

a sermon from ACTS 2:36-38:

ON THE THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

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I. AN OPENING PRAYER

On the joyous occasion of the Baptism of this infant of these faithful Christian parents, let us pray: “Almighty and everliving GOD, look mercifully upon us, and bless what we do in Thy Name. Grant that this child, now to be baptized, may by the power of The HOLY SPIRIT grow into The Likeness of His Saviour [,Thy dear Son]. Bring him to the years of discretion and lead him then to confirm The Covenant we make for him today [on his behalf]. Keep him faithful unto death...” all the days of his life.¹ Admit him then, O LORD, into Thy Church Triumphant in Heaven, even as he now enters into The Church Militant on earth. These things we pray in The Name of GOD The Father, Son and Holy Ghost. AMEN.

II. A PROPOSITION

Let us consider briefly together why we so rejoice at this child receiving The Sacrament of Baptism under the care of The faithful Church: First, that we have all crucified our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. Second, GOD desires that we be convicted of and repent of our sins. Third, that we be baptized in His Name and our sin forgiven, that we may receive The HOLY SPIRIT.

III. A SCRIPTURE – ACTS 2:36-38 – REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED!

³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that GOD hath made That same JESUS, Whom ye have crucified, both Lord and CHRIST.

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

³⁸ Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in The Name of JESUS CHRIST for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of The HOLY GHOST.²

¹ 1, Hymnal of The Moravian Church, p 109, paragraph 2. “The Baptism of Children.”

² 2, KJV, ACTS 2:36-38.

IV. INTRODUCTION – WHY WE GATHER TO BAPTIZE OUR CHILDREN

The LORD declares to parents in PROVERBS 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”³ That Way of covenantal salvation and righteousness began in ancient Israel with The Commandment for circumcision, of which Moses records The Word of The Almighty to His Old Testament people in GENESIS 17:11-12, “And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of The Covenant betwixt Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations...”⁴ There, that child was entered into Israel under The Divine Law, “...appointed by GOD [The Father] as token of His Covenant with Abraham and his seed...”⁵ And they rejoiced!

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”⁶ That Way of covenantal salvation and righteous now begins in The Church with The Commandment for Baptism, of which our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST – The Word of GOD Incarnate - declares as The Almighty made Flesh to us His New Testament people in JOHN 3:5, “...Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of The Spirit, he cannot enter into The kingdom of GOD.”⁷ But here, this child is entered into The Church under The Divine Grace, appointed by GOD The Son as both an outward “seal of initiatory incorporation with Him” with water and inward “cleansing” of our souls with The HOLY SPIRIT.⁸ And we rejoice!

V. THAT WE HAVE ALL CRUCIFIED OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS

First, that we have all crucified our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. Saint Peter declares to his fellow countrymen in ACTS 2:36, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that GOD hath made That same JESUS, Whom ye have crucified, both Lord and CHRIST.”⁹ Recall the occasion of why Peter now speaks to the men of

³ 2, KJV, PROVERBS 22:6.

⁴ 2, KJV, GENESIS 17:11-12.

⁵ 3, Fausset’s Bible Dictionary, entry “circumcision,” 834.01.

⁶ 2, KJV, PROVERBS 22:6.

⁷ 2, KJV, JOHN 3:5.

⁸ 3, Fausset’s Bible Dictionary, entry “baptism,” 482.05.

⁹ 2, KJV, ACTS 2:36.

Israel that day – Pentecost, a day of outpouring of The HOLY SPIRIT, which astounded and terrified the many devout people of GOD gathered that day. For the finger of The King of the universe was stirring in them the realization that, as Justin Martyr writes, “The Father of the universe has a Son. And He, being The First-Begotten Word of GOD, is even GOD.”¹⁰ “For CHRIST is King, Priest, GOD, Lord... and Man” Who has died in our place for us!¹¹

Saint Luke records in the beginning of ACTS 2, “...And suddenly there came a sound from Heaven as of a rushing mighty wind... And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with The Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as The Spirit gave them utterance!”¹² The astounding result was, that the many GOD-fearers and Jews gathered to Jerusalem at that time heard The Gospel miraculously preached to them in their various own tongues by these Apostles of CHRIST.¹³ This was so humanly impossible an event that the listeners and observers that day were shocked to find the only conclusion was that they were standing in The Presence of The Spirit of The living GOD being poured out upon His people!

And as they were being convicted in their hearts of their sin before The LORD, Peter stands up and declares to them, “The Almighty has sent His Anointed One, The promised Messiah Whom we have cried out for centuries. And what did we do when The Divine King came to bring The Kingdom of our Fathers to us and to all mankind? We caused His Blood to be spilled out upon our own heads on The Cross! Look upon The One Whom we have crucified and let us pour dust and ashes upon our heads in lament before The Almighty! My GOD, my GOD, what have we done?”

