

Study 0024

Scripture Text: *Hebrews 6:2a; Luke 3:16-17; Matthew 20:20-23*

So far, we have studied three of the four baptisms. In this study, we shall be looking at the last of them—Baptism of Fire. Baptism of fire is a special kind of baptism, and may not even feature as one of the scriptural baptisms in some writings on the subject of baptisms. This is because, on the one hand, some bible scholars believe that **Luke 3:16** refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a present age baptism, while baptism of fire speaks of God's judgment in eternity, while on the other hand, some others believe that both baptisms refer to one baptism, that is, Holy Spirit baptism, particularly, with the evidence that cloven tongues of fire appeared on the day of Pentecost. Also, baptism of fire is not the kind of thing that many Christians today want to be associated with, coupled with the manner of many so-called Christians, who are averse to the slightest indication of any form of discomfort or inconvenience.

In the third scripture text (**Matthew 20:20-23**), the Lord uses the word 'baptism' to describe the suffering that He would have to go through for the sake of mankind, as well to glorify His Father. But in these verses, He also categorically states that the disciples who had asked for high positions with Him in His kingdom would have to go through the same baptism, even though the positions they sought were not His to give. By implication, what Jesus said to James and John, He was also saying to the other ten apostles; and, He is still saying the same to all who would ever be His disciples; that is, you and I. Jesus is saying to you and I that the baptism of fire is another identifier of those who are one with Him—they shall drink of the bitter cup of suffering, and be baptized with a baptism of agonizing pain/sorrow. In seeking the glory that is yet to be revealed, many of us look at the splendour/glorious of seating next to Jesus, but never consider what we must go through to even enter into heaven (**Matthew 7:13-14**). A roasted chicken for example, looks and tastes good to the eater, but if the chicken could speak, it would tell of a 'baptism' it had to go through to become a delight! So it is with every believer in Christ who shall be the delight of the Father—it is certain that he must need go through certain unpleasant things to bring glory to the Father.

In **Luke 14:25-33**, Jesus made a startling statement; and that, when great multitudes followed Him. He said if anyone does not love Him more than any other thing on earth, including his own life, and, does not pick up his cross (suffering, affliction, hardship, etc for the sake of the kingdom) and follow Him, such a man cannot be His disciple, follower, or Christian. Jesus went on to encourage His listeners to count the cost of being a disciple before stepping in. He was not trying to discourage them rather, Jesus was asking the people to be well-prepared for the journey ahead if they were to follow Him. Therefore, one thing that we need to resolve in counting the cost, is to be prepared for the baptism of fire!

Baptism of fire can be described as the involuntary and mandatory baptism which every believer in Christ must of necessity pass through, otherwise, they cannot be said to be Christ's, or amount to anything in the kingdom of God. Baptism of fire is involuntary because you find yourself in it just by being allied with Jesus Christ; and it is mandatory because, you really do not have a choice in the matter—you have to go through it. A person can be said to be baptized with fire when he is made to undergo, or is overwhelmed by, or 'dipped into' hardships, afflictions, trials, temptations, persecutions, or suffering for the sake of the gospel, or for the sake of Christ. This is clearly not something that we want to hear, especially in a world and a church that is largely pleasure and thrill seeking. In baptism of

fire, the medium which is 'fire', may not necessarily be a literal fire, but a figurative fire, that may include affliction, hardship, persecution, deprivation, among others.

Bible history, and particularly, church history, has shown that baptism of fire is something that occurs to all believers in Christ. It is not a matter of 'if', but one of 'when' and 'how' the believer in Christ will be baptized with fire, to make us more fruitful (**John 15:1-2; 2 Corinthians 12:7**). Baptism of fire is of extreme significance because it brings about a purging and purifying of the believer in Christ, of worldliness, carnality, as well as, fleshly attributes which he may have reason to boast about. By this action, it also makes the believer's service acceptable to God (**Malachi 3:1-5**). It is this baptism that really brings out the 'sterling' in the believer, and the 'true worth' of the believer. Please let us note that this is by no means talking about glamour but about bringing glory to God, and being glorified by Him. The bible tells us in **Romans 8:17-18** that we will be glorified with Christ only if we suffer with Him. We don't go about looking for hardships and afflictions (which is ascetism), but when it comes, we don't seek to avoid it either!

In **Romans 5:3-4**, and **James 1:2-4** this baptism is implied when it is said that we rejoice in tribulations and trials, respectively. The bible makes us understand that the baptism of fire is good for us because it is a testing/proving of our faith (**1 Peter 1:6-7**) which when successful, builds us up in perseverance/patience, character/ integrity, and brings us into a hope that can never be lost. The baptism of fire enables the believer to stand under pressure and to remain a Christian regardless of the situation (**Proverbs 24:10**).

