

The Mystery of Baptism (Romans 6)

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[0 : 00] A couple of, if you were here two weeks ago, that's not the passage we're looking at today, but if you were here two weeks ago, you recall that we had a look at what we called two weeks ago, a praecce for the book of Romans, a praecce that says that the gospel is embedded, if that's the right word, in the mystery of Israel.

The gospel, Paul says, you see verse three there, concerning his son, and then who was descended from David, designated son of God of power. But that, verse two, he says, the gospel promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures.

The gospel is promised, and it was announced as promised through prophets, and it was recorded to be pondered by a faithful community in the holy scriptures.

This is not the gospel, not the gospel, say, of Gnosticism, therefore. It is not the Jesus, not the gospel of a current avalanche of modern reading between the sources, a guesswork Jesus. He says, the gospel of a Christian, and he says, the gospel of a Christian, and he says, and it's invading into some parts of the church, tragically. A second century Gnostic says, these things, he's talking about the gods and religious ideas generally, these things, says this Gnostic, these things never happen, but they are always true.

[1 : 53] That's the heart of Gnosticism. History claims the truth that are historical and real in our space-time world, are indifferent, swept away.

But religious truths, sort of free-floating up in the air, are all true. Great. These things never happen, but they're always true. The church needs a way, and I think in our time, is in the process of discovering a way of being in this conversation in a way which is faithful to the apostolic witness. How about the only Jesus we know is the Jesus present to us, clothed in the gospel. That's the only Jesus the church knows, the gospel, the Jesus who is clothed in the whole gospel, the promised Jesus, the one prophesied, and the one written in holy scripture.

It's the only Jesus we know. Jesus not present to us as a kind of cloud of undefined, good-feeling love. Ever met a Jesus like that?

There's the kind of Jesus who even makes inroads into some, presumably, conservative churches sometimes. They don't know it, but they just sort of slip into it. Isn't Jesus just love?

[3 : 16] Sort of undefined love. No. Jesus we know is promised and prophesied and written in holy scripture.

That's the only Jesus we know. Jesus as Israel's Messiah fulfilling the mystery of Israel and calling now the Gentiles, us, to himself.

And this means more than a periodic remembering, doesn't it? Oh yeah, Jesus was Jewish. That's not enough. Or it's not achieved by Christians trying on occasion to sound Hebraic.

You know, sometimes we have a Savior's sufferers or something. It doesn't work. It does mean remaining in a kind of given, and here we begin to approach what we're going to look at Romans 6. It does mean remaining in a kind of symbolic universe in our thinking, in our understanding, in serious ongoing attention to the apostles and what they teach.

[4 : 20] So today, a kind of exercise in remembering. Remembering what kind of symbolic world the apostles give us to live in.

Remembering the holiness, in a sense. The hallowedness. Even the beauty of remembering. Remembering this Jesus promised by prophets written in Holy Scripture.

Look at how, in a sense, to remember. How to remember. And how to remember according to Romans chapter 6, which you have in front of you.

Romans chapter 6, that's what we're going to look at today.

Holy Scripture. How do we read it? At the very least, by beginning in prayer. We don't just read, we pray. So let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you have given us such a great gospel.

[5 : 31] That you promised them. That you announced it by prophets. That you have, part of the mystery of salvation is that you've given it to us in Holy Scripture.

We're about to look at that now, Lord. A little portion of it. Help us. Give us understanding in these things. Help us to conger them in godly patience.

With our minds wide awake. Listening for your presence. Lord, speak today. As we attend to your word. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Do you not know, says Paul here. We'll give some context in a moment. That all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.

We were buried, therefore, with him by baptism into his death. So that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in heavness of life.

[6 : 31] For if we have been united with him in a death like this, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like this. We know that our old self was crucified. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed.

And we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is free from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.

For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all.

But the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans chapter 6, 3 to 11. What words? Prologue to this, in broad terms necessarily, in the book of Romans.

[7 : 38] Recall in the book of Romans we hear about man. Jew and Gentiles, Jew and Gentiles together as sinners, all have sinned, says the apostle. A first great announcement then follows of the shocking good news in verse 20.

But now, here sinners, Paul is saying, now a righteousness has been revealed from heaven. A righteousness has been revealed from heaven.

All human effort is therefore rejected in salvation. Philosophical, religious effort is all set aside by God. There is God for man in the man Jesus Christ.

And he, this man, confers right standing on sinners. And then, Paul follows with a, you might call it a, an, um, a, um, Abraham-David meditation.

And then there's an Adam-Christ meditation. Paul looks at the broad sweep of what, how God had been speaking to Israel as he unfolds the whole mystery of salvation in the letter to the Romans.

[8 : 55] In a certain sense, we might even say that Paul constructs for us, for the church as the Lord's apostle, a kind of symbolic world in which we can live. We hear again about Abraham, David, Adam and Christ.

Great figures from the mystery of God speaking to Israel are caught up in the mystery of the gospel. That's why he asserted about fools, doesn't he, as Christy, as we talked about a couple weeks ago, the gospel which had been promised through prophets written in scripture.

