

15 - CELEBRATING NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told his disciples, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” Matthew 28:18-20.

The Greek word that is translated disciple is *mathēteuō*. “*Matheteuo* means not only to learn, but to become attached to one's teacher and to become his follower in doctrine and conduct of life.” From the AMG Complete Word Study New Testament.

When Jesus was on this earth, twelve disciples left everything in order to attach themselves to Jesus. They were given the privilege of learning from His teaching, observing His miracles, and following His example. The experience was priceless.

Fortunately, the experience is still available! Everyone can attach themselves to Jesus and be born again by the Holy Spirit. We can learn from His teaching, experience His miracles, and be living examples of the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in our lives (Galatians 5:22,23).

Being a disciple of Jesus is the greatest privilege on earth. All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him. He works through His disciples to share His message, show His love, and shine His light in the world. Those who are searching for truth will welcome the light.

BRINGING LIGHT TO THE DARKNESS

If you take a tour in an underground cave, the guide may ask everyone to turn off their flashlights for a short time so everyone can experience total darkness. In such a setting you can put your hand an inch in front of your face and see nothing. It is an eerie feeling. It is a welcome relief when the lights are turned on again.

Now imagine the tour guide plays a horrible trick on everyone. He leads them deep into the cave and then hides from them, leaving them to find their way out on their own. The cave has many passage ways and many dead ends. After hours of trying various paths, the flashlights begin to get dim and then go out. All the spare batteries are used up. The group is in total darkness with no hope of getting out on their own.

Many hours go by. The group begins to wonder if anyone will find them. They pray for help, asking God to send a search party to find them and lead them out. More hours go by. Despair begins to set in. Then all of a sudden a voice is heard calling, “Can you hear me?”

“Yes, Yes! We hear you! Please help us!” Soon a light is seen. Everyone rejoices. Help has arrived!

The enemy, Satan, has led the world into darkness and despair. He wants us to be lost and dead. When someone you love is lost, your focus in life is to find them before it is too late. Jesus loves us. He came to rescue everyone from our hopeless situation. He doesn't want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9). Unfortunately, many people have become comfortable in the darkness and refuse to come into the light even when help has come.

When Jesus went back to heaven, He sent His disciples into the “cave” with His light, love and power to lead everyone who wants to be helped “out of the darkness and into His marvelous light” 1 Peter 2:9.

WHY WAS JESUS BAPTIZED?

1. What did John say is the reason for water baptism? Matthew 3:11

For John, water baptism was a symbol of the repentance that had already taken place in a person's life. When some Jewish leaders wanted to be baptized, John told them they needed to repent first. “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” Matthew 3:8, NIV. Repentance is a choice to turn away from sin and choose to follow God plan for life.

2. Why did Jesus ask to be baptized? Matthew 3:13-15

If Jesus had not sinned, why did He need to participate in a symbol that expressed repentance? John resisted at first, but Jesus insisted that it was necessary in order to “fulfill all righteousness.” We can better understand this when we realize the challenge Jesus faced on earth.

3. Did Jesus automatically know truth or did His knowledge increase? Luke 2:52

When Jesus was in heaven, He chose to be our Savior. He could see the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:9,10). When He was on earth, He “increased in wisdom.” He had to learn what His mission was. He studied the Scriptures and observed the temple services. We can also assume that His parents told Him the stories of:

- His miraculous birth.
- The angels who sang and announced His birth to the shepherds.
- The wise men from the east worshipping Him and giving Him gifts.
- Simeon recognizing him as “the Lord’s Christ” Luke 2:25-35.

Gradually He began to understand that He was to be the Lamb of God who would “take away the sin of the world” John 1:29.

4. What did Jesus continue to choose throughout His life on earth?

- A. John 5:30 “I can of myself do nothing. . . . I do not seek my own _____ but the _____ of the _____ who sent Me.”
- B. John 6:38 “I have come down from heaven, not to do _____, but the _____ of _____ who sent Me”.
- C. Matthew 26:39 “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, _____ as _____, but as You will.”

Having taken our nature upon Himself, Jesus often faced temptations. For example, after Jesus said He would be killed and resurrected on the third day, Peter objected. He “began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’” Matthew 16:22.

Jesus replied, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” Matt. 16:23.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus faced a very intense struggle. “He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to [His disciples,] ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.’ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*’” Matthew 26:37-39.

In each situation, Jesus had to choose: “Do I turn away from My mission to save the world or do I surrender to My Father’s will? Am I willing to be ‘obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross’” Phil. 2:8.

