

John Part 13: The Revelation of Jesus Christ — Clean

John 3:22-36, refers to the concurrent baptisms of John and Jesus' disciples. Matthew and Mark indicate that John the Baptist was imprisoned immediately after Jesus was baptized. The events of our study happen just before John the Baptist was imprisoned. John 3:24 tells us, "John had not yet been thrown into prison."

John 3:22 NKJV After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.

It appears here that Jesus was baptizing people in water, but John 4:1-2 tells us it was done by His disciples.

John 4:1-2 NKJV Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples),

This is one of the transitional moments of John the Baptist's ministry, when he shows the superiority of Jesus.

Acts 19:4 NLT Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus."

John 3:22-23 NKJV After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.

Aenon and Salim are on the west bank of the Jordan River. Being at a place where there was much water indicates that the baptisms were by immersion. Much water is not needed for sprinkling or pouring. John's popularity continued and people were coming out to be baptized by him. John and Jesus' disciples were baptizing at the same time.

John 3:25-26 NKJV Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"

John's disciples felt that Jesus was a threat and competition to John and his ministry.

In the next verses, John once again certifies that Jesus is superior. John wanted his disciples to know that he could not accept the position of supremacy that they wanted for him. He knew that Jesus was the Christ.

John 3:27-30 NKJV John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.

John came exalting Jesus Christ and was filled with joy over the Lord's position. The "bride" that is mentioned is the host of those who believe and follow Jesus. John knew that Jesus was superior and that He had come from heaven.

John 3:31-32 NKJV He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.

John declares why Christ was superior.

- First, Jesus has a divine origin, verse 31.

- Second, His teaching and testimony is based on the things He has seen and heard, verse 32.
- Third, Jesus has divine authority, verse 35-36.

John 3:33-35 NKJV He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.

To cap his words, John spoke about the life changing impact of believing on Jesus Christ. Anyone who receives Christ's testimony will certify that God is true, because Jesus' words are the words of God.

John 3:36 NKJV He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

John's baptism represented a legal and physical manner of cleansing by repentance toward God. The act of baptism was an outward sign of repentance. Throughout the Law and Prophets, self-imposed washing was practiced often. The Pharisees and Scribes and legalists practiced many kinds of washings and cleansings as part of their tradition and obedience to the Law.

John the Baptist's message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2) Everyone in the region went out to him and confessed their sins and were baptized in the Jordan, (Matthew 3:5-6). Jesus gave His approval for John's baptism.

Matthew 3:13-15 NKJV Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

Jesus found John's baptism to be a necessary activity for Him to fulfill all righteousness. What does that mean? There was ceremonial and legal justification in John's water baptism. Jesus did not discount what John was doing. Jesus recognized the necessity for confession of sins and ceremonial cleansing. These actions were a necessary part of obedience to the Law.

Jesus recognized the validity of what John was doing. At this early stage in Christ's public ministry, Jesus' disciples became involved in the ministry of repentance and baptism as a sign of cleansing.

As a result of these baptisms, certain Jews began raising questions about purification and ceremonial washing. Being clean was a very important part of their religion. They had been practicing ceremonial washing. They paid close attention to what tradition and the Law said was clean and unclean.

An important question for them and us is: "Who has the right to cleanse or purify sinners?" Who or what really purifies the heart? Can the human heart really be cleansed from sin?

Since Adam's original sin, people looked for methods of inner cleansing and relief from the guilt of sin. All of humanity have struggled with the condemnation and guilt of an unclean heart. We need to know how to be cleansed in our own sight and before God.

How can I be cleansed in my sight and before God? Where may I turn for cleansing?

The reason this question was so critical to those certain Jews, referred back to Moses' Law, the blood of atonement, and their ceremonial washings. Their questions address everything they practiced in their religion. Their questions were also directed at Christ's

authority to cleanse from sin. This is a major question that was presented by religious groups and individuals throughout Christ's life and ministry.

Who has the right to cleanse or purify from sin? Does Jesus Christ really have the authority and ability to forgive and cleanse sins? Our soul seeks this inner cleansing. We need to be made clean. We want to find relief from the burden and guilt of sin in our own hearts and minds and before God. We want to be able to stand in God's presence without condemnation.

