

BELIEVERS' BAPTISM.

NOTES OF A SERMON (PERSONALLY REVISED) PREACHED AT MOUNT ZION STRICT BAPTIST CHAPEL, QUEEN'S ROAD, WATFORD, BY MR. S. R. HUNT, BEFORE BAPTISING FOUR SISTERS, ON LORD'S DAY EVENING, MARCH 22ND, 1925.

"And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptised him."—ACTS viii. 38.

GOD'S ways are past finding out. He is "wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." If we are taught by the Holy Spirit, we shall be led to see that it is not only unnecessary, but sinful for us to move a single finger towards the work of God. He is more than able to do everything Himself that pertains to us and vital godliness. I want to be stripped of everything false in religion, and desire the same for you also. If we are not stripped by God here, we shall stand ashamed in our sins without shelter before Him in the great day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts will be laid bare. If we are never made to feel our need of Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we must not expect to walk those golden streets hereafter with all who have been taught by His Spirit to fear His holy Name and stand in awe of Him. Human reason cannot understand God's holy method of working. In the incident that surrounds our text, it appears that Philip was preaching the gospel with God-given success in the cities of Samaria. How would fallen man speak of what took place? What would carnal reason say at the thought of Philip leaving much people and spiritual prosperity to go down into a desert place to preach to one man? What would your nature and mine have said? "Philip, you must not forsake all that you are doing here to go after one man." But you see the order had gone forth from God, who is "wonderful in counsel and excellent in working": "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Therefore it is not for you or me to say why God should do this, and why He should do that; it rather becomes us as taught and humbled to bow and say, "Thy will, not mine, be done."

Philip had a definite command given to him by God, in the first place, to preach the gospel. He was prepared for this great work by the Holy Ghost, by whose quickening operations he had earlier still been called by grace. Otherwise, how could he preach? And like God Himself and His ways, His grace; of which Philip was a partaker, is sovereign grace; hence the instrument and its use in this case were under divine sovereignty. Powerfully was Philip led to go toward the south and join himself to the chariot in which this eunuch was found sitting. Now see the character this man proved to be: he was in a very

high position in life—a guard and keeper of the treasures of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians—and Philip discovered him sitting in his chariot, reading in chapter liii. of the prophecy of Isaiah concerning Jesus. I am thankful that we are told that while this man was in no mean position, he was nevertheless very ignorant on spiritual matters; yet his ignorance was no bar to the mercy of God in sending Philip to preach to him. The mercy of God had designed the removal of those scales that were over the eunuch's eyes, by Philip as the means. Seeing the chariot, the evangelist ran thither, and hearing its occupant read Isaiah liii., he enquired: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" And the eunuch said, "How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him." Do you see two features here that would gladden Philip's heart? (a) Felt ignorance, and (b) A desire to learn. My friends, it is awful to be ignorant of the way of salvation, and have no desire to know it; terrible also is it to be so full of head-knowledge, hugging a false profession of religion, being too proud and self-satisfied to desire the teaching of the Spirit of God. Felt and confessed ignorance, with a thirst for knowledge, is infinitely more desirable than imagined wisdom. Job, who was one of God's most honoured servants, prayed: "That which I see not teach Thou me." If you and I have these two things, felt and confessed ignorance and a real thirst for God's teaching, in our experience—at the beginning, in the middle, at the end, yes, all the way through—we shall know what it is to be made wise unto salvation. What makes a man feel his ignorance more than the enlightening rays of the Holy Spirit shining into his heart? What were heaven and hell before the Lord showed to us our own ignorance and indifference to the reality of both places? Ignorance comes from nothing less than sin, which, if not mourned over, confessed, repented of and forgiven, must be punished in hell for ever.

