



Theophilus' Quest: Discovery Stage Six

Our fifth stage of discovery with Theo looked at the good news of forgiveness and new life that Jesus' death, burial and resurrection makes possible for all humanity. On this sixth stage of discovery, Theo will investigate how we should respond if we want to accept God's offer of forgiveness and new life in His Son.

The quest continues . . .

Turning and Returning ... what shall we do to accept God's gift of forgiveness?





Jesus' Great Commission

Jesus went about teaching, helping, and forgiving people of their sins – even down to his last moments on the cross (Luke 23:39-43)

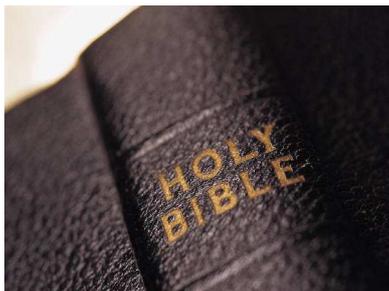
But following His death and resurrection it is now time for Him to set things in order as He prepares to return to His Father in Heaven. Matthew, Mark and Luke record Jesus' last instructions to His disciples as follows:

I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples (i.e. learners, followers of Jesus) of all the nations, baptising them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20)

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16)

With my authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to Me' (Luke 24:47)





Just following Jesus' orders ...

About ten days after Jesus gave His Great Commission, the disciples did as Jesus had instructed them – **please read Acts 2:22-42.**

Notice that the apostle Peter (one of Jesus' chosen and authorised messengers) **taught the gospel of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection** (verses 22-36)

Notice that many believed Peter's message and were sorrowful about their actions, and they asked Peter what they should do about it: **Peter's words convicted them deeply, and they said to him and the other apostles, 'What should we do?'** (verse 37)

Now notice Peter's answer to their question regarding how they should respond to the gospel: **Each one of you must turn from your sins and turn to God (i.e. repent) and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit ... Those who believed what Peter said were baptised and were added to the church ...** (verses 38-41)

Notice the apostles continued to teach those baptised believers so they could continue to grow (verse 42). This is Jesus' and His apostles' answer to the question: *"How do I receive God's gift of forgiveness?"*

Faith (i.e. trusting God's power and His promises), which is initially expressed through **Repentance** (changing one's mind, turning to God) and **Baptism** (immersion/burial in water to receive God's promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit), and then **continuing to live by faith** (keeping on trusting God and surrendering to Jesus)



Faith

A Christian's faith is not belief without evidence or belief that runs contrary to evidence – it is not 'pie in the sky' wishful thinking! Faith begins with accepting the testimony and evidence of God's word (Romans 10:17; Luke 8:1-21) and grows in proportion to our relationship with Christ as we follow Him and experience His faithfulness. Belief or faith in the biblical sense means much more than just mental assent. True faith encompasses the **assent** of the intellect, the **trust** of the emotions, and the **obedience** of the will (Hebrews 11:1-19)

At its heart, biblical faith means to trust. Anyone who truly believes or trusts God will surrender themselves to His care and to His directions (Matthew 6:19-33; 7:21-27; James 2:14-26) ... putting our lives in His hands and relying upon His power in the same way that we might be called upon to trust a surgeon's expertise and integrity when seriously ill and in need of a life-saving operation (when you think about it, 'faith' isn't just a *religious* concept – we live life on the basis of faith all the time – if we didn't, we would rarely be able to do anything at all!)

This story may help us to understand the character of biblical faith:

Blondin was a famous high-wire stunt performer. One of his most notorious stunts was to walk (sometimes blindfolded) across a wire stretched over Niagara Falls. When Blondin announced his plan to push a man in a wheelbarrow across the Falls, a newspaper reporter interviewed him about it. "Do you think I can do it?", Blondin asked the reporter. "I really believe you can", replied the reporter, "I think you're the greatest stunt artist of all time". Then Blondin responded to his admirer, "You really believe I can do it? Well then, get into the wheelbarrow!"

There is a big difference between simply believing in someone's ability and being willing to trust that person *with your life*. Jesus wants us to trust Him to the point of surrendering our lives to Him. Jesus wants our heart and will as well as our mind. **Jesus wants us to get into His wheelbarrow!** Anything less falls short of authentic biblical FAITH!



Repentance

Appreciating God's love expressed through the gospel and arriving at the point of being willing to trust and follow Jesus leads us naturally to a change of mind (repentance – 2 Corinthians 7:8-11) ... we see that we have been travelling in the wrong direction (the journey away from our Father) and have been using the wrong road map (our will over God's will) which has led us to become lost, bruised, beaten and broken (life in the prodigal pig-pen). **So we resolve to make a U-Turn in our journey!** In Jesus' story about the prodigal son, repentance is described as the son 'coming to his senses', and determining to get up and return to his Father (Luke 15:17-18)