From Sinai, Israel was told to wash their clothes in preparation for worship before God, (Exodus 19:8-10, 14). Without that washing, they would be considered unclean before God. The ceremonial washings were an essential part of their cleansing and being prepared for God's presence. When a person had been healed, they were appointed to certain washings with spring water and various sacrifices. By the time of the New Testament, people became preoccupied with ceremonial washings. They would wash the outside and not address the corruption that was within. Their hope was to wash away the filth of their sin. What they were doing on the outside needed to be done on the inside, but how can one cleanse the inside?

We all want to be released from the prevalent guilt and shame of our sins. We want the guilt, burden and weight of sin to be removed. We need to be cleansed.

John's disciples were at a disadvantage in this argument. These certain Jews had noticed that two groups were out preaching repentance and baptizing. The crowds following Jesus were becoming increasingly larger than those who followed John. These groups of Jews were ready for debate.

Who has the right to cleanse or purify sinners?

They argued about ceremonial washing. The Essenes were a strict group of the Jews known for their careful observation of the Law. The Essenes were considered stricter than the Pharisees. Anyone who wanted to become an Essene was required to surrender everything he owned to the community and wear white. After being proven for two years, they would be allowed to use the community water for cleansing. The Essene Jews practiced "Lustrations" or "washings" everyday. The word "**Lustration**" means: "to purify by means of sacrificial offering or ceremony."

Josephus mentions about 4,000 various Lustrations. They had their own manual of discipline. They washed for celibacy, piety, convictions, concerning immorality, and righteousness.

In addition, the Pharisee practiced many types of "ablution" or "ritual washings." These were ceremonial washing of their body, of vessels, and clothing for religious purification. The Pharisees were preoccupied with ritual purifications. Many regulations were added to their washing. Their "ablutions" were not performed for sanitary or hygienic reasons. It was done purely to remove ritual uncleanness.

Jesus instructed them to "cleanse the inside of the cup and dish"—that is, cleanse their hearts and spirits—and not just wash the outside by religious rituals. Moral filth cannot be washed away with physical cleansing agents, (Jeremiah 2:22; Isaiah 1:16).

Jeremiah 2:22 NKJV For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, Yet your iniquity is marked before Me," says the Lord GOD.

How can a person be made clean before God and clean in their own conscience? How can we be made clean without defilement or contamination? As we face pandemics, disease, and moral uncleanness in this world, we are all faced with these questions.

Cleansing and purity are not just a matter of external washings with water or cleansers. All of the various types of ceremonial washings cannot make a person clean.

Why do you think they had all of those types of washings in the Law and in traditions? Everyone was concerned with personal sin and uncleanness. Everything they did fell short of its intended goal. God said soap and water cannot take away iniquity. The Pharisees were concerned that Jesus' disciples did not do the ceremonial washing of their hands before they ate. Jesus knew that there was more to be considered than having the exterior of the body clean. Jesus confronted them on this.

Matthew 15:18-20 NKJV ...those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”

God spoke to us through Isaiah about being made clean.

Isaiah 1:16 NKJV Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil.

Any person coming before God must be clean.

Psalms 24:3-4 NKJV Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully.

The questions are persistent, how can we be made clean and what can wash away my sins?

Ephesians 5:25-26 NIV Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

What is the Apostle saying? What can make us holy and clean? Jesus Christ gave Himself up to make the church clean?

First, He cleanses us by the Word.

Second, He cleanses us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Titus 3:5 NKJV Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

God is committed to cleansing our lives.

Isaiah 1:18 NKJV “Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”

God has provided the perfect remedy for our sins, stains and uncleanness. What can wash away our sins?

Third, we are cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1:5 NKJV To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.

Revelation 7:14 NKJV So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

This is a sure word from the Lord. If we want to be made clean, we must come to Jesus Christ. The ultimate cleansing is only by the blood of Jesus Christ. We cannot deal with the stain and pain of our sins on our own. No amount of washing with water or cleansing with

soap can cleanse the stain and defilement of our sins. This is why Jesus tells us to come to Him. This is why He came.

John 3:16 NKJV For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:18 NKJV He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:35-36 NKJV The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.