Then, he is prepared to speak this passage to his first hearers, readers in Rome, a passage obviously about baptism.

And while we're doing sort of overviews, it is interesting, at least it seems to me interesting, to note the big kind of narrative overview at work here, as Paul continues his treatise to the church at Rome.

Maybe not quite an overview, a kind of foundational story that is quietly present as Romans unfolds at this point.

[10 : 04] Very simply, so we see here, chapter 6 is about what we call chapter 6, it's part of the scroll. Chapter 6 is about baptism. Or, if you could put this in Israel narrative terms, this is about Passover.

There's an out of Egypt into freedom, a narrative underneath the baptism motif in scripture. You recall at 1 Corinthians 10, it surfaces, so to speak.

Paul talks about baptism of Israel. She went through the Red Sea. Then, in chapter 7, you'll recall, the very next part of Romans is about law.

Or, after Passover in the desert, Israel receives the law at Sinai. And then, chapter 8, famously, is about redemption achieved, or entry into the promised land, again, in Israel narrative terms. The whole universe is pre-figured in the promised land. The promised land, the place of God's people. The whole universe has definitely become the place of God's people.

[11:14] So, Romans, again, Romans 6, 7, 8, rehearses, through the prism, so to speak, of Jesus, Israel's mystery. We call this a symbolic universe.

That's a good thing to call it. That's it for Paul. Paul, always thinking in terms of things like Passover, desert, promised land. Jesus of Nazareth, undoubtedly, always thought about that.

It's the true story of the world was Israel's fate. Of course, I think it's easy for these things to be trivialized. I think maybe sometimes the word story is overused.

We should think of it as the divine narrative of the history of salvation. And chapter 6, in a certain sense, is a most kind of a sobering moment in this divine narrative, this divine story.

It's kind of almost overwhelming when you see it, it seems to me, in its true context. It's very surprising. If you will, we receive it.

[12:24] We may receive it, chapter 6, as where salvation's author, narratives always have an author, the author of salvation now writes people like ourselves, you and I, all of us, are now written into the story at chapter 6 in this narrative.

Suddenly, we, the hearers, readers, appear for the first time, in a sense. Paul says, you have been baptized. You are in this story.

You're in it now, whether you like it or not. You church at Rome. You church at Vancouver. Have you ever had that kind of experience where you're reading something?

I hope you've had this experience. It doesn't have to be in reading, come to think of it. It might come to you in painting or in music or somehow, but it often comes to people when they're reading.

Have you had that experience when you suddenly, you're reading, you say, oh, that's me. I think I'm portrayed here. I'm being captured. I remember, if you'll allow, a personal anecdote.

[13:37] Quite clearly, reading a 17th century Puritan theologian, John Owen, and as I read it, I just thought, I am here. He's captured me.

I'm photographed by this writer. It was a treatise about temptation and sin, actually, so I won't expand on that. But I just said, yes, this man understands me.

Romans 6 is suddenly, here we are. We're in the story. Of course, such moments may be deceptive. There's things which cloud our vision. It might be our vanity that we're seeing when we see ourselves.

But this kind of seeing is near the center of things in the biblical worldview. Then shall I know, even as I am known, when he appears, this is all through scripture, when he appears, then we shall see him.

Then we shall be like him, says John. And faith begins to live in this future promise. But first, before all of that happens, according to Romans 6, we get right to it now, in some way, which we need to contemplate together as the church, we must learn somehow to die, according to Romans 6.

[14:55] I'm trying to just see what's on the surface here. Isn't Romans 6 a kind of mirror, not a new image? See, the scripture, it's a showing us ourselves.

But we might read Romans 6, again, with this in mind, where we see ourselves. And I think it's a strange self that we are invited to see as we look at Romans 6.

The New Testament makes much of the mind, doesn't it? We should note this just as we look here. The mind is what the philosophers sometimes call, I believe, a primitive.

Just a strange word. But it means a kind of first order thing. As such, it may not really be understood, the mind. It is the God-given organ for understanding.

It is a strange thing, our mind. It functions in so many strange ways. Look how it functions. It absorbs. It orders things. It rearranges things.

[15:57] It is apparently open to transformation. We hear this in the prayer book, liturgy, about the transforming of our minds. Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, the apostles say.

Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Our capacity to perceive and believe, our capacity to perceive things and to believe things, is simply not understood.

It is what one philosopher calls a natural piety. I love that phrase. It's just there. It's the gift by which we live.

It's part of the mystery of being a human. It's a natural piety which no one understands. We see the world. We perceive it. And we are called to be responsible participants in it.

We can think about the world. The mind, the mind knows. Do you not know, say the apostles. This is their witness. Do you not know, says our passage.

[17:07] Do you not know that as many of us, or that all of us, who have been baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death.

That seems strange to me. You can know, in some measure, appropriate for us now, in this dispensation, you can know, apparently, what those words mean.

And in many senses, I don't think anybody knows what they mean. I want to just think about such words with you, or mind them, or as they invite, even see them.

Isn't it strange that words can generate, this seems especially relevant in regards to words like Romans 6. Words generate pictures in the mind.

