that you have' in terms of material possessions. That would be a mistake. What is being said by 'good-bye' is the old way of life in Egypt. No more the dominion of Pharaoh. No more the bondage and slavery of the old way of life under sin. That is the picture. Leaving all this behind, they departed. Remember Romans 6:6, ...*our old man was crucified with Him ... that we should no longer be slaves of sin*.

### **The Exodus: a symbol of our death to this world**

The farewell of the Exodus is very interesting. The word 'exodus', or *exodos* in Greek, appears three times in the NT and it is used in 2 full meanings. (1) It is used of the Israelites leaving Egypt. We see this in Hebrews 11:22. *By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure (the exodus) of the children of Israel.* (2) And secondly, it is used to talk about death. In 2Peter 1:15, Peter says this as he was approaching the end of his life: *Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease (i.e. my death, my departure, my exodus from this world).*

I am saying all this to show you that the departure from Egypt is a symbol of our death to this world. The Bible says that the OT was written for our instruction. And here we see that the story of the exodus from Egypt is to be understood as a symbol of our death to this world.

It is this understanding that we should have in mind when we read 1Corinthians 10:1-2 where Paul says, ... *I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were (notice this word) **baptized** into Moses in the cloud and in the sea...* Paul deliberately compares the baptism to the Exodus where the Israelites were said to be *baptized into Moses*. Baptism in Romans 6, remember, is compared to death, to the dying to sin. And Paul says that the Christian is *baptized into Christ*. The point here is this. Moses represents here the whole legal system, the old covenant. And Paul says that those Israelites who left Egypt were baptized into the old covenant, into the law of Moses, in the crossing of the Red Sea. In the same way, you and I when we left the world, we were baptized into the new covenant in Christ at our baptism.

And Paul continues the parallel in speaking of the communion in vv. 3-4. ...*all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.* The people of Israel were baptized into the old covenant when they left Egypt and passed through the sea. So we too left the old life when we were baptized into Christ. We entered into the new covenant.

### **Lay aside the weight of sin**

This being the picture, how does all this apply to us? Well, let me ask you this question. Did you say farewell to the old life as the Israelites did when they left Egypt? If not, I don't know how you can say that at baptism, the old man in you has been crucified with Christ. Every Israelite had to leave Egypt behind. They had to literally stand up and go. I am sure that many wept as they looked at their house for the last time. The Israelites left most of their belongings behind because when you travel, there is not much you can carry with you. In fact, every weight that you carry will gradually become a burden. The writer to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 12, ... *let us lay aside very weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...* Lay aside the weight of sin, say farewell to the life of sin, don't carry it with you in your walk with God.

At baptism, make sure that you don't take your old nature along with you into the new life with Christ because otherwise your spiritual life will be one of misery. ...*whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple*. The Israelites left all their material possessions behind them, but they brought their wretched old attitude with them into the wilderness. So much so that none of them reached the land of promise except for two persons. You can give away all your material possessions to the Lord but if you have not departed from the world which is under the dominion of sin, under the dominion of Satan, the pharaoh of this present world, then you cannot be a disciple of Christ. That's what Jesus Himself says.

Let us come to the conclusion. To bear your cross is to forsake all that you have for the sake of Christ. And to forsake means that you have said farewell, that there is a departure, an exodus. In spiritual terms, Paul uses the expression 'to have died'. At baptism, you have died. Romans 6:3: ... *do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?* You have departed from Egypt. You have crossed the Red Sea. All the old life of sin is behind you. That's how Paul understands baptism to be. For him, it is death. It is finished with the world.

### **The promise of a victorious life**

Then you have the promise of a victorious spiritual life. It is Paul again who says in 1Corinthians 15:57, *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord JC*. That is life in abundance. Sanctification doesn't mean the eradication of sin. It means the victory over sin. God's promise is that we will no longer experience the power of sin in our lives. We will experience constant victory over sin. You will always be victorious provided that you have died to the old life. You cannot live in the resurrection life unless you have died. You cannot be resurrected unless you have died. But it is when you have died that you can experience the power of the resurrection. And though sin continues to be in your flesh, you have neutralized its dominion over you. The body of sin has been destroyed.

In fact, victory is meaningless unless you have to fight a battle. It is precisely because we have the battle against sin and the flesh that we experience the reality of spiritual victory. And for victory, there has to be power. This power will never be your experience until you fulfill the words of the LJ. You say farewell to all that you have, not just your material possessions, but to your whole old nature. Then you will experience the power of His resurrection and enter into the fullness of the new covenant with all its glory.