

JESUS GATHERS DISCIPLES AND BEGINS HIS MINISTRY

Have you ever reflected on the group of men that became Jesus' disciples? They were a motley group: rugged fishermen, a tax collector, some doubtful individuals, some zealots who wanted to change the world through overthrowing the current government, men who deserted Christ when the chips were down. Yet how merciful of God to include such individuals in His select group to accompany His Son for three years! We all relate to them with relief, especially when we've put our foot in our mouth like Peter so often did, or when we haven't spoken up for Christ when we know we had an opportunity. Today we will begin to meet some of these men who walked with Christ through Judah and Galilee.

John 1:35-42 ESV:

*35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples,
36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"*

37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

38 Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

39 He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

*40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was **Andrew**, Simon Peter's brother.*

41 He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).

*42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called **Cephas**" (which means **Peter**).*

Remember from last week, that John is going through this week sequentially. So we are now at the third day of the week. On the seventh day we will be at a Wedding in Cana (John 2:1). Since Jewish weddings were usually on Wednesdays, it would make this third day the Sabbath. So on this Sabbath Day Jesus began selecting His disciples.

The two disciples of John the Baptist who left him to follow Jesus were **John**, the writer of the Gospel, and his friend **Andrew**. How did the **Baptist** feel about his followers leaving him to follow Jesus? John 3:30 records the Baptist's comments regarding this question: "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*"

When Jesus asked these two men, “*What are you seeking?*” He was undoubtedly trying to determine what it was they were looking for in a Messiah. If they were expecting a military leader to overthrow the Roman Empire, they would not want to serve Jesus. Jesus invited them to spend the day with Him. Jesus very likely used this time to develop a relationship with these men, perhaps telling them some of what He planned to do, and answering questions they may have had. They must have been very favorably impressed by what Jesus told them because Andrew went and got his brother Simon and brought him to the Christ. It is interesting that most of the references concerning Andrew show him bringing someone to Jesus. That is what Christians want to do once they have met the Lord? They want to bring others to Him too. The language here in verse 41 suggests that John also went to get his brother, James, to introduce him to Jesus.

Jesus named Simon, **Cephas (Peter)**. Both of those names mean “a rock,” although it would take a lot of time and effort before Jesus could develop Simon into a rock. But that shows us what Jesus wants to do for everyone who follows Him. He makes them God’s children, as we read in John 1:12 NRSV:

12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,

Andrew told his brother Simon: “*We have found the Messiah!*” In Hebrew the word *Messiah* means “**anointed**,” and the meaning of the Greek word is “Christ.” To the Jews, the meaning was the same as “Son of God.”¹ In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed and thereby set apart for special service. **Kings** were especially called “God’s anointed” (1 Samuel 26:11; Psalm 89:20). So, when the Jews spoke about their Messiah, they had in mind a king who would come to deliver them and establish the kingdom.

Jesus had to explain, however, even to His own followers that the cross had to come before the crown, that He must suffer before He could enter into His glory (Luke 24:13–35). The Jews of that time found it very difficult to accept that Jesus was the Messiah.²

John 1:43-51 ESV:

*43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found **Philip** and said to him, “Follow me.”*

44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

*45 Philip found **Nathanael** and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”*

46 Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”³

¹ Matt. 26:63–64; Mark 14:61–62; Luke 22:67–70.

² John 7:26, 40–44; 9:22; 10:24.

