

TODAY!

What Would Jesus Be Doing If He Were You?

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

Insight 9. Becoming A Follower Of Our Lord Jesus (Part 2)

In Insight 8 we discussed the first of three distinct biblical requirements for you to effectively and powerfully follow Jesus and serve Him as your beloved Lord. Let's continue with the second scriptural parameter of following Him:

2. You must receive a baptism of repentance.

After our Lord Jesus rose from the grave He appeared to the Eleven and told them, *“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever **trusts and is immersed** will be saved; whoever does not trust will be condemned”* (Mark 16:15,16 CJB). The connection between trust and immersion is significant.

Consider this:

- What physical act could someone who has been born again take to epitomize their radical change of heart, their total commitment to earnestly flee sin and by His grace wholeheartedly serve our Lord?
- Is there an indicator so dramatic, so dynamic and all-encompassing, that it could represent the radical change you've undergone when you are born from above and become a new creation in union with Christ?

For our Hebraic ancestors in the faith that indicator of separating themselves from sin was total immersion in a *mikveh*, a hewn stone “tub.” By immersing themselves completely, they were committing their lives to *no compromise* with ongoing sin and unbiblical values. This was a deeply personal step



of intense determination to set one's heart to *turn away from* the defilement of sin and *live uprightly to please God* — in other words, *biblical repentance*. Stepping down to immerse oneself into the *mikveh* waters symbolized washing away the old life pattern of sin and rising up cleansed in spirit.

John the Baptizer used the Jordan River as a *mikveh* to immerse the repentant:

“It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send My messenger [John the Baptizer] ahead of you [Jesus], who will prepare Your way—a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.’” And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him.



Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River” (Mark 1:2-5).

Our heavenly Father sent John ahead of our Lord Jesus to prepare the way for Him. But, **what preparation did our Father know was needed?**

First, think of the drastic change to their historical religious practice which John was proclaiming as he used the Jordan River as a “*mikveh*” to prepare the way for the Lord. With cleansed hearts through immersion they were being prepared for the coming Lord, the prophe-

sied Lamb of God Who would be sacrificed on their behalf (see Isaiah 53:1-12), even if they weren't aware that He was already among them! No longer would the forgiveness of their sins depend on the Day of Atonement each year in which a spotless lamb was sacrificed on their behalf.

Through the preaching and labor of John, our heavenly Father was offering them a **baptism signifying their heartfelt repentance**. The people who came to John with humble hearts readily understood their own sinfulness and willingly confessed their sins. They eagerly received the cleansing immersion which physically signified their spiritual repentance.

You'll notice throughout the Book of Acts (see 2:38,41; 8:12; 8:38; 9:18; 10:47; 16:15; 16:33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16) that those who put their trust in Jesus were *immediately immersed* in baptism. Why? Because immersion baptism for the born again is their heartfelt response of identification with their new conviction that they don't want to go on sinning against God. Their new life of grace in Jesus as His beloved sheep far outweighs the allure of their old ways and former life.

Through the writings of Peter and Paul the Holy Spirit clarifies *why* immersion baptism is so important:

*"Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were **baptized into His death**? We were therefore **buried with Him through baptism into death** in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too **may live a new life**. If we have been **united with Him like this in His death**, we will certainly **also be united with Him in His resurrection**" (Romans 6:3-5).*

In your baptism of repentance you identify with Christ's death and resurrection, while pledging to keep a clear conscience.



John's baptism for repentance (Luke 3:3) called for turning away from sin and rising up into forgiveness and a new conviction about how to live life: *according to God's Word*. The new believer intentionally set aside their past so that their present and future ways could reflect the res-

urrection power of Jesus at work in them through His indwelling Spirit:

*"This also prefigures what delivers us now, the **water of immersion**, which is not the removal of dirt from the body, but **one's pledge to keep a good conscience toward God**, through the resurrection of **Jesus the Messiah**" (1Peter 3:21, JNT).*

Our Lord's first followers understood immersion baptism to be like plunging a cloth into dye. The cloth takes on the *quality* of the dye. Those who are im-



mersed into Christ are united with Him into a *new nature*. Paul definitively identifies our "water burial" with Christ so that by our trust in Him we're no longer enslaved to keep on sinning. Our "resurrection" from the immersion water then firmly identifies us as a new creation capable of taking on the *character qualities of Jesus* through ongoing transformation by His Spirit.

It's with this understanding of dying to slavery to sin and rising to live for Jesus and become more like Him that the Holy Spirit warns each of us through John to stop continuing to sin:

“No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him... The person who keeps on sinning is of the devil, because from the very beginning the devil has kept on sinning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work... No one who has God as his Father keeps on sinning, because the seed planted by God remains in him. That is, he cannot continue sinning, because he has God as his Father” (1John 3:6,8,9).

John’s warning here is significant. Don’t think that just because you get baptized you can live however you want and still be found acceptable to God. Graphically put, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud” (2Peter 2:22). A “pig-washing conversion” is wholly ineffectual if you keep holding onto whatever defiled you before!

Finally, a baptism of repentance fulfills one part of our Lord’s warning, “**No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit**” (John 3:5). His first Hebraic followers clearly understood that He was referring to immersion in water in their new spiritual birth. (“Immersion” into the Spirit will be discussed in our next Insight.)

So what changed this clear understanding of immersion baptism?

First, an important historical note. From its beginning, Roman Catholicism was plagued by fierce anti-Semitism. And centuries later many of the Protestant Reformers were gripped by the poison of anti-Semitism as well. From the second century onward the Gentile religious leadership was determined to make a clear split from any practices considered “Jewish.” As the religious establishment in Rome became more and more intertwined

with political power, anti-Semitic posture and practices became the law of the land.

Second, as the political/military might encompassed within Roman Catholicism conquered the pagan world, they widely incorporated syncretism into religious policy. (Syncretism means ecclesiastical leaders adapted pagan rituals and traditions into Christianity in order to make it more acceptable to conquered heathens to ensure their compliance.) **This was the source of infant baptism. Why? Most pagan tribes had an initiation rite by which a baby was accepted into the community. Infant baptism became an ideal bridge for the religious hierarchy to make pagans comfortable with Roman Catholicism as their new religion.**

Later, however, the Roman institution revised the biblical purpose and intent for baptism. The new edict stated that infant baptism washed away the stain of original sin passed on from Adam and Eve. How grievously contradictory this teaching was to God’s unchanging Word on why immersion baptism is specified solely for a repentant, born-again person who understands the reason they’re doing this!

Something to seriously consider:

During the 39 years we’ve served our Lord we’ve found a common thread among adults who were baptized only as infants: **their lives remain relatively unchanged.** Most have experienced little sense of **sanctification**, and are plagued by old toxic memories and motivations which hinder any transformation into the character of Jesus. We’ve also found that many perceive spiritual gifts which are apportioned by the Holy Spirit to be more like personality traits than Divine empowerments which come *after* a person is born again. And in faith communities which practice infant baptism, the *baptism of the Holy Spirit* is irrelevant.