

Our first few sessions have largely been preliminary in nature. But now we hit the ground running with the event that launched Jesus' public ministry and that was His baptism.

If you have spent any time at all around church, you no doubt have had at least some instruction about baptism. It comes from the Greek word baptizo- To plunge, to dip or submerge something into another substance so that the object takes on the nature of the substance that it was immersed in. think of dipping a piece of cloth or leather into a dyeing solution, for example. .

So being submerged into water contains a number of vivid symbols. In Biblical symbolism, water represents inner cleansing (Ephesians 5:26, Hebrews 10:22,) and spiritual rebirth (John 3:5,) both of which are central themes of baptism. So along those lines, immersion in water has an extremely rich significance in both the Old and the New Testaments. As you'll recall, under the Old Covenant, the Jews were required to take a ceremonial bath called a mikvah in order to enter the Temple. Obviously, this represented cleansing from sin in order to enter God's presence. So. this is something the Jews would have understood.

Ok, with that in mind, lets fast forward into the New Testament and we're going to meet one of its most colorful characters: A man we know as Jochanan the Immerser or John the Baptist. He was Jesus' cousin and he is called the Baptist, not because he started a denomination, although you do hear that from time to time. But he arrives on the scene

after 400 years of silence from God. There had been no prophetic voice in Israel since Malachi gave us the final Book of the Old Testament. And when John arrives, he is an eccentric fellow! He lives in the desert, wearing camel hair and eating locusts! Now that could refer to the insects as we think of it. That may seem gross to us but in some parts of the world edible insects are a delicacy! But it could also mean the nut of the locust tree. Either one would be a possibility for someone living the kind of ascetic life John was living.

John's message was a very straightforward one: The Kingdom of God is at hand! The Messiah is arriving! And as people responded to his message he would baptize, or immerse them in water as a sign of their turning away from sin.

So put yourself in John's shoes here. He had the responsibility of announcing the arrival of the Messiah, call the people to turn away from their sin and baptize them as a sign of cleansing from that sin. But imagine how he must have felt when the Messiah, who had never sinned, came and asked to be baptized! John's response was certainly understandable: "You want me to baptize you/? You're the one who should be baptizing me!" But Jesus went through with the baptism in order to fully identify with the people He was coming to save.

Now is this the same baptism that we practice as Christians today? No. As you know, from here Jesus went on to complete His mission, die for our sins, rise from the dead and ascend back to Heaven. Now while the water's symbolism of cleansing from sin is certainly still there, these events give baptism a whole new dimension. Lets look at

Romans 6:3-6 describes Christian baptism as being basically, a funeral for the person we were before coming to Christ. We were buried with Jesus in baptism and raised with Him to walk in a wonderful new life! Powerful, isn't it?

OK, going back to Jesus' baptism, notice what happens next:

"... the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

So we see and hear this amazing confirmation of who Jesus is: The beloved Son of His heavenly Father who is well pleased with Him. And we also see the Holy Spirit descending on Him in the form of a dove. Here is an aspect of Jesus' life and ministry that often gets overlooked: The profound role that the Holy Spirit plays in His life.

Many people who read the accounts of Jesus' miracles assume that the reason He was able to do them was because of His divinity. Of course, He was God in the flesh, the second Person of the Godhead. That never changed. However, I would like to draw your attention to an important Scripture which puts this into a different context. That passage is Philippians 2:7 tells us that He "... made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Other translations say that He "emptied Himself" or "... gave up his divine privileges"

When it describes Jesus as "emptying" Himself, the Greek word is "keneo" , which means to empty, deprive of content, to render void. When Jesus was on earth, He never

stopped being God, but He did empty Himself of some of His privileges as God. That was the only way He could fully identify with humanity. He got tired. He got hungry. And this was why He wasn't able to do miracles until He was anointed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus didn't have the power to do miracles because He was God, although He certainly was. But Jesus had the power to do miracles because He was a man who had been filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. So this is where His miraculous ministry was birthed and in the near future, we will look at His first miracle, which took place at a wedding of all places. In the meantime, I ask as always that you like and subscribe the channel and please help me spread the word! Keep it real friends!