Do you not know? The New English Bible translates that as, do you remember, or do you keep in mind? That's clear enough, I suppose.

[18:16] That's important. Do you not know? Do you not remember? Do you keep in mind? The life in Christ, logically, spiritually, logically, if that's right, if that's a good expression, if not chronologically, begins with a symbolic act.

And initiation into nothing less than a strange new world. And it's marked by this thing. It's marked by baptism.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. This is where it all begins.

What is baptism on the surface? Well, I take it, it is, the discussion time you can go over this, you can challenge this, rebellish it, make it richer, I need your help here, but baptism is at least from one set of circumstances into another set.

From one set of circumstances into another. Paul's habitual thinking, we mentioned earlier, his symbolic world, again, something like Passover, Sinai, promised land, sets us, I think, on a firm foundation for understanding baptism.

[19:47] Christian baptism is more than, but never less than, this meaning in this kind of story, this symbolic world. It is baptism from slavery in Egypt to a promised freedom elsewhere, a promised land.

in the prison of his days, teach the free man how to praise, is a word from a Christian poet, W.H. Auden, that for me captures that mystery.

We're in a prison in Egypt, but we're going to be taught to be free men praising. Your humble servant raced through Christopher Hitchens latest book, God is Not Great.

Have you heard about this book? Why Religion Poisons Everything? A person in a bookstore gave me one of their advanced copies. I thought I was cheating when I read the book. I like that title.

It doesn't beat around the bush, does it? But unfortunately, I have to announce the title is probably the only really interesting thing about it. The rest of the book is, by and large, ridiculous.

[20:56] I raise this here because this author and we Christians might expect this kind of thing to become what is it, more or quite common in the future.

This author, and I think he speaks for a lot of people in our culture, he maybe speaks for our culture period here, this author will not let this story pass without insisting that you explain the character of this God.

This God killing so many Egyptians Christians in the drama of setting free those Hebrew slaves. He'll stop at this point.

Oh, that's a nice talk. You Christians can talk about a symbolic world, Passover, the desert, promised land, but I'm going to call you up on this. Look at this story.

Look at this Passover story. This God witnessed you here. All he does is kill people. He kills all these Hebrew, he kills all these Egyptian children, then he wipes out an Egyptian army as they chase the Hebrew people.

[22:01] These blood-soaked pages of the Old Testament, he calls them. The tone of this book is amazing. I think it's beginning, more and more we're going to see this kind of attack on our faith, in our culture.

It's getting rough out there, really rough. I'll give you one example of this polemic. Forgive me on a Sabbath for saying this, but this is the tone of the whole book.

He says, well, if you're teaching your children the Christian story, he said, I accuse you of child abuse. Teach a child this Christian stuff is ugly and immoral and you shouldn't do it. Where you go to the next step after that, I don't know. I don't know if the police are going to show up someday and arrest us all or whatever, watch it. Well, what is the heart of the answer to this kind of heated denunciation of this story that we're attending to?

In a footnote, it has to be short and it will have to be short when you have conversations with such people. The Old Testament and the Bible as a whole does not apologize for its fierceness and we shouldn't.

[23 : 09] Why? Because the God of Israel, the one God that Christians confess as love, hates sin. The form that love takes in the presence of evil is fierce wrath.

That's the best answer I can give. We're going to have to learn how to say things like this to people who will not grow up in Sunday schools, church schools, will not read Christian literature. They're going to listen to the Christopher Hitchens of this world. They might become the dominant voice. And we're going to have to learn to say, well, here's how we respond to your charge. Our God is love. And when holy love is in the presence of evil, it takes the form of fierce wrath. God will judge Egyptians when he says, let my people go. He will chase an army into a sea to let his people go. He is that kind of God. If that truth offends people in our culture, well, they will be offended.

[24 : 14] So be it. Another, a footnote before we move on. The glories of the prophets, the subtleties of wisdom literature, Mr. Hitchens ignores if he knows about them at all.

End of that footnote. Let us read carefully our story, our symbolic universe. Again, do you not know that we who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death?

The word death here signals, correct me if I'm wrong, I'm trying to see again what is on the surface of this story of holy scripture.

The word death signals that we are dealing here with extremes, with extreme things. It signals that. Do you not know that we have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Our faith is about extreme things. How else describe words about death if not as an extreme discourse? Extreme kind of means at the boundary of things, at the edge of meaning, that which most challenges man.

[25 : 27] Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Sobering words, aren't they?

Do you remember the existentialist, these people's categories come and go in the life of the mind, don't they? Do you remember those people names like Camus, on the religious side, good old Soren, Kierkegaard?

On this subject, I always found them quite good. Good enough. They weren't just right, but they were good enough. They captured this thing, death, as a kind of absurdity, making a mockery of life, putting a question mark over everything.

But strangely enough in our culture, this is now seen as a kind of overwrought response to the meaninglessness of life that death represents.

Life is absurd or finally without meaning, perhaps, but the answer now is, so what? Just get used to it.

[26 : 33] The new man of our culture, the new person who's increasingly out there, and I suspect that Christopher Hitchens, at a popular level, represents this, he's kind of a happy nihilist.

