

## LESSONS

### 1<sup>st</sup> Lesson: 2 Kings 5: 1-14

1 Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper. 2 And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. 3 Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." 4 And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel." 5 Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. 6 Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy. 7 And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me." 8 So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. 10 And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean." 11 But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' 12 Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. 13. And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" 14. So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson: Matthew 3: 1-6; 13-17

1. In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2. and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" 3. For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.'" 4. Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him 6. and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. 13. Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. 14. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" 15. But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to

fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him. 16. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. 17. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Lesson: Apocalypse Explained 475:21

Washings were instituted in the ancient churches, and afterwards Baptisms in their place, which nevertheless are only representative and significative rites, in order that heaven might be conjoined with the human race, and in particular with the man of the church; for heaven is conjoined to man when man is in ultimates, that is, in such things as are in the world in regard to his natural man, while he is in such things as are in heaven in regard to his spiritual man; in no other way is conjunction possible. This is why Baptism was instituted; also the Holy Supper; likewise why the Word was written by means of such things as are in the world, while there is in it a spiritual sense, containing such things as are in heaven, that is, that the sense of the letter of the Word is natural, while in it there is a spiritual sense. By means of this sense the Word conjoins the angels of heaven with the men of the church. The holy supper likewise conjoins and the same is true of Baptism. But he is much mistaken who believes that Baptism contributes anything to a man’s salvation unless he is at the same time in the truths of the church and in a life according to them; for Baptism is an external thing, which without an internal contributes nothing to salvation, but it does contribute when the external is conjoined to an internal. The internal of Baptism is, that by means of truths from the Word and a life according to them, falsities and evils may be removed by the Lord, and thus man be regenerated.

## S E R M O N

### Uses of Baptism

A Sermon by  
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When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. Matthew 3: 16

### Introductory Ideas

To teach the way to heaven the Lord God Jehovah of the Old Testament came into the world. But before the Lord began His public ministry and openly declared that He is the God of heaven, He sent His prophet, John the Baptist to urge people to prepare a place in their hearts so that the Lord may come to them. John came preaching, saying “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a Baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4).

Surely the Lord dwells within us as a constant presence leading and guiding us to perform heavenly uses so that ultimately we may come into heaven. The Lord's presence can be awakened within a person who opens his heart and mind in acceptance of the Lord. But before anyone can experience the redeeming power of the Lord's presence a person must prepare the way.

### Baptism – The Lord's Coming

One means by which a person may prepare for the Lord's coming is to follow the example the Lord has given by being baptized. Yes, it is true we must repent and continue living a new life, a heavenly life as we shed hurtful attitudes and behaviors that injure others. Baptism, a most holy form of worship (TCR 667) can symbolize a new beginning, a wonderfully new life founded upon looking first to the Lord. As we turn to the Lord in all we do, we make it possible that we may come out of the wilderness. We can leave behind the wilderness of troubled intentions and distorted ways of thinking that misdirect us from serving the Lord and other people.

Preparation of people for the coming of the Lord is the reason why John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a Baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. By means of Baptism a person takes a symbolic, public stand to celebrate the wonderful process of growing closer to the Lord.

John baptized in the Jordan River because "the waters of the Jordan" mean the beautiful truths that introduce a person into the church (AE 475:19). We find these introductory truths in the Word which tells us that: there is one God; there is a life after death; good people who believe in God and live a good life enter heaven; people who continue to do evil deeds lead themselves into hell.

Elisha the prophet told Naaman to go and wash in the Jordan seven times. "Washing" in the Jordan means the purification of a person from falsities and his reformation and regeneration by the Lord as the person lives according to the truths in the Word (AE 475:19). Therefore, John baptized in the waters of the Jordan River. The washing of Baptism means spiritual washing, which is the cleansing of our souls.

Before the Lord may come and dwell with us we must remove the barriers that stand in the way. We must cooperate with the Lord and allow Him to cleanse our loves of sinful cravings and our thoughts of false reasonings so that He may then come in. Baptism serves the use as a symbolic expression of who we are in our relationship with the Lord. So we turn now to the three uses of Baptism.