God can employ any means to achieve the baptism of fire. What is therefore important is that you live in accordance with the word of God at all times and in every circumstance. A few instances of baptism of fire include when:

- (a) You are slapped on one cheek (or insulted), and you have to turn the other cheek (or open yourself up for more insults); without feeling the burning desire to retaliate immediately or at a more auspicious time (**Matthew 5:38-39**);
- (b) You are forced to go a mile (or do something unpleasant or inconvenient), and you are willing to go the extra mile (or endure more unpleasantness or inconvenience where that is required) without murmuring, grumbling or complaining (**Matthew 5:41**);
- (c) Your coat is taken, and you surrender your inner clothing as well (**Matthew 5:40**);
- (d) Your spouse ill-treats you, and you take solace in God, rather than retaliate (**1 Samuel 25:1-42**);
- (e) You pray for those who hate you and despitefully use you (**Matthew 5:43-44; Acts 7:58-60; Romans 12:14**);
- (f) You give water and food to your enemy, and not feel that you are being asked to do more than he has done to you (**Romans 12:17-21**);
- (g) You rejoice when you are being persecuted for the sake of the gospel (**Matthew 5:11-12; Acts 5:40-42; 16:16-34**);
- (h) You face trials and temptations with absolute trust in God, and not trying to wriggle out of it (**Daniel 3:1-30; 6:1-28**).

To be able to go through baptism of fire and come out purged (or pruned), purified (or refined), and glorify God, we need to pray like Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane (**Matthew 25:39-44; Luke 22:41-44**). Prayer enables us to accept God's will for our lives which include suffering, persecution, hardship, and unpleasant conditions; and, enables us receive the provision of help and grace to be able to bear the hardship, and unpleasantness that we may be 'dipped' into (**2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Isaiah 43:1-2**). If the believer in

Christ will undergo his baptism of fire and come out as he should, he also needs to have understanding by the Holy Spirit that suffering can be the will of God, and that through it all, God will be with us (**2 Corinthians 4:11-18**). Hence, we should not struggle with God when He is passing us through the fire (**2 Timothy 2:3; 1 Peter 4:12-19; Philippians 3:10, 17-21; Revelations 2:8-11**). Please note that baptism of fire is not punishment for transgressing God's word, but a purging of excesses that may not enable us be our best (**Proverbs 25:4**). Sometimes, it may come in the form of punishment from men for doing what is right before God, but which they consider wrong by their standards (**1 Peter 4:12-19**)! We also need to note that it is the person who goes through the baptism of fire without 'jumping out' who will be crowned in the end or glorified by God (**Daniel 3:1-30; Hebrew 5:5-9; 2 Corinthians 11:22-33**). The baptism of fire is an ongoing thing which does not end until the time that God will glorify you (**Job 42:10-17; Malachi 3:3; Matthew 24:4-13**).

Baptism of fire is the process that leads to and culminates in higher levels of consecration. If there is no costs and cross, there can be no crown in the kingdom of God. This simply, is the message of the baptism of fire!

EXERCISE

Answer true or false to the statements below.

- (1) Baptism of fire takes place when a Christian is put into fire to fortify him.
- (2) The 'fire' in the baptism of fire can be a literal fire.
- (3) One of the goals of baptism of fire is to bring the Christian to the place of glory.
- (4) Baptism of fire is suffering and afflictions of all kinds.
- (5) For the baptism of fire to be effective, the believer in Christ needs to be covered with spiritual oil—the Holy Spirit.
- (6) Baptism of fire makes the believer in Christ to be more productive.
- (7) Among the work of baptism of fire are pruning and refining.
- (8) Two end results of baptism of fire are glorifying God and the believer being glorified.
- (9) Baptism of fire is optional for believers in Christ; that is, you may choose to be baptized by fire or not.
- (10) Not all hardship can be attributed to baptism of fire.
- (11) When you see a believer who has successfully been baptized in fire, you will observe that he is long-suffering and a person of integrity.
- (12) Baptism of fire continues until the believer in Christ is glorified.
- (13) Prayer and grace are two indispensable means of successfully undergoing baptism of fire.
- (14) The believer in Christ cannot be said to be fruitful until he has been baptized with fire.
- (15) A woman who has been divorced by her husband because she is a Christian, and who remarries as a result has successfully been baptized with fire because of her experience.
- (16) A Christian who is imprisoned for burning a mosque in retaliation of the burning of his church is being baptized with fire.
- (17) A beautiful young lady who dresses to be well-covered even though she is being made fun of on a daily basis is being baptized with fire.
- (18) God uses baptism of fire to punish people who do not do the right thing.
- (19) Suffering cannot be the will of God.
- (20) If you want to be baptized with fire, all you have to do is make a big fire and jump into it, just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did in Babylon.