At His baptism Jesus chose to publicly accept His mission to save the world from sin. He knew this meant “the iniquity of us all” would be “laid on Him” and that He would be “led as a lamb to the slaughter” Isaiah 53:6,7. At His baptism He communicated His willingness to:

- Pour “out His soul unto death.” Isaiah 53:12
- Be “numbered with the transgressors.” Isaiah 53:12
- Bear “the sin of many.” Isaiah 53:12
- Make “intercession for the transgressors.” Isaiah 53:12
- Make “His grave with the wicked.” Isaiah 53:9
- “Make reconciliation for iniquity” Daniel 9:24
- “Bring in everlasting righteousness” Daniel 9:24.

Because of Jesus’ decision to accept His mission, God made “Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” 2 Corinthians 5:21. As a result of His perfect life and death, Jesus was able to “fulfill all righteousness” for the human race.

5. What did the Holy Spirit do for Jesus at His baptism?

A. Luke 3:22 _____

B. Luke 4:18 _____

Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit. The names Christ (in Greek) and Messiah (in Hebrew) mean “Anointed One.” At His baptism, Jesus accepted His mission to be the Savior of the world and was anointed to:

- Share the gospel.
- Heal the brokenhearted.
- Set people free from guilt, shame, slavery to sin, and death.
- Open the eyes of people that they might see the truth.

Soon after His baptism Jesus began “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’” Mark 1:14,15. When Jesus said “the time is fulfilled,” He was announcing that He was the Messiah referred to in the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-26.

Jesus’ example of being baptized is an important lesson for all of us. It was a public and tangible way for Him to communicate His:

- Belief - Based upon the Scriptures and the providence of God, Jesus understood that He was born to be the Savior of the world.
- Acceptance of His mission – As our representative, Jesus was to live a life of perfect love and then die for the sin of the world.

Our faith is not to be a private matter either. Baptism is a tangible expression of the truth we have believed, the choice we have made, and the mission we have accepted.

6. What message did Jesus receive after He was baptized? Luke 3:22

The anointing of the Spirit and the words from His Father empowered Jesus to overcome Satan and fulfill His mission on earth. Since Jesus represents the human race, God communicates the same message to us.

Because of Jesus, we are His children. In Christ He adopted, accepted and redeemed us (1 John 1:9; Ephesians 1:5-7). He invites us to cast all our cares upon Him, for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). We are free to come to Him just as we are, for He is not counting any of our sins against us (2 Corinthians 5:19).

THE SYMBOL OF BAPTISM

7. What is the meaning of the symbol of baptism in Romans 6:2-5?

D _____ B _____ R _____

Baptism is a symbol of our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. It is a tangible expression of faith that:

1. Legally, in Christ we have died the death we earned by our sin and have been raised with Jesus (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:19,20).
2. Personally, we have chosen to “deny” ourselves, take up our cross daily, and let Jesus live in us and be our Savior and Lord (Luke 9:23-25; Romans 6:11-13, 16-18; Galatians 2:20).

8. What does Paul say was crucified with Jesus? Romans 6:6

The “old man” is a reference to the human race that was condemned by Adam’s sin and died in Christ. We are now free to choose to “put off the old man” and “put on the new man” (Colossians 3:9,10; Eph. 4:22-24).

9. What is the result of our having died with Christ? Rom. 6:7

Having died in Christ, we all “have been freed from sin.” (The word translated freed is from the same Greek word translated justified in Rom. 5:9.) In other words, the law can no longer condemn us to death if we have already died the death we deserved. We are now free from the condemnation of the law. We are now to “reckon [or count] ourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” Romans 6:11.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

10. Read Matthew 28:18-20

A. What did Jesus say had been given to Him?

B. What did Jesus command His followers to do?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Satan was cast out of heaven when he rebelled against God (Rev. 12:9). He was cast out as “the ruler of this world” when Jesus died on the cross (John 12:31). Satan could no longer claim to have authority on earth (Luke 4:6). Instead, Jesus was able to say, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.”

Having redeemed the human race, Jesus qualified everyone for heaven and legally transferred everyone from Satan’s kingdom into God’s kingdom (Colossians 1:12-14). In the light of this good news, Jesus said:

1. Be willing to disciple others; be the kind of Christians others will want to follow and learn from.
2. Baptize people who receive Me as their Savior and are committed to representing God in all they say and do.
3. Teach people all I have commanded you; especially to ‘love others as I have loved you,’ for that is the ultimate way people will know that you are my disciples (John 13:34,35; 15:12).

This is a call to help people experience God’s amazing grace and to view all of life in the light of the unconditional love shining from the cross of Christ. Jesus tried to teach the disciples for 3½ years about the kingdom of heaven. Only after His resurrection were they able to begin to understand what the Kingdom of Heaven was really like.