Now what did this Ethiopian eunuch do with his ignorance, which some of you might argue was even more intense in some respects than you would plead yours to be, brought up as you have been to hear the Word of God explained? He did not know to what person the prophet referred. Ah, sinner, and what has all explanation about the Person of Christ done for you? Nothing at all savingly, apart from the inshining of the Holy Ghost. You and I are no wiser in a spiritual sense by nature than this eunuch. Well, this is what he was taught to do with his ignorance—confess and press: "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself or of some other man?" Is not "Christ is the Friend of sinners" written right across this account? Philip answered his question by preaching to him Jesus; and the word, being with power, was gladly received and brought forth precious fruit. I have no doubt that the eunuch felt and expressed his unworthiness, and Philip would nevertheless tell him that it was possible that Jesus Christ

could look upon such an ignorant, hell-deserving, unworthy sinner. This possibility was proved by the confession of faith that was afterwards made by this now enlightened, happy man. What liberty Philip must have felt as he was the means of loosing the bonds of this eunuch! When God intends to bless souls He opens the mouths of His servants and speaks through them right into hearts prepared to receive the word. It is an awful thing, at such times of blessing, if a man is afterwards left to walk in pride as if he was entirely responsible for such ministry. I have been impressed deeply of late of the awfulness of this. You know Herod gave not God the glory, and what happened? He was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost. An awful end, left on record as a solemn warning. Now listen to the encouragement and reward Philip had. The convert answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." What sweet music, for "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost." Just then they came to a certain water, and the eunuch said: "See here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptised?" (Surely this means that Philip must have preached baptism to him, else how would he know there was such an ordinance?) "Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest." Then came the blessed confession of faith, and immediately baptism.

This brings us to the words of my text, which contains with its surroundings the following points: 1. The mode of Baptism; 2. The meaning of the Ordinance; 3. The manner of persons to participate in it; 4. The motive of Baptism; 5. The message given by God to those who should walk in it. May the Lord help us to say a few words upon these important things.

1. *The mode of Baptism.* When Moses was instructed by God in things pertaining to the tabernacle, he was told to see that he made all things according to the pattern that had been showed to him on the mount. This was to emphasise the fact that everything in connection with the worship of God is most solemn and important, and must be done in accordance with the revealed mind and will of God in His Word.

There is a pattern given in the Scriptures which must be definitely followed regarding baptism. Jesus gave this pattern Himself when He was baptised by John in Jordan, and Philip followed it precisely when he baptised the eunuch: "And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptised him." This is a death-blow upon infant sprinkling, commonly called infant baptism. There is no pattern anywhere in the Word of God for infant or adult sprinkling. If baptism is to be administered in the way the text speaks of, believers are to be totally immersed. Some say it is not wise to use any other mode than sprinkling. But "God's ways are just, His counsels wise." If God thought that the mode He instituted, and which we desire to follow, was unwise for any reason whatever, would He have ordained it? Certainly not.

"Too wise to be mistaken, He,
Too good to be unkind."

Further. Sprinkling entirely fails to set forth the meaning of baptism; therefore, how can it be a part of God's instruction? It is dangerous business to tamper with, or seek to improve upon, God's way. The two sons of Aaron were consumed for offering false fire which the Lord commanded not. Sprinkling is an imitation at best, and a very poor one at that, for the word itself means something quite different to that of baptism. Baptism means to immerse or dip. Even should the clergy in the Church of England follow the limit given in the Prayer Book and practise infant immersion, still Scripture gives no sanction for this. The mind of God was followed by Philip and the eunuch as they both went down into the water for the latter to be baptised. There is no resemblance of this act when a man takes a child and, standing by the font, immerses that child in water that he himself does not enter also. Both minister and candidate, God says, are to go together into water to observe this holy ordinance. There is no room to suppose that in this or any other case mentioned in the Bible a few drops of water would be sufficient for obedience to this command. Philip did not leave the eunuch in the chariot, and say: "I will fetch a little water in a vessel and sprinkle you." Both left the chariot, both entered the water, and Philip plunged the eunuch beneath the surface. With such clear direction we continue to observe this mode of baptism, which is the only God-honouring one as attended to by faith.