### First Use of Baptism

The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that "the first use of Baptism is introduction into the Christian Church, and at the same time insertion among Christians in the spiritual world" (TCR 677). It is true that every person, as to their mind, is midway between heaven and

hell while living in the world (Life 19, TCR 69). We also know from the Word “that people while living in the world have present with them at least two spirits from hell, as well as two angels from heaven” (AC 968). That being the case, we are free to choose between the one and the other. The hope is that we are exercising our freedom responsibly and choosing heaven, thus allowing the Lord to influence us.

In the Lord’s kingdom of heaven people from all nations are known and distinguished according to their religion (TCR 678). The Lord has miraculously arranged the heavens into hundreds, even thousands of angelic societies. People of the same religion live together. The Lord has ordered their societies according to their religion and the manner in which they express their love to God and to the neighbor (TCR 678).

Baptism serves the use of providing a sign here on earth and in the spiritual world that the baptized person is of the Christian faith. While living in the world, a person of the Christian faith who steadfastly lives according to the Lord’s Word, lives also in association with angels of the Christian heaven. Just think of the most splendid wonder of Christian people after death passing into the spiritual world, coming into heaven, and “even though they have never seen each other before, know each other, just as men in the world do their kinsmen, near relations, and friends” (HH 46). Everyone in the other life continues living among people with whom he has associated with while he lived in the world. Baptism serves as an introduction into association with Christians in the spiritual world.

### Second Use of Baptism

The Lord’s Word tells us that “the second use of Baptism is, that the Christian may know and acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer and Savior, and follow Him” (TCR 681). Let’s consider why acknowledgement of the Lord important. There are many ways in which a person demonstrates his acknowledgement of the Lord. One example is bowing down in prayer as a gesture of humble acknowledgment of the Lord. But Baptism is one of the greatest ways to demonstrate that we acknowledge the Lord as our God and Savior, and the source of our salvation.

While engaging in the sacrament of Baptism can symbolize a person’s knowing and acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ, there’s still much more. The “name of the Lord Jesus Christ” has a specific meaning for us. We know and believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one God of heaven and earth. We can know further from the Heavenly Doctrine that the Lord’s name “means in the Word nothing else than acknowledgment of Him and a life according to His commandments’ (TCR 682).

Acknowledgment of the Lord is important because of the implications it has upon how we live. Our acknowledgment of the Lord must be joined with obedience. When we acknowledge the Lord we are saying, in essence, that we believe in Him and have enough reverence that we are willing to live a life in obedience to His commandments. The Lord’s Word provides the true guiding principles for life.

True Christian Religion 8 teaches us that, “there is a universal influx from God into the souls of men of the truth that there is a God, and that He is one.” Even so we must be absolutely mindful of the fact that human selfishness, love of the world, and all manner of sin suppresses that influx. In other words, evils of life can cloud a person’s mind from acknowledging God to such an extent that the person could fall into disobedience.

But the Lord says “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways. For why should you die?” (Ezekiel 33: 11). In deciding to turn from evil, a person may commemorate this decision by engaging in the sacrament of Baptism as a sign that he is willing to acknowledge and obey the Lord.

### Third Use of Baptism

In the True Christian Religion the Lord teaches that “the third use of Baptism, which is the final use, is that man may be regenerated” (TCR 684). John’s Baptism served to make way for the coming of the Lord. While in the world the Lord was establishing the Christian Church as the former Israelite-Jewish Church declined to its end. At the same time, the Lord was also restoring order in the spiritual world. This He accomplished by casting evil from the world of spirits and by creating the spiritual heaven.

In addition to preparing a way for the Lord, Baptism in the present day also serves the use as a sign indicating that a person may be regenerated. Baptism symbolizes cleansing – John’s Baptism the “cleansing of the external man” while “Baptism at the present day represents the cleansing of the internal man” (TCR 690). This cleansing of the internal man is regeneration (TCR 690). Our “internal man” is the world of our loves and intentions along with our thoughts and the decisions we make.

Remember the Lord said “...hypocrites, you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence...first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matthew 23: 25-26). Surely we want goodness to characterize our outward behavior. At the same time, however we must cleanse our “internal man” the inward behavior of our loves and thoughts so that there is harmony between what’s inside of us and what we display to the world. With the Lord’s help and in cooperation with Him we must cleanse the inside and outside of the “cup” of our lives.

