

The Little Baptist

By J.M. Martin

"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 3:15

Chapter 15

Sunday - The Sermon - The Baptism

Sunday was a beautiful day; the sun shone with all its brightness; the sky overhead was serene and blue, and the green leaves, nestling in the breeze, made the day surprisingly delightful.

Col. Brown, with his entire family, were early at the church; and, at the appointed time, the pastor entered the stand, introducing the service by the usual preliminaries, and announcing as a text, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the Tree of Life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." *Rev. 22:4*. He stated that the subject to be discussed, was: THE CHRISTIAN'S RIGHT TO THE TREE OF LIFE. "Man," said he, "was lost in the Garden of Eden, as a consequence of his disobedience to the command of his Maker. He was driven from the garden, and a flaming sword, which turned every way, was placed to guard the way against man's approach to the Tree of Life. This was doubtless an evergreen tree, pointed out to man as an emblem of eternal life. The flaming sword in the hands of Justice, was an emblem of the wrath of God, because of man's transgression. God's law had been violated, His sovereign authority spurned; and Justice demanded satisfaction before man should again approach the Tree of Life and live forever. The decree of God had gone forth: 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.' 'The dust shalt return unto the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it.' Man must yield to the immutable decree and give up this mortal life and unassisted by Mercy his spirit must return to God, only to be banished from His presence. But 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Christ fulfilled the law by a life of strict obedience to all of its moral requirements; offered Himself a sacrifice for man's transgression, and gave His own life as the price for man's redemption. Christ honored the law, and died in man's stead, that God might remain just, and man be saved. Possessing both a human and divine nature qualified Him for mediation between God and man. He suffered on the cross until Justice was satisfied, then, crying out, 'It is finished,' Justice and Mercy met together, and Righteousness and Peace kissed each other, before the altar of His sufferings. He died for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. He has become the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him, and the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

"Yet, although Christ offered a meritorious sacrifice, and Justice demands no more, the flaming sword is not removed. It yet guards the way to the Tree of Life (through the law) as before. The law yet claims its penalties of all transgressors; it must have a perfect obedience, else none can gain access by its authority; but Christ, rendering this

obedience and becoming the end of the law, has opened up through the gospel a new and living way. Christ said, 'I am the way;' and when the old prophet, Isaiah, had a vision of this way it appeared to him so plain, that he said 'the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.' Yes, this way is plain. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.' Faith leads to love and obedience. 'Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.' This way is said to be narrow, yet it is plain and clear of obstructions. It is so easy of access that whosoever is willing to walk therein may readily find it. But it must be entered through the strait gate of selfdenial. This is only difficult because just on the other hand, the broad road, that leads to destruction, is entered by the wide gate of self-indulgence.

"Would you walk in this new way that has been opened to the Tree of Life, and escape the edge of the flaming sword? Then enter in with humility and prayer; enter it with repentance and faith, and such faith as produces love and willing obedience to all the commands of Christ. When He came out of the baptismal waters of the Jordan, the Holy Spirit, in the likeness of a dove, came down to attest that He is the Son of God, and after His conference with Moses and Elias on the Mount of Transfiguration had ended, a voice from the cloud was heard saying: 'This is my beloved Son; hear ye Him.' Those who hear and obey the Son of God, shall have a right to the Tree of Life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. The Christian will enter Heaven by a right derived from Jesus Christ. His followers have a title to Heaven that is sealed with the blood of the everlasting covenant; and as an earnest of their inheritance, they have the Holy Spirit to bear witness that their rights are secure."

The sermon of which this is but a brief outline, was closed with a glowing description of the holy city, the new Jerusalem, which the lovers of Jesus shall one day enjoy. The effect on the congregation was almost magical. All were electrified by the eloquence of the speaker; and the subject had taken hold on the minds of very many present. There was many a "weeping Mary," and "trembling jailer," ready to inquire, "What must I do to be saved?" and not a few of the old hardened sinners were made to feel their need of salvation, and with Agrippa of old, to say, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." The full results of the Sermon will be known only in eternity.

The pastor then requested all who desired to witness the administration of baptism, to repair to the ford of the little river, but a short walk from the church. "This," said he, "might have been as well attended to here at the church. We have a baptistry that affords water sufficient for the purpose but the young lady to be baptized prefers going to the river, as it more resembles the earliest customs of the disciples. It is some more trouble, to be sure; but a little inconvenience should never be weighed in the scale against duty. I am, myself, partial to baptizing in a river, or a place of much water, because it seems fully to follow in the footsteps of my Master, who, in my imagination, I can see going down the banks of river Jordan, where His forerunner, John the Baptist, laid Him beneath the yielding wave, and raised Him up again, thereby prefiguring His death and resurrection." Arriving at the water, the pastor took an eligible position, and announced that the church was present and ready to hear the profession of faith of any other person who might feel disposed to confess Christ before the world, by being baptized in His name, and after His example. That it was the duty of all Christians to obey the commands of Christ, and that baptism is the first duty enjoined after believing

and realizing pardon.