¹⁰ 4, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, “CHRIST, Divinity of,” p 94, 5th entry. “Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.184.”

¹¹ 4, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, “CHRIST, Divinity of,” p 94, 7th entry. “Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.211.”

¹² 2, KJV, ACTS 2:2-4.

¹³ 2, KJV, ACTS 2:5-6.

But as Matthew Henry says here, the risen, ascended and enthroned JESUS CHRIST is He Whom GOD has glorified! And these GOD-fearing sons of The Covenant trembled at the thought! "...This aggravates... [the] wickedness [of the wicked]... [This] magnifies the wisdom and power of GOD... [This glorifies JESUS] to such a degree as to make Him both Lord and CHRIST...; He is [The Divine] Lord [Incarnate] of all... He is one Lord to the Gentiles, who had had lords many; and to the Jews He is [The King] Messiah... This is the great truth of The Gospel..., that That same JESUS... that was crucified at Jerusalem, is He to Whom we owe allegiance, and from Whom we are to expect protection..."¹⁴ from sin, death and damnation that would steal us from GOD's Love – Lord JESUS, save us!

Now we may hear these men, crying out in their souls, as should all men in all ages before The judgement seat of GOD, as did David in PSALM 51:1-3, "...Have mercy upon me, O GOD, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me!"¹⁵ Before The Law of GOD recorded by Moses, we are all convicted as sinners, as Saint James declares, "For whosoever shall keep The whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all!"¹⁶ As Saint Paul says, "For all have sinned, and come short of The Glory of GOD!"¹⁷ Woe then, to the sinner who is lost in his sin, as The Almighty warns us by His prophet Ezekiel, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die..."¹⁸ O my friends, let us flee to The Cross of JESUS our Lord and CHRIST!

VI. THAT WE BE CONVICTED OF AND REPENT OF OUR SINS

Second, GOD desires that we be convicted of and repent of our sins. Saint Peter's fellow Jews reply urgently to him in ACTS 2:37, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and

¹⁴ 5, Matthew Henry Notes, ACTS 2;14-36, verse 36.

¹⁵ 2, KJV, PSALM 51:1-3.

¹⁶ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:10.

¹⁷ 2, KJV, ROMANS 3:23.

¹⁸ 2, KJV, EZEKIEL 18:20.

brethren, what shall we do?”¹⁹ As Wycliffe observes here, “Peter’s hearers were both convinced and convicted. They were cut to the heart by the realization that they had put to death GOD’s Messiah, and they therefore asked what they might do to be delivered from this awful guilt!”²⁰ And we do also stand there with those men of Israel on that day, asking the same question, “What then shall we do to be saved?”

And well that we should also cry out, “Lord, save us, we pray!”²¹ For His Blood is upon, not only their heads, but upon ours – and all mankind – as well! So we too cry out, as did these men of Israel, with David in PSALM 118:25, “Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee...!”²² Recall what the people cried as JESUS entered the earthly Jerusalem as in MARK 11:9-10, “...Hosanna; Blessed is He that cometh in The Name of The Lord: Blessed be The Kingdom of our father David, that cometh in The Name of The Lord: Hosanna in the highest!”²³ And yet GOD’s people crucified The Holy One of Israel Incarnate, The Saving King. And not only they, but we also!

The LORD calls us through His prophet in ISAIAH 1:16-18, “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith The LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”²⁴ So Justin Martyr says of our hope in JESUS CHRIST and in Him alone, “But there is no other [Way] that this: to become acquainted with [and one with] This CHRIST, to be washed in the fountain spoken of by Isaiah for the remission of sins...”

¹⁹ 2, KJV, ACTS 2:37.

²⁰ 6, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, ACTS 2:37, p 1128.

²¹ 3, Fausset’s Bible Dictionary, entry “Hosanna,” 1670.01.

²² 2, KJV, PSALM 118:25.

²³ 2, KJV, MARK 11:9-10.

²⁴ 2, KJV, ISAIAH 1:16-18.

that our sin-guilt be washed away by The innocent Blood of JESUS in atonement for our sins!²⁵

But if we walk in The Way which we should go before GOD, and teach This Way to our children, we need not fear, for He shall be with us to redeem and wash us clean! For salvation is to those who seek the face of The LORD, who submit to His Law, who cry out in lament before His holy Presence for the sake of their sins, who believe in their heart, confess with their mouth, “Hosanna – Lord, save us, we pray!”²⁶ So our comfort is at The Cross of CHRIST, as Saint Paul declares in ROMANS 10:9-10, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth The Lord JESUS, and shalt believe in thine heart that GOD hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation!”²⁷

VII. THAT WE BE BAPTIZED IN HIS NAME AND OUR SIN FORGIVEN

Third, that we be baptized in His Name and our sins forgiven, that we may receive The HOLY SPIRIT. So we read The Word of GOD in ACTS 2:38, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in The Name of JESUS CHRIST for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of The HOLY GHOST.”²⁸ Peter and the other Apostles here obey what The risen CHRIST Himself commands His Church to do in The Great Commission as in MATTHEW 28:18-20, “...All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in The Name of The Father, and of The Son, and of The Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway[s], even unto the end of the world. Amen!”²⁹

²⁵ 4, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, entry “Salvation,” p 574, 5th entry. “Justin Martyr, (c. 160, E), 1.217.”