2. *The meaning of Baptism.* This is very closely united to the mode, and, "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Baptism is, when rightly observed, an act of faith. The act of a true believer who has been made such by God the Holy Ghost. An infant knows nothing of faith, without which it is impossible to please God. Believers' Baptism sets forth the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Infant sprinkling cannot set forth burial, neither can infant immersion or sprinkling be acts of faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are solemn truths that all infants must necessarily be ignorant of.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, He said: "It is finished, bowed His head, and gave up the ghost." And we humbly believe that He did these things for some of us. Oh what amazing love and mercy! He went into the grave, not to be holden by death, for He came forth on the third day triumphant from the tomb, and now He is risen and seated at His Father's right hand, interceding for all those whose names are written in the Book of Life. If these things are not true, our faith is vain, and consequently baptism and preaching; and we are yet in our sins. But, bless God, they are living truths that will never die. Baptism illustrates the sufferings of Christ under the hidings of His Father's face: "All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over Me." For whom? "For Christ

also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

And where were those people who, like the eunuch, have been brought out of darkness into light? They were buried in sorrow and sin; at death's dark door they lay. Buried deep down in trespasses and sins, immersed in the world absolutely. Something has taken place in their experience. As God's purposes of love towards them must be fulfilled, so through His perfect work and blood-shedding, they have been brought from, and raised out of, a death in sins to a life of righteousness. They have been baptised by the Holy Ghost. Without an experience of this essential baptism, water baptism is out of place. Do you think that God takes a person immersed in the world straight to heaven without the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Impossible. Heaven would be no heaven to such a person. Experimental religion, without which we must be lost, is set forth in this blessed ordinance. When a believer has really experienced an unfolding of these things, in so far as the Lord has seen fit to make them known, that believer, when so wrought upon by Him, is constrained to come forth and declare what the Lord has done for his soul. Whereupon by baptism this character professes a dying to the world, and a rising again to a newness of life—a life given, not imagined or read of only, but one given by Him who said: "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

3. *The manner of persons who are to participate in this ordinance.* Who are they? They are called believers. Unbelievers have no right to it, and we are anxious to prevent such persons walking in it, for "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." We have sought to describe the change that must take place before a person is made manifest as a believer, and are glad indeed when such altered characters desire to express the change by following Him in whom they have believed. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." "Damned!" How awful to think of, and yet too real to be left unspoken. If you die in your sins you must be damned; but if you are made a humble believer in the fact that you are a sinner, and if that belief sets you seeking after, if haply you may find a Saviour, you shall be saved. A true believer is a praying soul, and a praying soul hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and all such shall be filled. What a mercy to be enabled to say with the eunuch before a heart-searching God: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." A believer is well provided for. He has God for his guide, and no good thing shall be withheld from him. Grace is given him here, and glory is promised hereafter. Sorrow for sin is felt, and forgiveness given by Jesus Christ. This means the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come. We believe that these our sisters, who are

shortly to put the Lord on by a public profession in baptism, are true believers. They have declared before the church here the Lord's dealings with their souls, and their testimonies have been well received.

Then God's Word says: "They that gladly received His word were baptised." What manner of persons are we? Do we gladly receive it or not? You who may have thoughts about this ordinance, and wonder whether you dare venture: How stands the case? Do you feel your emptiness and poverty? It is empty vessels that are meet to receive, and poor empty, perishing sinners are they who gladly receive His Word. Would a word from His lips to your soul fill up your vast desires? Has your heart been filled with His Word as it has been applied? Sinner, thou art the manner of person for baptism. What doth hinder thee to be baptised? A full soul will steal God's Word; it will climb up another way; but an anxious enquirer will wait until he receives the word by faith from the Lord Himself. I believe these our friends have gladly received His Word. It has been good to hear them tell of how the Lord has applied it with divine power, and the effect produced. I desire to be found at His feet in profound humility and gratitude under a sense of His great goodness and condescension in using this unworthy sinner as the means in His hand of preaching the truth into their hearts, so that we see the fruit. When we observe the finger of God dealing in a way of grace with poor sinners, it behoves us as enabled to bless His Name and seek to humble ourselves under His mighty hand.

Then the Word of God tells us that penitents are admitted to this ordinance. "They were baptised of Him in Jordan, confessing their sins." All are not confessing sinners. Sin must be felt before it can be confessed. The publican was a penitent, but the Pharisee was not. The former smote upon his breast and cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Penitents receive pardon. Penitents are washed in the precious blood of Christ, in His own time, and finally they enter heaven. Such are still welcome to be baptised.

