

# Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## WHY, INDEED?

By Ted J. Clarke

### INTRODUCTION

On Friday morning's Today Show (Aug. 23, 2002), Matt Lauer interviewed Lisa Beamer about her new book, entitled, "Let's Roll." Lisa's husband, Todd, was one of those heroes on Flight 93 that foiled a terrorist plot to fly a jumbo jet into the White House. Todd was the one who said, "Let's roll," to other passengers on the plane who were willing to give their lives to save others. Perhaps they saved the President and some of his staff. Sadly, while the passengers of Flight 93 prevented another disaster like the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania resulting in the loss of all life on board. Lisa wrote about her husband, his personality that thrust him into the role of a leader on Flight 93, and what life has been like since his death.

### WHY DID LISA?

In the months since this tragedy Lisa Beamer has not been bashful at all in expressing her faith in God and the Lord Jesus as a help in getting her through some really tough times. I do not know Lisa's religious affiliation, but we surely ought to be impressed with her boldness in speaking of God and Christ. Supposedly Matt Lauer read her book or was provided with a summary of its major points in preparation to interview her. One of the questions Lauer asked Lisa was, **why** did she feel it was so necessary to share so much of her personal faith in her book. It did not appear to me that Lauer was asking the question in order to give Lisa another chance to publicly express her faith. He really didn't understand why she (or anyone) would make her faith such a public matter! I'm sure Lauer would say that one has a right to his/her personal faith, but I'm equally certain that he (and most media personalities) cannot understand

how faith can play such a vital role in one's life.

### WHY DON'T YOU?

Many people think one shouldn't talk about one's faith publicly, and certainly you should not state or imply that everyone should do the same with their faith. You know, if you have faith, fine, but keep it to yourself and don't bother others about it. Do not tell others about your faith and do not ask others about their faith. Far too many Christians share those points of view and that is one major reason that the Lord's church is plagued with problems as well as why we are not growing. Christians are not growing in the strength and practice of "**the faith**" (Jude 3), and the church is not growing in numbers and ability to do its work. Too many are silent about teaching others about the blessings God gives through Christ and what one must do to become and remain a Christian.

### WHY WE MUST!

There are many passages we could consider, but think about the verses below. "*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:13-16). We live in a world corrupted by sin with unpleasantness all about us. Salt purifies, preserves, and gives a pleasant flavor. We are to be pure and to give a pleasant flavor to those about us. We live in a world filled with darkness and despair. Many people cannot see the way to

a better life, so Christians must dispel the darkness and be light to the world, pointing them to **the Light** of the Son of God. "*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*" (John 8:12). Have you pointed someone to Jesus as the light of the world and the light of life?

The apostle Paul required of Christians in Philippi: "*That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye **shine as lights in the world**; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain*" (Philippians 2:15-16). Do people like Lisa Beamer take this Scripture seriously and put to shame Christians that should know better and do better about teaching and practicing the truth of God's word? May it not be so!

### WHY BE ASHAMED OR AFRAID?

Lisa Beamer is evidently not ashamed of her faith. Matt Lauer may not understand that, but every New Testament Christian should! We should all be like Paul when he said: "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith*" (Romans 1:16-17). Are you ashamed of your faith? Are you ashamed of the Lord Jesus? Do you think it doesn't make any real difference if you are ashamed or fearful about sharing your faith? Jesus clearly taught: "*For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels*" (Luke 9:26). Do you really want the Lord to be ashamed to name you before God the Father as one of His

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own? No? Then do not be ashamed to name Him as Savior before the world!

One class of people who will inhabit hell are "the fearful" (Revelation 21:8). We quote that passage frequently in referring to the fate of "all liars," but what about the "fearful"? Who are the fearful? The word could better be translated as "cowardly" and in the context of the book of Revelation it refers to those who consider their personal comfort and safety more important than faithfulness to Christ. In Revelation 21:8 the word "fearful" is followed by the word "unbelieving," for to be fearful and to refuse to speak out for Christ is the same as being an unbeliever (John 5:44; 12:42-43). But this brings a greater condemnation and shame upon most Christians today, for we are not in danger of losing our lives if we speak out about our faith in Jesus Christ, as those were in the first century (cf. Revelation 2:10). What is keeping us from telling others about our great God and Savior? Not fear of death or even serious bodily injury. It may come to that in our society, but that is not a present fear. Even if it should come that we might be put to death

for speaking out about our faith, we must do that rather than be ashamed to speak or to renounce Jesus as Lord (cf. Matthew 10:28; Acts 5:28-29). Do you need to be ashamed about being fearful when it comes to telling others about the faith you have in Christ? One pioneer preacher used to say "I'd be afraid to be ashamed and ashamed to be afraid about telling others about Christ." Is that not the attitude we all should have!?

