



10/05/26

Baptism Service

## *Have You Been Abnormally Born?*

Ben M.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says, “Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel that I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.

Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.” Paul uses the strange phrase, “abnormally born”. Every birth story is unique. You may have been born in a taxi or an ambulance but Paul says there was something extraordinary about his birth. The Greek word for abnormal means untimely. Prem babies can survive at 24 weeks. Amazing! Paul was born very late. He came late to the party so he felt like the least of the Apostles. He felt underserving and unworthy so he worked harder than all the other Apostles. It was like playing catch-up because you were born in August and started school younger than all the others.

Of course he is not talking about his natural birth. He is talking about what Jesus said to the wise and religiously experienced Nicodemus, “You must be born again”. (Jn 3) You’ve got to make a fresh start with God and build your house on Jesus Christ. Humble yourself, repent and start all over again. Jesus is not talking about going back into his mother’s womb, he is talking about the birth of the spirit. The other apostles had walked with Jesus and knew him personally. By the time Paul became an apostle Jesus had already been crucified, buried, raised and gone to Heaven. Paul had missed all the action. But when he could have been loving and following Jesus, he was persecuting the church. When Paul became a Christian, he fell off his horse and was blinded by the Light of Jesus who said to him, not why are you persecuting the church, but why are you persecuting Me?

What is your problem with Jesus? What is wrong with him that you cannot just accept him and follow him, love and obey him? Are you afraid he will lead you down some wrong path? Is he some bad man? This is God come in the flesh; the God who made you and gives you to enjoy every good thing that you have. Paul had wasted so much time kicking against the pricks. Now he is just so sorry! He feels so unworthy to be an ambassador for Christ. Imagine how it would feel if you were Paul, your sins are forgiven, you’ve been sent to minister to the local church where there are people whom you have persecuted for following Christ. He had to eat so much humble pie! Those Christians had to be so forgiving and gracious, but the Lord just knit them together in love like a whole new life. It’s an incredible experience. Paul felt late to the party, but he got there but only by the

grace of God. Grace is favour you can't deserve. Grace is a gift. God wants to give you the gift of his own Son. He wants to give you Jesus and in him forgiveness of sins and the whole of Heaven for all of eternity. All you have to do is believe it and be baptised everyone of you.

I don't know where you all are at in terms of your journey of faith. Although Jesus had died rose from the dead and gone to Heaven, it was still possible for Paul to meet him and begin his journey of faith with Jesus and be baptised. That is good news for us all because Jesus is still alive, still at work in the world and you can meet him and know him and walk with him. He will forgive your sins and receive you to himself. You can do it even today. There is hope for everyone of us. If you've got Jesus wrong and you know you have to turn around and believe, do it today. He will accept you and use you for his glory just like he used Paul and these precious folk here today as well, not forgetting the baptism bit. Have you put your faith in him? Have you been baptised? Do you know you're sins are forgiven? Is Jesus your Lord? Are you ready to meet God? There is hope in Jesus Christ.

### **Baptism Testimonies**

**James.** I have come to church every Sunday with my mum for the whole of my life even before I was born. My mum always read me a Bible story and prayed for me when I went to bed. From the age of seven I didn't really take Junior Church seriously but one night my mum was reading a story to me and I realised that Jesus had died for me, that I needed forgiveness for my sins. I loved singing songs in church and I joined the church band when I was twelve. I have chosen the song, "Who do you say I am?" It says, "I was lost but He brought me in ...While I was a slave to sin/Jesus died for me" As it says in Luke 15:24, "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." and John 6:47, Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life". I have never regretted that moment and never will. It is great to be living with Christ and I know where I am going. It is such an amazing thing to know.

**Rebeca.** I was brought up in a Christian home and have been going to church with my family since I was a baby. I learned that I am a sinner but that Jesus died to save me. I became a Christian at a young age. (I can't remember but my parents say I was six.) I learned a lot from the Bible and listening to God's word being preached. It is so good that Jesus suffered and died for me in my place. Getting baptised is obeying what God tells Christians to do. I have been thinking about being baptised for some time and it is good to be able to take this step today. A significant Bible verse to remember is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". What wonderful grace and mercy God shows towards us. I've chosen to sing "His mercy is more". It shows that no matter what you have done or whatever you are going through, God can fix things. I am here today to confess that I have trusted in Jesus as my Saviour.

**Kimberly.** My journey with God began when I was ten years old. My Dad died just before my tenth birthday and from then on I began to feel the presence of God in times of need, when feeling alone, troubled or worried about things of this world. My Christian journey began when at eighteen a nudge from God prompted me to attend the local Methodist church where I was warmly welcomed, nurtured and encouraged. It was a place where I

felt God's presence by the Holy Spirit. I became a Christian and was confirmed at the age of twenty-three having been baptised as a baby. Through the years there have been times when I've felt close to God and his word and there have been times when through fear, worry, challenges and distractions I had this deep-seated feeling that I was not being good enough to receive God's unconditional love just as I am. My journey along the path of life, love and truth has been inhibited. I stopped reaching out and as a result no longer attended church fellowship. Covid 19 proved very challenging in many ways though through on-line services God's light within me was rekindled and I felt myself being drawn closer to God again through engaging in my local church fellowship and private Bible-study.