³ By calling him “an Israelite in whom is no guile (deceit),” Jesus was certainly referring to Jacob, the ancestor of the

48 Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”
 49 Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”
 50 Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.”
 51 And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

This is the fourth day of the seven-day period that John is describing. Jesus called Philip and Philip trusted Him and followed Him. Philip gave evidence of his trust and faith in Jesus by sharing it with **Nathanael**. Philip told Nathanael that Jesus was the Promised One of whom Moses and the prophets wrote.⁴

Nathanael knew that the town in which Jesus was raised, Nazareth, had a very bad reputation (Acts 24:5) and he questioned how anything good could come from there, especially the expected Messiah. It would be like saying in today’s world that Jesus came from the wrong side of the tracks. It would make sense to most Jews that Jesus would come from a place like Jerusalem or Hebron. Philip, however, gave the only sensible answer: “*Come and see.*” He knew that once Nathanael had an opportunity to meet and talk with Jesus, all his questions would be answered. “Come” in the Bible represents an invitation of God’s grace.⁵

We all need to guard against prejudices and Nathanael was no exception. Though a good man, Nathanael allowed his prejudice toward the people of Nazareth to make him think Jesus was an impostor. It did not take long, however, for Jesus to wipe away any doubts that Nathanael might have.

Let us look at verse 47 where Jesus says Nathanael is an “*Israelite in whom there is no deceit.*” This is probably a reference to his ancestor Jacob who was deceitful. You may recall that in Genesis 27:35 Jacob is labeled as an Israelite who was deceitful.⁶ Jacob was born holding the heel of his brother, so that he was named Jacob, meaning “to supplant, deceive, attack from the rear.”⁷ Jesus may have immediately seen a contrast between Jacob and Nathanael, which prompted Him to refer to Nathanael as a man without deceit. Jesus may also be suggesting that Nathanael’s directness indicated that he was an Israelite without any underlying motives and that he was willing to check out for himself the things that were being said about this Jesus.

Nathanael was amazed that Jesus knew about him. Jesus said He knew exactly what

Jews, a man who used guile (deceit) to trick his brother, his father, and his father-in-law.

⁴ Deut. 18:18-19; John 1:21, 25; Isa. 52:13-53:12; Dan. 7:13; Micah 5:2; Zech. 9:9.

⁵ John 1:39; 7:37; 21:12.

⁶ You can read the whole story about Jacob’s deceitful behavior toward his brother Esau in Genesis 27.

⁷ Elwell, Walter A.; Comfort, Philip Wesley: *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (Tyndale Reference Library), S. 661.

Nathanael was doing before Philip approached him: he was under the fig tree. Jesus' ability to see Nathanael without actually being physically present convinced Nathanael that Jesus was the Son of God and the appointed King of Israel. Nathanael's experience was like that of the **Samaritan woman** at the well, which we will investigate in a few weeks.

Jesus gave Nathanael a mild scolding here, asking whether it was just because He saw him under the fig tree that he believed. Jesus promised Nathanael that he would see greater things than this, and in the next three years Nathanael did see much greater things than these.

In verse 51 when Jesus says that Nathanael will see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man, He is again referring to Jacob in the Old Testament. Nathanael would have instantly understood the reference, but since we may not, let us recall what Jesus is talking about. After deceiving his brother, Esau, for his father's blessing and birthright, he had run away from home in fear that his brother would kill him. His first night away from home was spent at Bethel where God appeared to him in a dream. A ladder was let down from Heaven on which the angels were ascending and descending. At Bethel Jacob learned that God would always be with him. This is what Jesus wanted Nathanael and the other disciples to know about Him. Just as Jacob received supernatural communication from God, so would Nathanael and the others. The Son of Man (Jesus) replaced the ladder in Jacob's dream. The angels would minister to Jesus and they would be subject to Him. Here Jesus was given charge over the angels. He could send them as messengers to Heaven, and they would return with messages for Him and to care for Him. So Jesus is saying that Nathanael will see Heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

This illustration is also for us when we consider that the ladder is Christ. Only through Him can you and I make contact with God. Jesus said, ". . . *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me*" (John 14:6).

CHAPTER 2

JESUS' MINISTRY BEGINS

John 2:1-12 ESV:

1 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

2 Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples.

3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

8 And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it.

9 When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom

10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."

11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

12 After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

Now let us go back to verse one of chapter two and work our way through this section carefully.