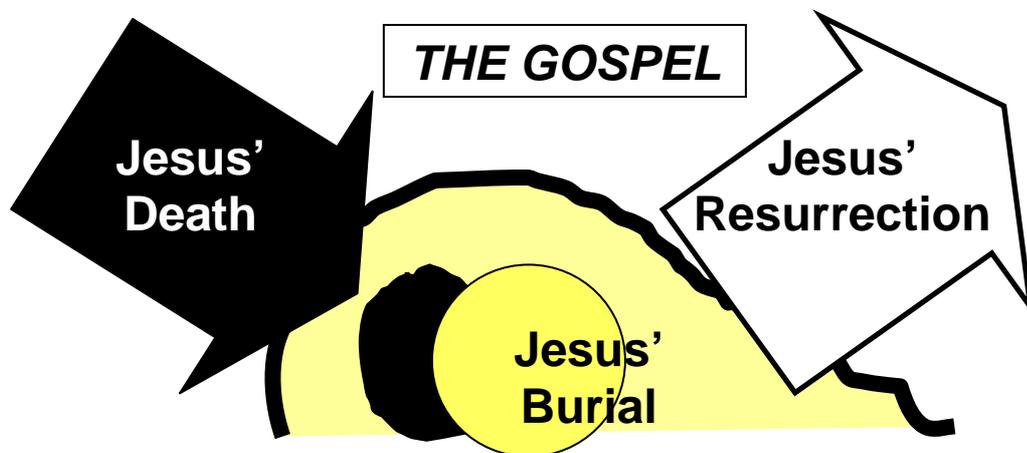


Baptism

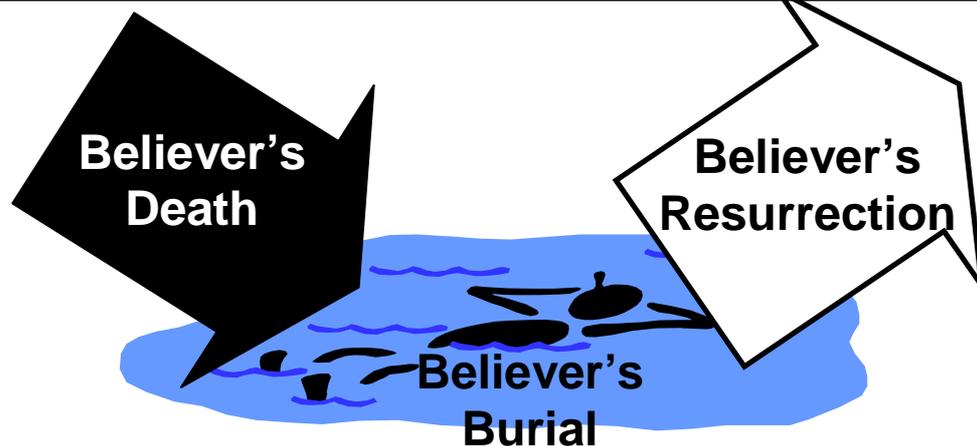
The repentant believer in Christ “obeys from the heart” the gospel (*the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus*) in water baptism (Romans 6:1-18; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10) – baptism is the divinely appointed way in which we appeal to God for a good conscience (1 Peter 3:20-21), thus “calling upon the name of the Lord” to be forgiven (Acts 22:16; Romans 10:13). It is at the time of our baptism that we are “born again” (John 3:5) because it is then that God forgives us of our sins and gives us His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32; Galatians 3:26-4:7). The repentant believer is baptised into Christ and into His death (Romans 6:3). And just as Jesus was raised from

death, so God raises the believer up from the 'watery grave' of baptism to a new life in Him (Romans 6:4). *In this way, faith (expressed initially in repentance and baptism) reproduces the gospel in the life of the believer whose life is now 'shaped' by the gospel as they continue to die to self and to live for God.*

Accompanied by repentance, baptism is a powerful re-enactment of the gospel; anchoring the body, heart and mind of each believer at the time of their reconciliation with God to that which is saving him or her (the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus) as they humbly surrender in faith to the promise, will and power of God (Colossians 2:11-13; cf. 2 Kings 5:1-14 and understand that it is God who is 'working' here, not the obedient believer or 'magic water'!)



OBEYING THE GOSPEL FROM THE HEART Romans 6:17-18



The response to His gospel that God requires from us is simple but profound. We are reconciled to God and receive His Holy Spirit through faith when we repent and are baptised into Christ: ***We are saved by the gospel when we conform to and obey the gospel – dying to our 'old (false) self' and being raised with Jesus to discover our 'new (true) self' as God's Beloved child.***

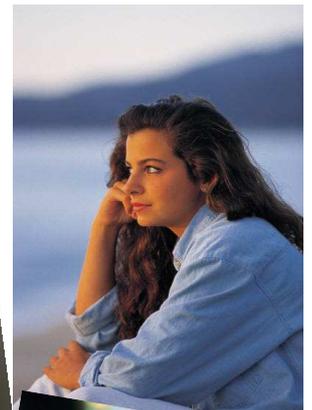
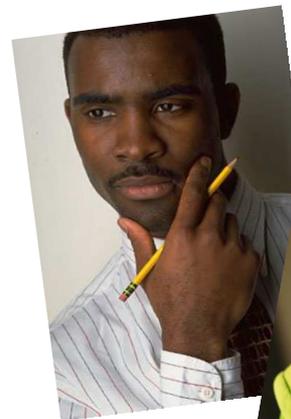


Authentic Christian discipleship is not for wimps!

Living by faith . . . beginning with repentance and baptism, the new born child of God embarks upon a new life in Christ, coming out of darkness to live in God's light – expect to stumble a bit as we adjust to the light! Baptism is not an end in itself . . . it is just the first step in the process of turning around (repentance) to begin walking by faith in the direction of home . . . and Jesus never promised that the journey back home to our Father was going to be an easy one!

The return journey will demand changes in our thinking and lifestyle – and for some of us those changes may be radical (we have all picked up a lot of harmful 'baggage' for our survival on that hostile path which led away from God). **Authentic Christianity** is not for the faint hearted. It may even bring suffering and persecution! Jesus warns:

If you want to be My follower you must love Me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, more than your own life . . . But don't begin until you count the cost . . . no one can become My disciple without giving up everything for Me
(Luke 14:25-35)



The paradox of forgiveness and new life in Christ is this:

By God's grace new life is a free gift, but if you want to accept His gift, it will cost you everything!