Post lock-down I began attending one of the local church's Bible-study house groups, 'The Rock', where I shared deep fellowship with some amazing Christian brothers and sisters. I know by their encouragement and the knowledge of God's word my faith has matured and grown over these past 5 to 6 years while studying Ephesians, Acts, John's letters and Hebrews. Through these studies, talk, reflections and sermons in two churches I was enabled to find Jesus in the Old Testament so that I can no longer run away from the truth that Jesus, my risen Lord and Saviour loves me. I want to express my love and obedience to the Lord by full immersion baptism and surrender my life to God's will and trust in him, always. "God is good, his love endures forever." (Ps 136) "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; (Is 43:1-2) These verses make me want to fall down on my knees and worship him because I am now free and able to accept his love for me, a sinner

The song I have chosen is "The Goodness of God" It pretty much has all the words I want to express at this point in my life's journey. It has meant a lot to me over the past eighteen months. Thank you.

**Christopher.** I'd like to share with you how I managed to get to this point in my life. I was born into a Catholic family, taught by nuns and priests, went off in my teenage years and joined up, served my time living a particularly godless life for most of that time. I let go. God hadn't. I came out of the forces, still a Catholic, going to church, confession and communion when I met a very genuine chap, a good friend who was a Jehovah's Witness. Unlike me they were very good at reading the Bible. As a Catholic you don't read the Bible much. You know some of the stories but you don't get taught the Bible. So I was a complete novice and my friend was very knowledgeable. So for a short period of time (25 years) I studied with him. It took a JW to show me how wrong the Catholic church was, a form of deceit. Jesus said don't be deceived (Matt 24:4) The powers of deception are very strong indeed. So I left the Catholic church but I didn't become a JW because there were many things that were wrong. They believe that Jesus was once Michael the archangel who is a created being. They don't believe in the trinity. They believe at death that the spirit goes into a perpetual sleep mode waiting to be resurrected to live here on a paradise earth and the only people who get into heaven are the 144,000, a remnant of the JW's elders. They weren't for me but I was going to keep using the knowledge they gave me of the Bible. I didn't have a church. They all had their little quirks, bending the rules to suit the culture. I'm an old stick; I like things to be the way they should be. My friend died of cancer and I stopped researching the Bible. Then, there was knock at the door and it was the Mormon Missionaries who asked me if I would like to speak about Jesus Christ. It was some time

before we got to speak about Jesus Christ because the first and foremost person to them is a guy called Joseph Smith who I learned later is not the sort of guy you want running your church. So, I went with the Mormons and very quickly I was made an Aaronic priest because I had some knowledge of the Bible which was more than they had. They didn't want me sharing that knowledge with anybody else. It didn't go down well when I began to question things. I kept being hauled in front of the Bishop and told to stop spreading corrupt ideas because the Bible is corrupt and mis-translated so that's why the Book of Mormon is the corner-stone of their religion. It's a book written in 59 days by a man with his head in a hat reading words off a stone. You find those things out later by delving into things you shouldn't even though it's on the LDS (Latter-Day-saints) information website. Then they wanted me to become a priest in the Melchizedek order which meant I'd be bound to the Temple and would have to keep my mouth shut and take certain oaths. I told the bishop I wanted no contact with the church for seven weeks while I dug deeper than a mole on steroids. What I found was so shocking it caused me to leave the church immediately. That was the second stage of deceit. Nearly 17 million people believe it. Some of them are my friends, surgeons, lawyers; the president of the church is a heart surgeon. These are not thick people, yet they are deceived. Some are not deceived. They are what we call shadow Mormon. They know it is wrong but they carry on because they don't want to lose their very wealthy, happy livelihoods.

I left the Mormon church and Covid happened. I was scrolling through religious programmes and John Mc'Arthur kept appearing. Finally I gave in and watched him. This great teacher brought the Bible home to me. I had carried out a real search and Jesus knew this. He let me go down that road to find out where I shouldn't be and to point me in the direction where I should be. A couple of months ago I started to come here and I liked what I heard. I liked the way pastor Ben preaches the gospel; something that is lacking in churches these days. A lot of protestant people have run to the Catholic church because they like the awe, the pomp and circumstance. In my mind I had never properly been baptised. I was christened as a child in St. David's and baptised as a Mormon priest. Both of them are false religions. This baptism, this act of obedience comes from the heart. I am really glad to be here today. I am glad to make associations with all you lovely brothers and sisters here. From this day my allegiance is with Jesus Christ. Amen

**Elwin.** My wife of 68 years is Margaret. With the help of my family and Rachel I was her full-time carer for six years. I've always been a Christian from a strict non-conformist household; chapel three times on a Sunday. It's so easy to say, "I'm a Christian". I asked myself, "Why am I a Christian? Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ and that he died for me on a cross to cleanse my and all our sins. I believe his teachings in the Bible and I try my best to live by them. I believe that he loves me and in the power of prayer. It was very easy for me to pray for his guidance and help during those six years. My prayers were answered. His hand guided me and he kept Margaret and me safe through a difficult period. I was relieved of my caring duties twelve months ago when Margaret who has dementia went into a care home. That meant I could attend Ebenezer Church. I thank Rachel and her family for introducing me to the church where I have been made to feel very welcome. I soon realised I wanted to take that extra step although I told Ben I thought at 89 I was too old to be baptised. He told me age was totally irrelevant and it is what's in the heart that matters. I know what is in my heart and I feel totally prepared and ready to be baptised. My sins are washed away and my heart is open to God. I am prepared to follow him for the rest of my life. Thank you very much.