Yeah, life's meaningless, but so what? Just get used to it. Why are they happy? Well, sometimes it's because they're well-housed and well-clothed, well-fed, and they're able to divert themselves throughout life.

You know, all of life, according to Pascal, is diversion, or busy with the arts or with education or with religiosity or whatever you're into, kind of horrible expression, whatever you're sort of diverting yourself with just now.

Hope it keeps your mind off of difficult things. But baptism calls us to embrace by faith God's profundity for us.

Do you think that's true? It must be true. It must be what this passage is saying. God calls us to embrace a profundity. Maybe, maybe we should not be distressed about our particular moment in history.

[27 : 50] Happy nihilists want us to stop manufacturing, as they see it, profundity. Christopher Hitchens, I mentioned, as I mentioned, thinks that it's kind of dangerous to manufacture this.

That's not his language, by the way. Private profundities perhaps are okay, but they must never claim public truth. Now we get to the heart of the minister, I think.

Here is where Romans, and Romans 6 in particular on baptism, points to a real balance as we think about our faith and the kind of culture where we're living.

A balance between a private faith, a private profundity, if you will, and a public confession, the kind of public confession which increasingly provokes bitter, angry denunciation to people of Christopher Hitchens.

The depth into which we are united here, we've been baptized into Christ Jesus. It was a public death. Paul thinks this way.

[28 : 58] This is Paul's symbolic universe. It had to be a public death. You might call it an extremely public death, wasn't it? During the reign in Palestine of Pontius Pilate, a Jew named Jesus, Jeshua or Joseph, died.

Paul writes to the Romans and says that it is into this death that they are now united. This public death of this man, Jesus.

The balance here, I struggle with this. It's easy to go wrong here, but there is a balance here between a public, the publicness of the gospel and an aspect of it which is quite private.

We are baptized, again, Paul says, into his death. death. Death. Baptized into his death. Remember death, that nasty chap, Claudius, he told that strange man, Hamlet, death is nature's theme.

It is ever so common death. Death is, what is death if not exclusion from the world, the world of space and time? the powers of this world judge themselves when they judge Jesus Christ as worthy of death.

[30 : 24] God, his father, judged him finally as worthy of life and as worthy of lordship over the whole world and therefore raised Jesus up out of death.

And it is necessarily, according to our faith, that it is in history that this happens. Therefore, this is what I struggle with, again, the conversation time, I need your reflections on this.

A merely private religious belief in the resurrection is not a Christian belief. As we said earlier, remember the Gnostics will gladly say that these things never happen, but they're always true.

Our faith, on the other hand, says it happened. Therefore, it's true. That's the way the Christian biblical symbolic world works.

The whole drama, the whole drama in Romans 6, the whole drama of death, burial, and resurrection is present here. Just look at verse 4 for a minute.

[31 : 33] We were, verse 4, we are buried, therefore, with him. Buried. Do you like that word buried? Why do you think Paul uses buried there?

It's a very pungent word. I take it, burial means that you are really dead. They've decided you're dead. It's been officially decided.

That's when they bury you. Even your relatives make it official. Bury him. He's dead. Verse 6 is up, speaking of pungent.

we know that our old self was crucified, crucified with him. It's obviously, Paul's not just thinking about any old death.

It's that public death of Jesus, crucified with him. I forget where, but the scholarly bishop, Nicholas Thomas Wright, says that it's very significant that Jesus was not hit by a bus, or by a cart drawn by a donkey.

[32 : 37] If he was crucified, crucified means total rejection, and it was an intentional rejection, wasn't it? So, in the same verse, do you see these words?

Our old self must suffer total rejection. Is it old self and new? So that our old self, yes, we know that our old self must suffer total rejection.

Just think about that. Paul says that you are, there's an old self that you are, and it must now suffer total rejection, crucified with him, so that the sinful body is destroyed in the same verse.

So that the sinful body might be destroyed. This is an invitation into a new world, a new language, a new symbolic universe.

What else can you call it? There's an old self that must suffer total rejection with Christ and his crucifixion. With Paul, in Paul's way of thinking, there is a sinful body and there is and will be the glorified body, which our Lord already has.

[34 : 04] You'll recall it's fully worked out in 1 Corinthians 15. Hint of that here, it's hinted at here in verse 4, Jesus, we're told, is raised by the glory of the Father.

the whole passage is kind of extreme, it's on the edges of my comprehension. I don't know how it is with you. We believe it, but to understand it, to enter into it, it's not easy.

It is a boundary use of language, isn't it? Jesus has been raised up by the glory of the Father. The Father is glorious in this act of glory of raising his Son Jesus.

The whole passage, again, is, and it seems to me, is meant to be extreme when we take it seriously as readers. We are brought into this symbolic world, and the promise is, the gospel promise is, that this world is real and has power.

As we read these words, they will be planted in you, as Peter says, like an immortal parent, and give you an immortal life, when you attend to the apostles preaching.

[35 : 29] But here is, I want to come back to this point, and again, I hope in the discussion time you'll want to follow this up. The power, I struggle with this, the power is worked out privately, better in secret.