**CONCLUSION**

It should not surprise us if Matt Lauer cannot understand **why** someone should feel compelled to speak of strengthening and sustaining faith. However, we should be surprised and saddened when even one Christian fails to do the same as Lisa Beamer when opportunities present themselves on a daily basis. We may never get to write a book about our faith that will make the best seller list, like Mrs. Beamer's book likely will, but we can do what God expects of us on a daily basis and have God's approval. Let us take up our personal cross daily, and follow Jesus, giving salt and light to a corrupt and darkened world.

**THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM**

by B.J. Clarke

Perhaps no subject evokes more controversy in the religious world than the subject of baptism. Many have been immersed who have never been scripturally baptized. Thus, we ask, "What are the essential elements of scriptural baptism?" In this article we shall note at least four essential elements for a scriptural baptism.

**I. THE RIGHT SUBJECT**

Baptism is not for everyone. It is only for certain individuals. In order to be baptized scripturally one must be four things. *First, he must be an alien sinner* (Rom. 3:10, 23). Baptism is not for those who have already become Christians. In Acts chapter 8, we read of Simon the Sorcerer who believed and was baptized, and was therefore saved (Acts 8:13; Mark 16:16). Shortly after his conversion Simon sinned grievously by attempting to buy the gift of God with money. Peter told him that his heart was not right

with God and that he needed to repent of his wickedness and pray to God for forgiveness. Simon was not instructed to be baptized again to remove his sin. Baptism is not for one who has already become a child of God, but rather, baptism is in order that we might become children of God (John 3:3-5; Gal. 3:26,27). Furthermore, since baptism is only for those who are sinners, infants are not subjects for scriptural baptism. Infants are not sinners (Ezek. 18:4,20; Deut. 24:16; 1 John 3:4).

*Second, in order to be scripturally baptized one must be a believer in Christ* (John 8:24; Mark 16:16; Acts 16:30; Rom. 10:9,10). Here again, this prerequisite rules out infants and those who are mentally incapacitated and unable to comprehend the deity of Christ and to express their faith in that deity.

*Third, one must be a penitent believer in Christ in order to be a candidate for scriptural baptism* (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; Acts 2:38). The passage in Acts 2:38 makes it abundantly clear that repentance is a prerequisite to scriptural baptism. Thus, if one is not willing to repent of sin then he is not qualified to be baptized. Therefore, those who are living in adulterous marriages, who have no intent whatsoever to leave those adulterous marriages, are not scriptural candidates for baptism. Repentance **must** precede scriptural baptism.

*Fourth, he must be a confessing, penitent believer* (Rom. 10:9,10; Phil. 2:9-11; Acts 8:35-40). Conviction in the deity of Christ must be so deep that the candidate is willing to express it publicly, both with his lips and his life. Many of the chief rulers believed on Christ but because of the Pharisees would not confess Him lest they be put out of the synagogue (John 12:42,43). One who has come face to face with the deity of Christ should be more than willing to make the good confession (1 Tim. 6:12).

**II. THE RIGHT ELEMENT**

At least six baptisms are discussed in the New Testament with several different elements involved. There is the baptism of John, the baptism of fire, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the baptism of suffering, the baptism unto Moses and baptism in water into Christ. By

the time that Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians there was only one baptism (*Eph. 4:5*). Thus, the question arises, which of the aforementioned elements is the right element in scriptural baptism today? The answer is given clearly in the Scriptures.

Water is the only element involved in scriptural baptism today. Jesus said that a man must be "born of water" in order to enter the kingdom of God (*John 3:5*). Upon seeing a body of water, the eunuch requested to be baptized in that water for the remission of his sins (*Acts 8:36*). Paul discussed a washing of water by the Word (*Eph. 5:26*). Peter pointed his readers back to the water that saved Noah and his family, and emphasized that water baptism today likewise now saves us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (*1 Peter 3:20, 21*).

Some have suggested that Holy Spirit baptism is the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5. Such is impossible, for several reasons. First, Holy Spirit baptism had Christ as its administrator, and therefore is not the baptism that will last until the end of the world (*Matt. 28:18-20*). Second, Holy Spirit baptism in no way pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (*Rom. 6:3; Acts 22:16*). Holy Spirit baptism was a direct outpouring from heaven. Contrariwise, water baptism definitely pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as the candidate dies to sin, is buried, and then arises from that watery grave to walk in newness of life (*Rom. 6:4*). Third, Holy Spirit baptism was never a command; it was always a promise. The baptism of the great commission is a baptism that we have been commanded to experience in order that we might enter into the body of Christ (*1 Cor. 12:13*). Thus, scriptural baptism must include the right element.

### III. THE RIGHT "MODE"

People often speak of different "modes" of baptism, such as sprinkling, pouring or immersion. In reality, the word "baptism", properly understood, points to only one manner, and that is immersion. The Greek word "baptizo" has often been defined as meaning to plunge, to dip or to immerse. The only scriptural "mode" of baptism is immersion. Paul described baptism as a burial (*Rom. 6:4; Col.*

*2:12*). John chose the waters of Aenon near to Salim because there was much water there (*John 3:23*). Jesus and John the baptizer as well as Philip and the Eunuch, went down into the water and came up out of water, thus signifying immersion as the manner of the New Testament baptism (*Matt 3:16ff; Acts 8:38ff*). Furthermore, only immersion pictures a death, burial and resurrection as described in Romans 6. Thus, scriptural baptism is immersion in water.