Kingdom of Heaven Other-centered Love	Kingdom of Satan Self-centered Love
The love of Christ motivates people to live for God and freely share with others (2 Cor. 5:14,15; Matt. 10:8).	Insecurity and fear motivates people to live for self. People give in order to get.
Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing good. (John 15:4,5; Rev.3:17).	People are basically good, but capable of doing evil.
Everyone is equally valuable in Christ, for He redeemed everyone.	Our value is based on our performance and possessions.
The fruit of the Spirit is what makes a person attractive (Gal. 5:22,23).	Beauty is based on outward looks and display (1 Pet. 3:3,4).
People seek God's will first as they consider how to use their time, energy & money. They even seek to honor God in what they eat and drink (Matthew 6:33; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Exodus 20:8-11; Malachi 3:8-10).	People seek first what feels good, looks good & tastes good at the moment, even though it may lead to more pain & brokenness in their lives (1John 2:16; Phil. 3:19; 1 Tim. 6:10; 2 Tim. 3:1-5).
People have a deep respect for what God has created and made holy: life, people, marriage, tithe, His name, His Sabbath, Himself.	People are willing to steal from God & others, destroy marriages, hurt and kill others, ignore holy time, and take God's name in vain.
"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16. God gives everyone the freedom to choose. The only ones who live forever are those who want to live with God. The others will perish.	There are many different ideas about what happens after this life: 1. All will live forever with God. 2. All will live forever: some with God; others tortured in hell. 3. No one will live forever. 4. Undecided.
God will bring an end to sin & create a new heaven & earth. There will be no more pain, sorrow or death. Rev 21.	There can't be a God of love because there is so much evil in the world today.

Baptism is a tangible way for people to communicate that they have:

- Died in Christ the death that the law demands (2 Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:19).
- Chosen to die to sin and receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord.
- Embraced the truth and mission of the Kingdom of Heaven.

If people are rushed into baptism without the above three in place, the motive for being baptized will be fear or reward. They will be baptized in order to earn God's favor or the acceptance of others. Their attitude will be, "What is the least I can do to be accepted by God?" The wrong foundation will leave them weak and vulnerable.

On the other hand, the right foundation will enable people to live for the glory of God, even when faced with opposition and challenges (2 Corinthians 5:14,15; 11:22-28).

11. What promise did Jesus give His followers in Matthew 28:20?

The mission Jesus gave His followers is not easy, for "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" have a strong hold on people (1 John 2:15,16). These temptations can lead people to have no interest in living with Jesus, even though He loves each person and has qualified everyone to live forever with Him.

The lies of Satan have led many people to reject Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Some will even try to ridicule and fight against those who choose to receive Jesus as their Savior.

In the midst of the challenges, Jesus promises, "I will be with you always." Since He has all authority in heaven and on earth, this assurance is a great source of encouragement to His disciples.

He promises to give us whatever we need in order to represent Him (John 14:14). He also assures us that He will provide for all our needs when we seek first His kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

12. How does Jesus describe the intimate oneness Christians are able to have with God? John 14:23; 17:20,21

13. What kind of relationship does Jesus have with His church? Ephesians 5:25-32

The oneness between Jesus and His church is so close and intimate, it is like a marriage. Jesus is the husband and the head of the church.

14. Who unites us to the body of Christ? 1 Corinthians 12:12,13

Those who surrender their lives to Jesus are united by the Holy Spirit to the body of Christ on earth. True believers are spiritually connected to Jesus and to each other. Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Matthew 18:20.

15. How are the members of the body to view each other and to work together? 1 Corinthians 12:14-31

When our physical bodies are healthy, all the cells and organs work together under the direction of the brain. When the church is healthy, every member compliments the ministry of others and works in harmony with Jesus, the head of the body. Every person is important and has a work to do. Each person needs the ministry that others provide.

If people stop listening to the head, that part of the body could be described as paralyzed. Jesus is sending instructions, but the message is not getting through. The ministry that God intended for that member to fulfill is not accomplished. As a result, the whole body suffers.

BELONGING TO A CHURCH FOR MINISTRY & GROWTH

16. How do we become part of a visible body of Christ? Acts 2:41-47

The Lord added believers to the church when they expressed their decision in a public way by being baptized. As the wedding ceremony publicly unites two people as one, water baptism is a public symbol that unites us with Jesus and His visible body on earth. Jesus is not a polygamist, having many wives. His wife is the church, not individual members.

17. How are Christians able to help each other? Ephesians 4:11-16

God desires to use every person in the church to help the whole body grow into maturity. When we experience God's unconditional love, we will discover it is a joy to be a channel of God's love to others. When we find our security in Christ, we will see the church family as a wonderful place to learn how to freely:

- Give and receive love
- Forgive and receive forgiveness.

Jesus said others will know we are His disciples when we love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34,35). They will be drawn by this love and will desire to experience Jesus as their Savior also.