This surfaces in scripture. In Colossians, we are told, you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

You are dead. Apostles like to go around telling Christians that they're dead. It's a strange, symbolic world. I'm trying to convince you that this is a strange, bad. You are dead.

In Colossians, the same theme is up. You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. But then it says, when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then you also shall appear with him in glory.

Maybe this is my own private thing. I don't think it is. At Easter this year, I thought about this a lot. At Easter, we might ask, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, is this to be understood as public or as private, if that question is relevant.

[36 : 50] It might be at cross purposes with the subject of the Easter proclamation. But for me, I would want to press that question. I think it has something for us.

Is the resurrection of our Lord from the dead to be understood as a public event, so to speak, or as a private event, if there is such a thing as a private event?

Well, I would say briefly to try and grapple with it, it's public enough our Lord's resurrection to justify belief. And it's private enough, private enough, that it must be embraced by faith.

A faith which waxes and wanes, as we know. verse 3, after all, tells us that we sometimes forget that we have died.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Don't you know? Don't you remember?

[37 : 56] As we said, the NEB translates it. We tend to forget that we died in Christ, Paul says. And here in Romans, he says, do remember this.

The passage here, though, will sing to us if we give it time. I have found it so in the last couple of weeks, reading it over and over and over again. Verse 11, at the end of it, says, we are to consider ourselves dead as sin.

When we consider, speaking of considering things, greed, or fear, or impatience, or lust, or unkindness, or pride, to summarize it as the Bible does, the world, the flesh, and the devil, they appear quite strong, persistent, inescapable, and I take it that to your dying day, they will be, in a sense, inescapable.

But Paul here appears to teach, I think he does teach, that patiently, persistently, really, we may identify and confront these things and say to them, go away, get lost, you have no more authority in me, you have no more authority over me.

sin doesn't have to reign in you anymore, you've died, it can't even get at you. That's what Paul seems to teach here.

[39 : 42] Verse 11, consider yourselves dead, dead to sin, and alive to God, in Christ Jesus. This passage just makes, the more you would think about it and stare at it, it makes your head spin, it really does.

I have found it so. The gospel invites you into an amazingly strange and powerful world. There is a bridge, I think, between public and private here, between, again, the persistent presence in the New Testament between now and then.

You know, everywhere. Have you noticed in the New Testament, the now and then, construction shows up all the time? Now we see through a glass darkly. Don't we as we think about baptism,

Romans says, I do.

Now we see through a glass darkly, then face the faith. We don't have to be ashamed as Christians that we're often puzzled, challenged, finding things difficult, intellectually, in every other way.

Paul says, oh, you can expect it. Now we see through a glass darkly. Who understands the mystery of how we can be a participant in another person's death?

[41 : 04] But the apostles preach it. You can. And you are. Even if you don't understand it. You just are. Christ's death is that great. His resurrection is that great.

The bridge between public and private, between then and now, is hope. The divine hope of the gospel. As I draw to a close here.

The divine hope of the gospel. Thinking about baptism in Christ will keep all of us, keep all of this in focus, especially through the mystery of hope.

Much in the theological and spiritual tradition of the church will help us much as we try and understand this sublime, wondrous, revealed mystery, baptism.

C.S. Lewis says, we owe God a death. We owe God a death. And, in a sense, God has provided the perfect death for us in his son Jesus.

[42 : 11] Our own death would just be another sign that we're under judgment. We'd remain in some mode of, some form of death for eternity.

But God has provided a death that is a healing death. We owe God a death. Deep in the depths of thy mercy, let me die the death that every soul desires, says the Christian poet Cooper.

Deep in thy depths of mercy, let me die the death death, that every soul desires. So easy to forget that we've died, isn't it?

On Mother's Day, I remember my mother, she always kept a kindergarten report card of mine around, just to bring out on occasions when I was bothering her, so that she could humble me in the presence of other adults or anybody else that she could show this kindergarten report card to.

She kept it all of her life that I now have it in my possession, I want to humble myself if I look at it. It just has in the comments section, this is why my mother kept it, the comments section of it said, Harvey knows his name, address, and phone number, Hartley.

[43 : 30] I was making progress and she was reporting on my progress. These are the elemental facts about me at the time. But I had a tendency, I didn't know them all.

But we can forget the most important things, can't we? We only know them partly. We see them through a glass, darkly. Romans 6 sort of is an extreme passage.

It's out there at the edges of meaning, where it should be for creatures like ourselves, and it's a challenge just to take hold of it and think that I have died and I have been raised with Christ.

I can live into this. There's a potential greatness in us as humans, by God's grace, that we can come into the mystery of baptism. We don't have to understand it.

Maybe that's why Christians like to find, oh, when should we baptize? How should we baptize?

Rather than think about what it means, because it's so deep. One last word from the tradition before I hear from the saints about these things, came across this the other day and I thought, wow, that's exactly what I want to say.

[44 : 42] St. John of the Cross, a Catholic mystic, in 1542 to 1591, he begins one of his poems by saying this, not in myself do I live, but in such great hope that I die of longing to die.

