

Eye Witnessed Baptism? or Saying “I Do” to Your Friend!

I graduated from college early in August-I got married on August 25 of the same year. Two weeks later my wife and I moved to Salt Lake City where I took up my duties as the new Youth Pastor. My wedding signaled an important change for me-in the space of an hour, my wife and I had gone from needing to be chaperoned to being qualified to chaperon others!!.

As I look back on my life as a teenager, and especially my dating relationships, I’m glad to be finished with that phase of my life. Sure, some of it was exciting-but mostly I was uncomfortable and insecure.

Since my wedding (actually since I met and fell in love with the person who is now my wife) I have found much greater fulfillment and security. Why? Because now I share my life with someone who loves me and helps look out for me-I’m not on my own any longer!

Through the years (I have now been married for 22 years) I have noticed several things about marriage-some of them are listed below.

The ingredients for a good marriage are the same as for a good courtship-communication, trust, time spent together, love, etc.

Most good marriages follow a good courtship-a time when two people spend a lot of time developing a friendship.

The wedding ceremony does not change how people feel about each other-if love, trust, and communication is not there before the marriage the ceremony will not create it.

While it is true that the wedding ceremony does not change one’s heart, it sure does change one’s status in society.

A wedding ceremony is a public statement of two people’s commitment to love and support each other-most people choose to have a wedding rather than to elope because they want their friends to know!

There is nothing magical about a signed and sealed marriage license. It

is just an official acknowledgment of the relationship and commitment.

One purpose of marriage is to provide two people long lasting *companionship* and *security*-how many happily married couples would want to go back to the insecurity and trauma of their dating days?!?

Another purpose of marriage is to “preserve the human race”-in other words, have kids. Marriage is not intended to be just two people selfishly looking out for themselves, but two people joined together with God working for the good of others!

In the beginning, God set up marriage as a permanent, eternal arrangement-it was modified to “till death do us part” because of sin.

While marriage is intended to be permanent, it is possible to get a divorce and bring the relationship to an end-this event always brings damage and hurt.

“So,” I hear you saying, “I thought this was supposed to be a study of baptism, not marriage-what’s your point?”

Jesus often used the things we are familiar with to help us understand our spiritual life-our life with Him. He used marriage many times as an illustration of the special, intimate relationship He wants to have with us, His people. Baptism is to Christian life what the wedding ceremony is to a marriage.

As you go through this study, you may wish to look back at the points made about marriage and the wedding ceremony and reflect on what they mean to your life and friendship with Jesus.

“Are you ignorant of the fact that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried

Eye Witnessed

therefore with Him by the baptism unto death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious [power] of the Father, so we too might [habitually] live and behave in newness of life. For if we have become one with Him by sharing a death like His, we shall also be [one with Him in sharing] His resurrection [by a new life lived for God]" Romans 6:3-5 (The Amplified Bible) "He who believes [who adheres to and trusts in and relies on the Gospel and Him Whom it sets forth] and is baptized will be saved [from the penalty of eternal death]; but he who does not believe [who does not adhere to and trust in and rely on the Gospel and Him Whom it sets forth] will be condemned." Mark 16:16 (the Amplified Bible)

A woman, talking to a pastor about spiritual things, made the following comment: "Don't talk to me about baptism! I have been baptized three times, and not one of them took." Just like a wedding, baptism will not "take" unless a meaningful relationship has preceded the ceremony.

1. What preparation for baptism can you find in Matthew 28:19-20?

Notice that spiritual understanding (In the KJV, Jesus said "teach;" in the NIV He says, "make disciples") is to precede baptism. In other words, you need to become acquainted with Jesus. This happens as you spend time with Him each day.

2. What preparation for baptism can you find in Mark 16:16? In addition to your own study Bible, check out the Amplified Bible (printed at the bottom of the introduction page).

The Amplified Bible expands "believe" to "trusting in and depending on" Jesus. The way you grow to trust someone who is completely trustworthy is to get to know him. As you spend time getting to know Jesus, you will trust Him more!

By they way, please notice that the text does NOT say, "He who does not believe AND IS NOT BAPTIZED will be condemned." Eternal life is not based upon baptism! It is the result of having a personal relationship with Jesus. Baptism, like a wedding, is a public declaration of that relationship.

3. What additional preparation for baptism is mentioned in the following texts?

Mark 1:4

Acts 2:38

4. Where does repentance come from?

Acts 5:31

Romans 2:4

2 Corinthians 7:9

Repentance is not something we do—it is something Jesus gives us as we remain focused on Him! When we see His love for us, when we realize the contrast between what we are like and what Jesus is like, and when we understand that our failures break the heart of Jesus, not only will we be sorry, we will want to quit sinning. That is repentance!

5. What symbolism does Paul give to baptism in Romans 6:4-6?

What a beautiful picture of Jesus becoming real in our lives. Baptism is like being buried with Jesus in death (death to our old way of living) and being raised up, or resurrected to a new life in Jesus!

6. According to the New Testament, how is baptism accomplished?

Matthew 3:16

Matthew 28:19

John 1:26

Acts 8:38-39

Eye Witnessed

If you consult a Bible Dictionary you will discover the word “baptize” comes from the Greek word “baptizo”, which means to “immerse, dip, or submerge.” This is important because it provides a physical demonstration of the symbolism Paul used in Romans 6 (see question 5).

7. To those who knew Jesus, baptism was important because it told the world that they belonged to Him. Note some of those who also participated in this ceremony.