Another word on this point. Our text not only indicates the manner of persons to be baptised, but it shows who should baptise. Philip was a believer as well as the eunuch. It would not have been honouring to God for an unbeliever to have administered this ordinance then, neither would it be now. "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin." God's worship is holy, and He will not approve an amalgamation of that which is holy with profanity. "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? . . . Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and

will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters; saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. vi. 14-18). Friends, I hope I have a true desire in taking these our sisters through this sweet ordinance, myself with them, to show forth the praises of Him who I humbly hope has brought me out of darkness into His marvellous light. Oh what wonders love has done for me, such an unworthy sinner! I want Him to shed His love abroad in my heart now as well as in theirs while they put Him on in this public profession. Thus may it be known to-night that a believer baptises believers, and may we thus be owned by Him. "And they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptised him."

Next, let us notice *the motive of the ordinance*. What motive was there in the institution of this sacred rite? What did we say if sets forth? The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And what moved Him to die? He came into this world, was laid in Bethlehem's manger, and did all that followed to save lost sinners.

"What mighty motive did Him move?"

The motive's plain, 'twas all in love."

This being so, do you think that any other motive moved Him to institute this ordinance which is so illustrative? Nay, it was all done in love. When Jesus came up out of the water after being baptised by John, His Father's love was showered upon Him when the heavens opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him, and "lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Then, did He not say, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments"? His love shed abroad in the heart of a sinner, and an insight into the meaning of this ordinance, will move the willing feet to swift obedience. Love begets obedience, and His loving motive in instituting baptism was to provide a way whereby His children might honour and obey Him by showing forth His goodness towards them.

Lastly, *the message given to those who are to participate in this ordinance*. i. A *discriminating* message is given. Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest." This excludes the flesh.

"He requires pure desires;

All the heart, or nothing."

"Bow down, sense and reason; faith only reign here."

A notional faith will not do, a God-given faith which pierces through sense and reason and honours the Giver of it is essential in moving anyone to rightly seek baptism.

ii. There is a message of *welcome* surrounding the text. "If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest." What an honour to have a welcome from the King of kings to follow Him in His ordinances! He says to such a believer, "Sinner, thou mayest." Is there one here to-night saying, "May I, Lord"? "If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest."

You are welcome. I believe that this message of welcome is given to our sisters this evening. I humbly believe the Lord would have me bid them welcome in His Name to this ordinance.

iii. Further, there is a message of *joy*. I would speak of it to you, my sisters. After the eunuch was baptised "he went on his way rejoicing." Does not this confirm the word which says of His commands: "In keeping of them there is great reward"? It is not *for* keeping them, but *in* keeping them. May you have the joy and peace of a good conscience before God, and hear spoken from Him some sweet message of joy, that the joy of the Lord may be your strength.

iv. Then, finally, there is a message of *caution*. Immediately after the eunuch was baptised the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, so that the eunuch saw him no more. Beware of leaning to any man. Philip was only what God made him to the eunuch, and this may be truly said of any God-sent minister. If God blesses any ministry to you, seek to thank Him for it; but glorify Him, not the instrument. Be careful of the danger of thinking that all the spiritual food you get must come from the man. Look to the Lord alone, for He is rightly a jealous God. All real good must come from and through Him. His servants are to be loved and honoured, but pray as enabled that God may reign supreme, and that you and they may be in the right place. Does not this circumstance convey this caution from the Lord? "Trust not to Philip; O man, put your trust in the Lord. Philip must leave you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Philip must die; I cannot." Look to the Lord as enabled in the hour of temptation, in the moment of sorrow, and when doubts and fears prevail: "Look to Jesus, kind as strong,
Pity joined with power."

You will get through safely no other way, but

"Through floods and flames if Jesus lead,
You shall go safely on."

Self will not afford you the least help, therefore seek to flee self. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Eyes will be upon you, my sisters. Some will look scornfully, others doubtfully, some hopefully and prayerfully; but, above all, remember that His eye is upon you. May your eyes be up unto Him for preserving grace that will enable you to endure to the end, and you shall be saved.

God bless you abundantly, and each one within the sound of my voice, if His holy will. May this day be a day to be remembered, as one of the days of the Son of Man. Amen.

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