Just, if I had quoted that at the beginning, I wouldn't have needed to talk before him. That says it. Great Christian person, lived a Christian life intensely.

Not in myself do I live, but in such great hope, there's the key bridge word, that I die of longing to die.

He longs to die into his baptism, which he wants to remember in a godly gospel manner. We can die of longing, to die.

It won't be morose, it won't be sad, it won't make you inward turning, it'll make you quite happy. We owe God a death. And Paul displays the death that we can, by God's grace, give back to God and be healed by this death.

[45 : 51] It always leads to resurrection. That's its privateness. And someday, when the Lord returns in glory, it will be made public that you died as you should have.

And God will make you alive forevermore. The passage is just there. An invitation into a new world. We're so used to those words, but they're extreme, they're wondrous.

I love them. I want to live into them. I want to live no longer in myself, but in such great hope that I die of longing to die.

Amen. I say a word of prayer and we'll talk about these things. Lord, thank you that you've provided for us a death.

A death that we can die that is a death in fact of mercy and of grace. And then when we die this death, we will know burial and resurrection and death and sin will no longer have authority over us forever more.

[47 : 00] Thank you for the gift of our baptism, this death, which leads to a life that will never end. And we say thank you in the name of your son, Jesus, the one who provided this for us all.

Amen. God bless you and I have a question.

Oh, wasn't everything made clear? Well, I hope you will answer it and make it clear. The saints will answer it. The saints will answer it.

In verse 3, chapter 6, it uses the word baptized. baptism. And that conjures up different definitions for different people.

I don't think of it as a physical act, I just think of it as spiritual. How do you think that Paul is using it in that verse, having studied this passage? Well, thanks for that question because it gives me another chance to say again how important I think the Israel narrative is.

[48 : 15] And where it surfaces, therefore you have confirmation of this. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul talks about, he uses the word baptism in a strange description of the people of Israel crossing through the Red Sea.

That that was a kind of baptism. So therefore, we cannot go wrong if we say it means out of one very bad set of circumstances into an amazingly good set of circumstances.

Out of slavery in Egypt and you're on your way to the land flowing with milk and honey. no longer a slave but free. So there's my bottom line answer.

It won't be bad if we keep it within that narrative framework. Baptism means that. And the New Testament writers do use narratives to teach.

I was amazed the other day to read again in 1 Peter how Peter talks about baptism and relates it to the story of Noah and the flood. When you're baptized, that picture of God's judgment on the world but he's going to save the world.

[49 : 20] Our baptism relates to that. Through those kind of waters we're baptized, Peter said. So the New Testament writers do use these pictures from Israel's history to describe the fullness of their meaning in Christ.

Is that a good answer? I think Paul at least means that. He may have been thinking about John the Baptist. He may have been thinking about I don't know what but he always thinks in terms of Passover, desert, promised land because right in Romans it's in front of you.

A baptism narrative, a baptism theological section, then a thing about law, then a heavenly triumphal vision in Romans 8, promised land motif.

Is that a, that's the best answer I could give. But it may be a lot more. He may even think about John the, our Lord's baptism by John the Baptist, that sort of thing. I tend to agree with you. I think that he was talking about moving from one situation.

Oh yeah, into death, death, burial, resurrection. Into the water means death. Underneath the water means you're buried or one commentator put it, I wonder if this is going a bit too far, but then out of the water is resurrection.

[50 : 35] I don't know if they, if they actually parsed it that carefully. Which, in terms of sprinkling, I don't know how you work that out. First drop is, I think waiting because they're really bad for it.

Grant. Similar question, what was the context then of baptism before Christ? People were not, we have, you know, one picture of it being a very public event, you know, people would line up to do it. Or, we also have the image of it being a very private kind of transformation. I mean, just a plant, a personal plant. But, what was the context?

Why was John the Baptist there? Well, yeah, it's an obvious image that you find across a lot of religious literature in and outside of Judaism and Christianity. It's a bath.

It means, I want to start again. So the idea of death is like, whoa. Yeah, it's an extreme. I'm just repeating myself here. Yeah, it's extreme, isn't it? But it stands for that, I like Lewis's words, we owe God a death.

[51 : 39] I'd like to give him a death. But there is a question again. What would have been the three curses? Well, there would be a lot of them. You know, there were all sorts of cleansing ceremonies in Israel.

One of them is they thought of Passover as a baptism. And John the Baptist was preaching that the kingdom of heaven is about to come. Get ready. Renew your life. And show that publicly by this act of baptism.

So that's the best thing I can do, Grant. I want to start again. It's a picture of I want to start again. Have a bath. Get ready for a public occasion where you've got to look good.

You need to have a bath. What's the order of the bath? Something's coming up. They were nice. What a bath. But I'm funny.

I mean, I emphasize too much. I want to just say, well, I think this passage is strange. I want to just look at it for the first time. Like a Christopher Hitchens. What's all this talk about death? Christians, you and violent, you and you.

[52 : 44] And look at this Passover. You mentioned all violent, murder, mayhem. You just have to say, oh, yeah, I agree with you. It isn't about wrath. We owe God to death.

