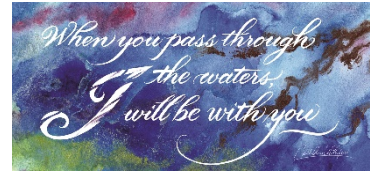




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A Baptism to Undergo

Passing through the waters

A Short Scripture Study and Personal Story

Luke 12:49-50 November 16, 2020

Last July 7, 2020, I awoke with Luke 12:50a on my mind – “I have a baptism to undergo...” This morning, November 16, 2020, I awoke with the verse on my mind again. I had not been reading in the Gospel of Luke on either day, so I believe the Lord brought this verse to my mind to consider.

On July 7, 2020, I had been in a waiting period for a week. The next day I was to have a heart procedure to fix an atrial flutter. My heart had been beating over twice as fast as the normal rate. This anomaly began just after my brother passed away the previous October, and it persisted for nine months, because I did not see the cardiologist until June, and because I did not realize its seriousness.

The Lord miraculously kept me from a stroke during those months through many events, even a trip to Israel in January (my first trip overseas). It was only *after* I understood the gravity of my condition that the waiting period before the procedure was difficult. As I pondered the words of Jesus, “I have a baptism to undergo...,” I thought the verse could not apply to me. After all, what I had to endure was nothing compared to His suffering.

The context of Luke 12:49-50

Luke 12:1a – “Under these circumstances after so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He [Jesus] began saying to His disciples...”

In Luke 12, Jesus warned the crowd about the hypocrisy of the religious rulers, about the inevitability of the hidden darkness coming to light, and about the protection to those who confess His Lordship and the judgment of those who blaspheme. He exhorted them with parables to take their focus from the temporal and bring it to the kingdom of God so that they would be prepared for the last days and His return.

And then Jesus said,

“I have come to cast fire upon the earth and how I wish it were already kindled. But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished.” (Luke 12:49-50)

The ensuing verses tell us that this “fire” would separate the **dross** from the **pure** in every sphere – the dross in our souls, the dross in the religious rulers, the dross in relationships and in the world. But this cleansing fire would only come through the accomplishment of Jesus’ distressing baptism.

A closer look at Luke 12:49-50

Let us look at the original Greek words in *blue italics* that correspond to the English underlined words and ponder their fuller meanings in *crimson*:

I have a baptism [*baptisma* – immersion] to undergo [*bapti'zō* – to overwhelm*, saturate, submerge] and how distressed [*sune'chō* – intense compression] I am until it is accomplished [*tele'ō* – complete, conclude, fill up, finish]. *(Whelm means to make fully wet or saturate. Overwhelm means to completely submerge.)

Jesus would bring a cleansing fire that would bring purity and justice to the earth. But first, He would be overwhelmed, completely submerged. He would experience intense distress until the immersion was finished.

How long did Jesus know about this immersion, i.e., His imminent execution? Months? Years? How long was His waiting period? How long did He endure intense distress, until on the execution cross “**He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.**” (John 19:30)

Jesus was “**a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.**” (Isaiah 53:3b) But on the other side of the accomplishment of His grief, was joy – the joy of accomplishing our redemption. (See Isaiah 53:11-12) “**For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross...**” (See Hebrews 12:1-3)

Jesus’ joy is now our joy. The Lord says, “**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they will not flow over you.**” (Isaiah 43:2a) Because the torrents overwhelmed Jesus, they need not overwhelm us, because He is with us.

That first week in July, I *did* have a baptism to undergo – a short, difficult waiting period of uncertainty and distress, but He assured me that He had gone before me through a greater baptism that would hold me. He would pass through the waters with me. My suffering was a tiny glimpse into His.

The waters of joy!

We **pass through the waters** of grief, waiting, pain, and distress. But there will be a day when we are overwhelmed by Jesus, the Living Water! We abide in Him now and experience the joy of His presence, but in that day we will be completely submerged and saturated in Him!

The Lord gave the prophet Ezekiel a vision of the New Jerusalem that beautifully echoes verses in Revelation. Ezekiel 47 describes a river that flows under the temple toward the east. It begins as shallow “flowing water” but steadily increases until it cannot be “forded.” *Forded* is the Hebrew *âbar* and means **to pass through**. The river is so strong, no one can **pass through** it without being overwhelmed – gloriously overwhelmed!

This flowing river is fresh and pure. It waters the desert plain of the Arabah and it flows toward the sea. It freshens and gives life to all the creatures in the river and the sea. It waters the trees on its banks causing them to bear abundant fruit for food and leaves for healing. The trees provide their sustenance every month of the year!

When I awoke in April 1980, the day after the Lord caused me to be born again, I felt like I was swimming under the water, completely covered in the knowing of His love for me. This immersion was in the Spirit and was a hint of the hope to come!

We **pass through waters**. Painful waters. But... “**There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High.**” (Psalm 46:4)

One day, we will be overwhelmed by joy! Can you picture us all swimming in that torrent of freshness and purity with our enemies so behind us that we will not remember them? Rejoice with me in our Hope!