As Baptism serves the use of regeneration, the ritual act of Baptism does not in and of itself actually cleanse a person at that particular moment. Let’s realize that Baptism serves as a foundation of all the things that follow: learning from Word, shunning evils, repentance, and obedience to the Lord by living a heavenly life according to His commandments. Regeneration is a wonderful process and means during the course of our lifetime in which the Lord joins good and truth together within our minds and in the life that we live. Baptism serves as a sign symbolizing this work of salvation by the Lord. And now we consider a few reasons, but not all of them, why a person should get baptized.

## Why Get Baptized

One reason to get baptized is because Baptism contributes to salvation. You may have heard it said that Baptism is not necessary to go to heaven. We know that people of all religions may enter heaven if they have lived their faith. We also know that all religion teaches two things: that a person should believe in God and also live a good life. The Lord has provided religion throughout the entire world and that each religion contains precepts like those found in the Ten Commandments (DP 326:9). Each religion also contains its own unique sacred texts, rituals, prayers, music, and other forms of worship.

The Lord is great in mercy and wisdom in providing a means for all people to freely enter heaven. A person could actually say that he is of the Christian religion, one of the religions provided by the Lord. Therefore, like people of other religions, all the person must do is live his faith and therefore he can be saved. So it seems then, that Baptism is not necessary. However, let's not use these erroneous reasonings to justify not getting baptized. Remember that the second use of Baptism is that the *Christian* [not the Mohammedan, Hindu or adherent of some other religion provided by the Lord) but that the *Christian* may know and acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ.

Accordingly, for those of us who are Christians of the New Jerusalem, let's not blind ourselves and trivialize Baptism. Baptism does indeed contribute to a person's salvation. The external ritual of Baptism has its life in the internal. Baptism contributes to salvation when a person is baptized and is, at the same time, "in the truths of the church and in a life according to them" (AE 475:21). In this way the external is joined with the internal. "The internal of Baptism is, that by means of truths from the Word and a life according to them, falsities and evils may be removed by the Lord, and thus man be regenerated" (AE 475:21). Baptism contributes to our salvation and is a unique Christian sacrament instituted by the Lord.

Another reason to get baptized is because we're taught in the Heavenly Doctrine that Baptism is commanded (TCR 668). The Lord commanded His disciples to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them (Matthew 28: 19). Naaman was commanded: the prophet Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman, telling him to wash in the Jordan River seven times. Even so in the Gospels we learn that the Lord Himself baptized: "Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea and there He remained with them and baptized" (John 3:22); the followers of John the Baptist complained to him that "He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified - behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him" (John 3: 26).

Now let's look at a third reason to get baptized. The Lord wants us to follow Him. He Himself was baptized. And we know from the Heavenly Doctrine that "the Lord's life in the world was an example according to which the men of the church are to live" (AE 254:2). The Gospel of John tells of the Lord saying "for I have given you an example" (John 13: 15).

And finally a fourth reason to get baptized is because Baptism contains something Divine (TCR 668). As a sacrament ordained by the Lord, Baptism (along with Holy Supper) is a most holy form of worship. Baptism is a most special Christian sacrament from the Lord. We know that all that comes from the Lord is clean, pure, and holy. As Baptism contains something Divine and the Lord is Divine, He is therefore in Baptism providing for the salvation of our souls.

#### Concluding Ideas:

John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a Baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. He said, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In each and every occasion that a person shuns an evil the Lord is coming, regenerating the person, and preparing him for heaven. The wonderful Word of the Heavenly Doctrine tells us that, "it is an attendant feature of every coming of the Lord that it is a beginning to those who are being regenerated" (AC 728).

Baptism sets us apart, but not in such a manner that we are special since the Lord loves everyone. Baptism serves as an identifying marker that we are members of the Christian Church here on earth and in heaven. We know and acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the one God of heaven and earth. And finally, Baptism is a wonderfully special sign that the Lord can reform and regenerate us as He leads us to heaven. A person baptized as an infant may, upon reaching adult age, confirm his or her belief. The sacrament of Baptism is also available to any adult who has not been baptized as an infant, and who wants to come before Lord to commemorate their faith in the Lord.

"Come now and let us reason together" says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1: 18). *Amen.*