Christopher Hitchens is an angry man, and he markets his anger in every book he writes. But he's great fun to watch and agree with. Charlie Rowe, something like that. he's very intelligent, he's very intelligent, and he knows how to display things in interesting ways.

But that said, he's picked an incident from the Bible. I mean, you can find lots of blood and gore in the Bible, but this is the only blood that is important to us.

And it's in verse 5, and it describes a substitutionary sacrifice that we have to internalize and buy into if we want that new life.

Thank you. Why didn't you give this talk? That's good. I find St. Paul very frustrating, because his use of prepositions just really sends these things.

[53 : 52] You know, you're in Christ, you're off Christ, you're with Christ, he's in you. I mean, how on earth do we explain this to people who have no background in the faith? It would be nice to be kind of clear and succinct, and that's my problem with St.

Paul. But, you know, the truth is there. And the baptism, for me, relates to the fact that this is the symbol by which I tell the world that I have identified with Christ, that he took my sins with him. And we don't make enough of that when we put it in terms like this, go back and forth across that path. Sorry to be not in my description.

But it's, you know, it is in that identification that we receive each of the greater in life. Right? Yes, yes.

That's what he's talking about. Well, that's what he's talking about. How to identify with it. Well, that's step one. Sure, sure. Get inside the story.

[55 : 00] Get inside this divine narrative of Egypt, desert, holy land. No, just get inside the narrative of the crucifixion. Well, yes, but that's... That's the start. That's it, yes.

But that's... But that narrative has the other narrative pushing it. But that's... Remember, by the end of this passage, I mean, he has talked about dying to sin and identifying in it and sin.

Because you're dead, sin has no authority over you anymore. That's why, somewhat dangerously, but because I want to talk just about baptism, this passage actually begins with, shall we go on sinning that grace may abound?

That kind of thing that happens in Paul's letters. And so the overall thrust of this passage is practical to the Bible.

Where Paul wants you not to continue sinning because you're dead. How is it that you're dead to sin? How is it that you're still living as if you weren't?

[55 : 59] That's his context. But that context comes out in the passage. We're dead to sin.

Not just dead, because you're dead, you can't sin. Tom Wright begins a little commentary. Sometimes Tom Wright on Romans is good, and other times he leaves me kind of cold.

On this one, he at least starts with some humor. I can serve some humor with you. Romans chapter 6 does begin with, shall we go on sinning that grace may abound? That kind of theme again.

That was always hurled in Paul's face. He says, you teach grace so strongly, the sovereignty of God's grace, that people are going to think that it's okay to sin.

And Paul's answer is this rich theological thing of, well, you can't sin because you're dead. You're not taking the story seriously. Tom Wright illustrates that to begin with by saying, one day this

prodigal son, he'd come home, everything was fine with his father and the other brother was even warming up a bit.

[57 : 05] And he thought, well, I'll put together a few bucks again. I think I'll go off on a quick trip into the far country. And because he never got financial advice from Dr. Burke, he went broke again. So he comes home and he reaches the front door of the home and he says to dad, I'm back again.

Here's another chance for you to show off how merciful and loving you really are. Shall we sin that grace may abound? See, that's what the opponents of Paul may have said to him.

You're going to produce another parable that the prodigal son keeps thinking, I can go out to this far country for long weekends, come back because dad's always forgiving and loving. And Paul's answer is, well, no, no, if you want to stay within that parable.

No, no, no, no, when the prodigal son comes home, he's baptized into the mystery of the church and he dies to sin. He can't go back into the far country. He's dead.

That's Paul's theological answer. That's the apostle's answer. You can't. So don't, or another theological answer, see to me, Tom Wright doesn't go into this, is that of course you can as a Christian go on sinning, but grace won't abound.

[58 : 16] It's just you'll hear God say, God is not mine. He'll find out what God is like as a father when he disciplines you.

You'll find out that God is not mine. But anyway, that's Paul's answer to, well, I'm teaching grace, shall we go on sinning? No. If you take your baptism seriously, you won't, because you're dead. You won't sin. That's why I guess Christ died to sin, he lives to God, you're so united to Christ that your life will become a life on that trajectory.

There'll be no question of going back into far countries again. And sinning, if grace may abound, no way. You're dead. You can't sin. Paul takes his symbolic universe that seriously.

And therefore, we are like the children of Israel in the desert. It could have gone on and on like this with the underlying narrative. Remember, they were always grumbling after their baptism and saying, I think we want to go back to Egypt, Moses.

[59 : 23] They sincerely said that. And the theological image is, no, no, at the Red Sea you died, therefore you can't go back to Egypt.

No, you can't. Only the promised land with God is for you. You can't go back. You can't grumble in the desert.

There's a kind of discipline applied to the people of God in the desert. I think that's what Tom Wright should have said more. The people of God will suffer discipline if they go back into sin.

The New Testament talks about that, doesn't it? God takes his people seriously. But the, to work out the metaphysics of it is my temptation and I don't think you can.

I want to. How is there, how is there, how does God give the mystery of Jesus to others? I would love, are those the things that the angels long to look into?