²⁶ 3, Fausset’s Bible Dictionary, entry “Hosanna,” 1670.01.

²⁷ 2, KJV, ROMANS 10:9-10.

²⁸ 2, KJV, ACTS 2:38.

²⁹ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 28:18-20.

And so, for the believing man or woman of faith at or above consenting age who comes in baptism to enter into The Church – The Kingdom of GOD here even now - or the believing parents of faith on behalf of their infant child who comes in baptism to enter into The Church, there is in This Sacrament the washing away of sin, the outward seal of the sign, the inward rebirth of being reborn again by The HOLY SPIRIT and the formal joining to The very Body of CHRIST. It is not the end of the Christian life, but the beginning!

So The Catechism of The Catholic Church tells us, “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in The Spirit..., and the door which gives access to The other Sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons [and daughters] of GOD; we become members of CHRIST, are incorporated into The Church and made sharers in her mission: [For] Baptism is The Sacrament of regeneration through water [and Spirit] in The Word” of GOD, JESUS CHRIST our Lord.³⁰

And when we do sin again, for no Christian man or woman is perfected until The Lord calls us home to his Kingdom Eternal Above, He is always there and ready to forgive us our sins when we confess and repent of them under the loving care of His faithful Church! As Saint John declares in I JOHN 1:8-9, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [But] If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”³¹ And further in I JOHN 2:1-2, “...if any man sin, we have An Advocate with The Father, JESUS CHRIST The Righteous: And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”³²

GOD The Son offered up for us at The Cross is The perfect sacrificial payment for our sins “that makes reconciliation for” us with GOD The Father. He is The atoning fulfillment of our sin-debt, of which we are convicted of under The Law of GOD,

³⁰ 7, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 1213, p 342. “The Sacrament of Baptism.”

³¹ 2, KJV, I JOHN 1:8-9.

³² 2, KJV, I JOHN 2:1-2.

“...provided by The Father's love, removing the estrangement” between us and
”appeasing GOD's righteous wrath against the sinner.”³³ And because of this Greatest
Gift of Grace to us, The Spirit of The living GOD now enters us His people to remake
and remold us into His Likeness, as He has made us in His Inage.

For as Justin Martyr says of The Sacrament of Baptism, “This washing of
repentance and knowledge of GOD has been ordained on account of the transgression of
GOD's people... Accordingly, we have believed and testify that the very baptism
which... [Isaiah] announced is alone able to purify those who have repented. And this is
The Water of Life... For what is the use of that baptism which cleanses only the flesh
and body [but not the spirit of man]? Baptize the soul from wrath [in rebirth by The
Spirit of GOD] and from covetousness, from envy and from hatred” from within!³⁴ Then
the outside of the cup of men's lives shall be clean also. Such are The Gifts of CHRIST
which we take such joy in today and always!

VIII. IN CONCLUSION

We have considered ACTS 2:36-38 as our baptismal Text, “Therefore let all the
house of Israel know assuredly, that GOD hath made That same JESUS, Whom ye have
crucified, both Lord and CHRIST. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their
heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we
do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in The Name
of JESUS CHRIST for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of The HOLY
GHOST.”³⁵

So we have seen: First, that we have all crucified our Lord and Saviour JESUS
CHRIST. Second, GOD desires that we be convicted of and repent of our sins. Third,
that we be baptized in His Name and our sin forgiven, that we may receive The HOLY
SPIRIT. Let us then resolve each day to walk The Way of The Cross together as The

³³ 3, Fausset's Bible Dictionary, entry “propitiation,” 2892.01.

³⁴ 4, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, “Baptism.” P 51, 6th entry. “Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.201.”

³⁵ 2, KJV, ACTS 2:36-38.

Church with our blessed Redeemer, raising up this child in The Way he should go, that when he is older, he may not depart from it!

And so we rejoice at The Baptism of this blessed infant, having been marked by the outward sign of the inward working of This Sacrament, signed by water and sealed by The HOLY SPIRIT of The everlasting GOD our Creator. Recall that we began with PROVERBS 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”³⁶ This day of gladness marks - not the completion - but the beginning of a lifetime of The Way of salvation and righteousness for this child under the loving guidance of his Christian parents, The faithful Church and the very hand of The Almighty. In The Name of GOD The Father, Son and Holy Ghost. AMEN.

³⁶ 2, KJV, PROVERBS 22:6.

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