Mrs. Brown went forward; told something of her experience from the time of her conviction of sin, until she found peace by trusting in Christ. She referred to the trials she had encountered on her Christian journey, and especially of her change of views relative to baptism, which had led her to pursue the course that she was then taking. What she had received for baptism had failed to bring the answer of a good conscience toward God, and she wished to be baptized after the example given by Christ.

All knew her to be an exemplary Christian, and the church was unanimous in her reception.

Mr. Coleman was not a controversialist; whatever he believed he preached as *truth*, and not a debatable question. He would give his own views in plain terms, but seldom alluded to the views of others, or even intimated that others differed from him. His motto was, "Preach the truth, and error will give way before it."

"Here are two sisters," said he, "who have come forward to receive baptism at the hands of this church. This is the way that a public profession of discipleship of Christ is made. They are here to submit to the initiatory rite of a Christian church - to take the oath of allegiance to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Baptism does not originate the obligation to serve Christ, but it is a public acknowledgement of it. It must be a voluntary, personal act, else it fails to be obedience. It does not actually wash away sin, but it is emblematical of it. It is a symbolical illustration of death and the resurrection. The body is buried beneath the waves, emblematical of dying and going from sight; it is raised again, typifying the resurrection from the dead. As a declarative action, baptism signifies a death to sin and a resurrection to new life; it also declares the believer's faith in a once dead, but risen Saviour. It declares our faith, that though our bodies must die and be buried or hid from sight, they shall yet, by the power of God, come forth again in the Saviour's likeness. Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament; it belongs exclusively to the Christian Gospel dispensation. The authority for it is Christ Himself. The obligation to perform it is just as binding on believers as any other command of the Gospel. Would we be faithful to our Master, we must neglect none of His commandments. Here are two persons that have had water poured or sprinkled on them, but this has failed to satisfy their consciences, because that was not the action that Christ commanded nor the example that He gave. They now propose to be buried with Him by baptism. After this, they will doubt no more that they have been Scripturally baptized. None doubt this; all denominations of Christians accept immersion as Scriptural baptism. Then, is it not best to accept that which no one doubts, instead of that which so many dispute, and with which so many become dissatisfied? Were I to offer any of you choice of two bills of money, telling you at the same time that everybody endorsed one as a genuine bill but that there was a dispute about the other - that by many it was suspected of being a counterfeit, which would you take, the one doubted, or the one that was good beyond question? Sprinkling and pouring are by many doubted, and with them, many become dissatisfied; but that immersion is genuine baptism, is undisputed and *indisputable*. It is Scriptural; it satisfies the conscience; and illustrates the most important doctrines of the gospel."

After singing a hymn and offering a prayer to the Throne of Grace for guidance to the persons about to profess the Saviour before the world by an ordinance of Christ's appointment, the pastor led the ladies down into the limpid stream, and in the presence of a large assembly of spectators, the mother and daughter were laid beneath the yielding wave - illustrating a death to sin; and raised again - illustrating the rising to a new life.

Coming up out of the water, Mrs. Brown remarked: "Now I have a conscience void of offense toward God, that I could not have while living in disobedience to His command."

She exhorted others to go and do likewise.

Mellie's face wore a smile of surpassing sweetness. Calm and deliberate in her manner, she repeated the language of the text, "Blessed are they that do His commandments." Then she said: "Thank God for the Bible; it has taught me how to love the Saviour, and how to obey Him."

Col. Brown and Frank were deeply affected by the services of the day; and hopes were inspired that soon there might be another baptized household after the apostolic pattern.

A few days afterward, Col. Brown told his wife that Mr. Coleman's sermon had knocked the scales from his eyes in reference to the importance of trusting in Christ for salvation; that he had never before understood why he could not be saved by simply being a moral, honest and upright man. He had never thought of the fact that the flaming sword had not been taken down, but still turned every way to guard the Tree of Life. This view of the subject alarmed him, and he saw that the only way to be saved was by trusting in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Like thousands of others, Col. Brown had never realized the distinction between the law and the gospel, but when he saw the necessity of a perfect obedience to the law, in order to escape the sword of Justice, he was enabled to comprehend the advantages offered to man in the gospel, by securing an entrance through the new and living way that Christ has opened for the salvation of His followers.

Reader, you cannot be saved by a law-righteousness, because the sword still guards the way to the Tree of Life - it has never been taken down. If you are unconverted, get into that strait and narrow way that Christ has prepared. Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many will seek (otherwise) to enter, and shall not be able. All who obtain a passport from Christ, will have an undisputed right to enter in through the gates into the Holy City, and to pluck the golden fruits from the Tree of Life, and live forever. Think not of a law-righteousness, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight... For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

"The law condemns, and makes us know
What duties to our God we owe;
But 'tis the gospel must reveal
Where lies our strength to do His will."