[60 : 37] That God, who is a Trinitarian relationship, can give his relationship to others. Ah, it's so, it seems to beckon into another world of profundity there.

the mind won't go there. But baptism symbolizes it.

The word symbol is so cheap, isn't it? It contains it somehow. Well, Bill.

I think there's hope for people, for Christopher Hitchens, his brother is a believer. Oh. I had a exchange of emails with his brother on the period and he's an iconocast too.

You know, he's a newspaper writer. He's a believer. He probably doesn't understand. Remember the, Christopher Hitchens wrote a book, remember he did, remember attacking Mother Teresa.

[61 : 53] What a man. It's like writing a book about attacking Salvation Army or something. I like the review on the back of that book was perfect. It said, if there's a hell, Christopher Hitchens is going there because he wrote this book.

What a perfect reveal the book. Oh, sir. He can't understand. He doesn't have the spirit. We struggle with it. We have the spirit.

It's great when you sit down and the spirit reveals scripture to it. There's hope for everybody who doesn't know Christ. Because Christ is going give you the opportunity to the day, day that he wants to come to him.

And we're supposed to sit there and try to argue with him over what he's attacking. He doesn't always talk to him. He doesn't have this book. He doesn't have this thing.

Thank you. Thank you. You've got to get that guy converted. You said, Harvey, that I think a merely private belief in Jesus down in that direction is not Christian.

[62 : 57] Yes. If it's full stop, that's the end of the story. In principle, it's not. Is that... Well, it's just a question. So, what are the...

So, if we keep it to ourselves, what are you talking about? I've always had a question about that. Listen, if I'm talking to a guy who doesn't know his...

At one point in his life, didn't know his name, address, and phone number. Who's not a professor? A lot of professors doesn't know his name. I'm out on weekends to do these things.

I mean, I'm just saying that the apostles met a real Jesus after his death. He was publicly in history. He was there. But he was not publicly in history in the sense that everyone could not deny it.

Because they met him, not everyone. I like my former pastor back, he's Bishop Desmond Hunt, used to say that if he had been made making up the gospels, he wouldn't have been able to resist making up a story of Jesus showing up in front of Pontius Pilate after his death.

[64 : 16] If the gospels were mythologizing documents, they would have that kind of moment in it. You know, Jesus saying to Pilate, remember me? Pilate, I'm not going to believe by the proclamation of the good news from Peter, from Paul, from John, from James.

It's preached and you may believe. When the Lord returns in glory, it'll be fully, see I should have said fully public maybe. That's what I'm starting to do with.

fully public, privately public, if you will. You know what I mean by that? I'm trying to get at something like that. 1 Corinthians 15 stands as the great central witness to these things.

Paul says, it happened. He rose. Here's who saw him. Public in that. And it will be fully public when he returns in glory.

That won't be a mystical experience. It'll be the real son of man. Holy public. Does someone else have a... I was just going to mention in the early part of your talk, you talked about Chris Hitchens referring to child abuse.

[65 : 34] Yeah. Sharing about stories with him. That's right. There's Sam Harris too, who is... Oh yeah, he's a friend. He's very similar to Dawkins' thinking. Oh yeah. And the young people, according to my granddaughter, are very much into Sam Harris.

Yeah. And my granddaughter is a very strong Christian. And she's reading about this child abuse. It's a convenient bigger rhetoric.

As a faith company, that you know, they really do see it as child abuse. Yeah. But then again, we shouldn't be surprised. I mean, C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia have been banned from certain jurisdictions.

These are stories by a Christian. Get rid of them. You know, it's up there that spirit of anything that's denigrated. I'm not surprised that people would take that.

I mean, this, as you pointed out, is shocking. I mean, it starts with death and ends with life. And then it's totally opposite from what we've actually experienced. Physically, you know, life, I mean, we're here to live the good life.

[66 : 43] We're here to live life to the fullest. But that's in worldly terms, right? You know, what we now, if you baptize and you get into Christ, you see those things as such foolishness.

You know, I mean, I experience that every day. You know, we see partying and living a life. And we're like, oh, we need that. So it does take quite a shift of thinking.

Oh, yeah. And so if you haven't had that shift of thinking, then you would think, oh, these Christians, look at that. What they're talking about is absolutely subversive. What they're talking about is actually taking away life from children.

So I'm not shocked by the non-Christian perspective on that. I like it when I'm shocked, though. I know we've got to end. I remember how I was shocked. When someone just told me a few years ago that in some Latin Catholic environment, they do present the baby at the baptismal fawn in a little coffin.

Bring the baby forward for death. Now, that is pungent. Would Paul like that or not? Would Paul say, no, no, that's garish.

[68 : 00] That is a kind of poisoning of it. You must be spiritual things are spiritually discerned. But nevertheless, in some Latin environments, they will do that.

And that's, oh my goodness, the pungentness of the death motif is thrown in your face there, isn't it? So there you go.

and next week? Oh, is it? Going to clear up this confusion created today?
You know, it's really interesting how much it's probably overlooked. Oh, good. Considering yourself
dead, it's been a lot of times. Good. That's one of your moments.
Thank you. Thank you, people, for your patience. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.