18. What tangible evidence does John refer to when he brings up the question, "Do I truly love God?" 1 John 4:19-21

Loving others is the evidence that we have experienced God's love for us and that we love God. Our brothers and sisters include:

- A. Our relatives by birth, adoption and marriage
- B. Our spiritual family (Matthew 12:46-50)
- C. Our human family (Matthew 25:31-46)

It is common for people to say, "I don't need to go to church to be a Christian or to worship God." This statement is true for those who are unable to go to church because they are sick. However, some people avoid church because they have been hurt by someone. They need to remember that God calls us to love and forgive people, not because they deserve it, but because God has loved and forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). The church is where we can learn to love and forgive others in the same way that God has loved and forgiven us.

Others neglect church because they have "more important" things to do. From heaven's perspective, the most important focus is to:

- "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" Matt. 6:33.
- Share the everlasting gospel with everyone (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 14:6).
- Lead people to be disciples of Jesus, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all that He has commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus needs every member of the body working together to do this most effectively. He is anxious to find all who have been "lost in the dark." He wants to lead them out of the "cave" and "into His marvelous light."

19. Would you like to be baptized as a tangible expression of your:

- Belief that you have died in Christ and are qualified for eternal life?
- Decision to surrender your life to Jesus as your Savior and Lord?
- Decision to embrace the mission of building up the kingdom of God in cooperation with others in the body of Christ?

_____ **Yes**

_____ **Not now**

_____ **I am considering it**

A PARABLE: THE FIXER-UPPER

Imagine buying a house. You paid cash for the house, so there is no mortgage. It is all yours. The house isn't in very good shape. You know that you are going to have to do a lot of work to make it a solid, nice looking home. However, there is one slight problem. The person renting the house thinks the house belongs to him, for he has lived there a long time. He has also been very sick and unable to work, so he doesn't have any money to pay rent, fix up the house, or keep it clean.

As the new owner, you have all the right in the world to go to the police and have him evicted. But you are a very kind and compassionate person. You are anxious to help him.

You knock on the door and wait for the door to open. For a long time there is silence. You know someone is in the house, for you have seen movement and even lights being turned on and off periodically.

You patiently wait and continue knocking. Finally, a person inside yells, "Go away. I'm not feeling very well. Leave me alone."

You knock again and say with a loud voice, "I would like to help you. Would you let me in?"

"No! Go away!" The voice inside responds.

Out of respect, you leave. But on the next day you come back and knock again. Again there is silence for quite awhile, but the person finally yells, "What do you want?"

Quickly you respond, "I want to help you!"

"I don't want your help!" the voice replies.

Owner: "Why?"

Renter: "I can take care of myself!"

Owner: "Are you sure?"

Renter: "Yes! Get off my property!"

The next day you knock again. The renter responds, "What do you want? Who are you anyway?"

Owner: "I am the new owner of the house. I have come to help you."

Renter: "Oh yeah, sure you've come to help me. You've come to help me out of the house... This is my house. I've lived here for many years and I'm going to stay here. Just leave me alone."

Owner: "Why don't you believe I have come to help you?"

Renter: "Because all you are interested in is your house. You don't even know me, so why would you have any interest in me?"

Owner: "I am your relative!"

Renter: "You've got to be

kidding! I'm sure you just want to come in here and kick me out."

Owner: "I want to help you. I bought the house so you can remain in the house."

Renter: "Are you serious?"

Owner: "Of course I'm serious! I would even like to fix up the house, doing the necessary repairs and even adding some features. If you are interested, I would even move in with you to help you regain your health."

Renter: "How can I trust that you are telling me the truth?"

Owner: "Simple. I haven't kicked you out. You know I could have received a court order and come with the police and had you evicted. The fact that you are still here is evidence that I am here to help you."

Renter: "I guess you're right. But I still don't want you to come in."

Owner: "Why?"

Renter: "Because the house is such a mess. I'm embarrassed to have you see it this way."

Owner: "I realize that. I also know that you are too weak to do anything about it now. It will simply get worse and worse. If you give me permission, I will work to not only clean the house, but also to help restore you to health."

Renter: "I'm still not sure I want you to come in though."

Owner: "Why?"

Renter: "Because you will probably start throwing things away that I want to keep."

Owner: "I would only throw things away that are unhealthy and that are hurting you in some way. Why would you want to hold onto things that make you sick?"

Renter: "I've become so used to the way I've been living that I'm comfortable with how I live."

Owner: "You're comfortable with all of your pain?"

Renter: "No. But there's no use talking about it. I'm helpless to do anything about it. I just have to get used to it."

Owner: "I know you're helpless to do anything. That is why I am here. If you give me permission, your life will be transformed. You will experience love, joy and peace like you never imagined."

Renter: That sounds too good to be true. I can hardly believe it....

Owner: But it is true!

Renter: You have been very loving and patient with me. I guess I can let you in.

Owner: Thank you.

Renter: What if I change my mind later?

Owner: You are always free to change your mind. I will never force myself on you. I love you. I will take good care of you forever!