### IV. THE RIGHT PURPOSE

The purpose of baptism is a matter of great controversy in the religious world today. Some say it has no purpose today, others say its purpose is to save, while still others say its purpose is to add one to a denomination after salvation has already been experienced. But what saith the Scriptures? The Scriptures teach that baptism has primarily a twofold purpose.

*First, its purpose is to bring us into contact with the saving blood of Christ so that we might be saved, having our sins washed away (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5; 1 Peter 3:21; Rom. 6:3; 2 Tim. 2:10)*. No one can read the aforementioned passages carefully and come to any other conclusion but that baptism is essential for salvation.

*Second, its purpose is to call us to a new manner of life*. Paul speaks of rising from a watery grave to walk in newness of life (*Rom. 6:4-6*). The individual who has been baptized must leave the old man of sin behind and no longer allow sin to reign in his mortal body (*Rom. 6:6-14*). Paul describes the Colossian Christians as those who had put off the old man to put on the new man (*Col. 3:5-10; Eph. 4:22ff*).

### CONCLUSION

Though much confusion exists in the world today concerning scriptural baptism, God has made His will abundantly clear. Scriptural baptism requires the *right subject, the right element, the right manner and the right purpose*. May we be loving and yet bold in our proclamation of this truth to a lost and dying world.

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## THE 144,000

by Marvin Rickett

There has been much wondering and speculation about the 144,000 in the book of Revelation. Many of the theories are fanciful and without scripture support. Who was this mysterious group of people designated the 144,000 in Revelation 7? Can we know anything about them?

Several things are told to us in the passage itself. They were servants of God. They were sealed of God. To be sealed meant to be set apart, approved, preserved. They are said to be members of the tribes of Israel, and 12 tribes are actually named along with the number of sealed from each tribe. But, was this literal Israel? Or is the passage using symbolism?

One encounters some difficulties when he tries to interpret the passage literally. In the list of tribes, one tribe is completely omitted - the tribe of Dan. Ephriam is also left out, but both Joseph and Manasses are included (Manasses was Joseph's son). Levi is included, yet he was not always counted in the Old Testament lists. The 144,000 were all unmarried males: "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins" (Revelation 14:4). This would exclude all women and all married men, if it were literal.

There is conclusive evidence that it is symbolism. The theme of the book of Revelation involves symbolism (Revelation 1:1, "... and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.") An exact, even number of sealed is given for each tribe - 12,000. It would not be likely that the exact, same number of worthy people would be found in each tribe. Even the term "Israel" was used symbolically in previous scripture. In Romans 9:6, Paul said that "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." Among those who were blood descendants of Israel, only those who believed on Jesus Christ were truly spiritual Israel. In Galatians 6:16, Paul refers to the "Israel of God": "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy and upon the Israel of God." The Israel of God in the New Testament dispensation is made up of those who are in Christ Jesus (verse 15, "For in

Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.") The Israel of Revelation 7:4 could be referring to spiritual Israel, the church of Christ.

The description of the 144,000 as male virgins (14:4) is symbolical of the fact that the faithful Christians refused to engage in emperor worship, to commit spiritual adultery with an idolatrous religion. They kept themselves pure from any compromise with the Roman religion.

If one is convinced that the 144,000 is symbolic, he should consider an adequate answer to the question: symbolic of what? It likely refers to the remnant of Christians who came through the imperial persecution of Rome with their faith intact. The book of Revelation makes extensive use of the symbolism of numbers. The number 144,000 is a perfect number, multiples of 12 and 1,000. It would indicate that none were overlooked, omitted, or left out; of those who were worthy. It is a large number, relatively speaking. Christians undergoing severe persecution would be greatly encouraged to remain faithful in knowing that they would not be forsaken by the Lord, and in knowing that they were not alone: There were others who were also persevering.

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**[Editor's Note:** Jehovah's Witnesses have insisted that the number of 144,000 is literal and refers to the number of their religion that will inhabit heaven and rule over all people on the newly purified earth. However, if they are going to take the number 144,000 literally, they will have to take the description of those who make up the 144,000 literally too. If that were the case then only virgin men from the 12 tribes of Israel would qualify (cf. Revelation 7:4; 14:4). JW's sometimes say they can know the nearness of Christ's second coming by how close they are to having the complete number of 144,000. Not to make fun of these people, but if the 144,000 have to be virgin Jewish males of the JW faith, the coming of the Lord must be a long way off. I am not aware of any great number of virgin Jewish males being a part of the Watchtower Society. - TJC]

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- Ted J. Clarke, editor.

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### GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP - COLOSSIANS 3:17

- 1. LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16:1-2).
- 2. PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
- 3. SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
- 4. GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
- 5. PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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