John 3:22

John 4:1-2

Acts 2:38

Acts 8:12

Acts 19:4-5

8. What happens when, by baptism, you take a stand for Jesus?

John 1:31

Galatians 3:27

Matthew 10:32

Baptism is a way of saying publicly that you commit yourself to an eternal friendship with Jesus, that you accept His offer of forgiveness, cleansing and new life. It is a formal pledge to spend time becoming better friends with Him each day. In a way, it is like voting a huge YES! for Jesus, realizing that He is voting a huge YES! for you.

***H**ave you ever watched two young people in love? They often can't seem to spend enough time together. They are always thinking of each other, thinking of ways to show their love to each other—we call that romance. Have you noticed that sometimes these same two people, after they have gotten married, begin to take each other for granted? At all stages of love and marriage communication is essential—more so as a couple matures and face greater challenges in life (raising children, juggling jobs, etc.). The same is true in our friendship with Jesus. Our need to spend time with Him, getting to know Him, learning to trust Him, grows instead of lessens as we go along.*

Begin each session with prayer - *maybe something like this: “Lord, help me to come to know you better as we spend time together...”*

Read the passage - *several times noticing as many details as you can.*

Imagine the setting - *put yourself in the picture. Try to imagine the sounds, smells, sensations.*

Summarize the passage - *in your own words.*

Apply the passage - *what message is God giving you?*

Meditate and pray - *meditate on how this passage makes Jesus more real. Talk to Him about the passage and about using the information you have learned to deepen your friendship with Him. Listen for impressions He is giving you.*

Passages for This Week

1 John 4:1-6

1 John 4:7-12

1 John 4:13-18

Eye Witnessed

1 John 4:19-21

1 John 5:1-5

1 John 5:6-13

1 John 5:14-21

Standing in the Jordan river, I watched the azure dome crack and glory come streaming through. At first I was so blinded I turned away, but a voice bade me look again, and as I did I felt a strange burning sensation, as though a cover or lens had fallen from my eyes. In that same instant I was aware that distance no longer affected the clarity of my vision.

I looked through a corridor in the heavens, that appeared to be lined on either side by planets, stars, and galaxies. Light flowed like a river down the passageway. Light so pure, so complete, that it seemed to have substance and form. It was clear and yet opaque—radiant, shining, rising, falling, expanding, moving like vapor on a winter's morn.

As I looked further along this luminescent pathway through the stars, I saw with wonder, the Source from whence it flowed. Strangely, the farther I gazed, the clearer I saw. There, in brilliant detail, at the end of the corridor (or was it the beginning?) was a city.

Its walls were made of light—luminous as burnished gold in the sun. Its foundations were 12 colors of the rainbow, so rich, so pure, so brilliant, that I wondered whether they might be the source or fountainhead of color. But my eyes were drawn upward, above this city of light and color, and there, blazing in glory beyond description, was a throne.

He who sat upon it shone with the unborrowed magnificence of ten thousand suns. The glory that came from Him was divided into colors as a prism separates light; but unlike a prism's colors, these were not refracted. They began with Him. Colors, as smoke, mingled and blended about the throne. Letters of fire were engraved upon it, blazing the words: HOLINESS, JUSTICE, TRUTH, LOVE, PURITY, ALPHA, OMEGA.

And the river of light, streaming down the corridor, burst into music as the voice of many waters, singing, "Glory, Glory, Glory." And I saw and knew that the river, and the stars, and the universe, and the earth, and all things bright or beautiful had their source in Him! I dropped to my knees and worshipped.

Then, from amongst the light about the throne, I saw the form of a Dove take shape. Its wings were like the city—luminous as burnished gold. Its eyes were flames so pure, so bright, that the path of light dimmed before their brilliance. It circled the throne three times, and then with a rushing of wings and a scattering of light, it flew swiftly towards me. The music of the river struck a note higher as the Dove's wings fanned the air above it.

As it drew closer, another thing happened. Light began shining from the face of the Man before me. Like the glory round the throne, that which shone from Him was not reflected. He was the source. And the light streaming from His eyes was by far more brilliant than the sun. While He stood, gazing upward, the Dove lit in dazzling splendor upon His head.

And a voice was heard, like the sound of many waters. The heavens trembled and the earth shook. The sound seemed to come from everywhere yet nowhere. It echoed and rumbled across creation, and the words spoken were these: "*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!*"

Then suddenly, as though heaven and earth had inhaled ... all was still. In the same instant it was dark. I thought my eyes had failed me, but as I grew accustomed to the darkness, I saw dim shapes of people here and there.

I looked up once again and saw, flickering dimly like a candle in a cavern, the sun. I wondered how it had grown so feeble, and I realized then that it had not been changed except by the glory my eyes had seen.

I turned my gaze earthward, searching for the One I had just baptized. He was kneeling upon the riverbank, where a subdued but holy

Eye Witnessed

light still shone about Him.

I looked around at the people gathered about and read the expressions on their faces. Only a few seemed entranced, but all were gazing at Him, though many seemed full of idle curiosity. Others appeared puzzled or looked confused. All were silent—wondering.

But I saw, and now bare record, that this was the Son of God!

It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Mark 1:9-10 (NKJV).

Matthew 28:19-20 “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.” Amen.”

Mark 16:16 “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

Mark 1:4* “And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

Acts 2:38* “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Acts 5:31 “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”

Romans 2:4* “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?”

2 Corinthians 7:9* “yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.”

Romans 6:4-6* “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin”

Matthew 3:16 “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.”

Matthew 28:19 “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,”

John 1:26 “John answered them, saying, “I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know.””

Acts 8:38-39 “So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”

John 3:22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.”

John 4:1-2* “Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples),”

Acts 2:38* “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Acts 8:12 “But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.”

Acts 19:4-5 “Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

John 1:31* “I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Galatians 3:27* “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Matthew 10:32* “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.”

(Unless otherwise mentioned, all quoted scripture is from the New King James Version)

** New International Version*