John 2:1-2 ESV:

1 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

2 Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples

This is the third day after calling Philip and Nathanael (John 1:45–51)⁸ and it is the seventh, or last, day of the week John has been recording. It would have taken Jesus two days to travel from Bethany to Cana in Galilee.⁹ Jewish tradition required that virgins be married on a Wednesday, while widows were married on a Thursday. This particular

⁸ Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 2:1.

⁹ Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A. R.; Fausset, A. R.; Brown, David; Brown, David: *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. Jn 2:1.

wedding was most likely on Wednesday. When we look at the other references to days in Chapter 1 we can see that the miracle at Cana happened at the conclusion of a seven-day period, which describes the first week of Jesus' ministry.¹⁰

Jesus was not snobbish and quite readily accepted invitations to any number of social events. He seemed to enjoy participating in the normal experiences of life and undoubtedly added something special to any occasion by His presence. Jesus attended this wedding with His mother and several of His disciples. Why were they invited to this wedding? It is not possible to know for sure but perhaps the bride and groom were friends or relatives of Mary and Jesus. Another consideration is that Jesus was considered a Rabbi (John 1:49) and Rabbis were often invited to weddings.¹¹ Jesus blessed the occasion of a marriage, not only by His attending, but also by performing His first miracle there.¹²

John 2:3-5 ESV:

3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Jewish wedding feasts usually lasted a week and it would be quite embarrassing for the host family of the bride and groom to run out of either food or wine. In fact, according to Jewish practices and traditions a family could actually be fined for running out of food and wine during a wedding feast.¹³ This may be the reason that prompted Mary, however she discovered this shortage, to bring the situation to Jesus' attention. She obviously knew who He was and therefore knew that He could be of some help. The word "woman" that Jesus used to address His mother may seem a somewhat disrespectful way to address His mother to us today, but it was actually a polite expression in this culture.¹⁴ However, by using this translation of the word "woman," Jesus is politely advising His mother that she can no longer exercise maternal authority in his Messianic work. That is always a difficult lesson for mothers and fathers to learn, when to let go of their offspring. Jesus asked, "*What does this have to do with me?*" Literally the phrase means, "*What is it to me and to thee?*" It could also be translated as "*What is it to us?*" That is certainly possible and fits in with the next statement also. "*My hour has not yet come.*" Jesus refers to His "*hour*" in three other places in the Gospel of John (12:27; 13:1 and 17:1). In each of those cases He is referring to His death on the Cross. So this comment may be an early reference to His true purpose in coming.

¹⁰ Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 2:1.

¹¹ Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Book III*, p. 355. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. 1973 printing.

¹² Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 2:1

¹³ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 2:1.

¹⁴ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:278.

However, some commentators also think that the time to disclose His ministry of Messiahship to the public had not yet come.¹⁵ Yet when you know that just a few verses later Jesus does the miracle, you may be puzzled. But these commentators go on to explain that Jesus was probably alluding to the fact that to disclose His ministry by performing a miracle in public would not be according to the schedule God had set for this information to become public. These commentators also explain that this miracle was not made public. Only a few individuals knew what Christ did and that Jesus was the source of the excellent wine that was being served.

Mary's comments to the servants indicate that she trusted Jesus to do what was right. Behavior typical of a Jewish mother, right? However, Mary's instructions here would be most appropriate for all of us to remember: "*Do whatever He tells you.*"

John 2:6-10 ESV:

6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

8 And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it.

9 When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom

10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."

Jesus instructed the servants to draw from the large water jars that were now full of water. Only a few people, the servants at the wedding and His new disciples, knew of Jesus' first miracle. The servants knew the source of the water, but not the power that made the wine.¹⁶ So Jesus' ministry was not yet made known to the general public. Imagine the impact of this miracle on Jesus' disciples? Imagine your reaction if the person next to you at a wedding turned the pitcher of water on the table into good wine. You would probably be amazed and wonder how that person could do that. It must have been an additional confirmation to the disciples, however, that Jesus was who He claimed to be. It undoubtedly would have strengthened their faith. They would continue to see miracle after miracle as they followed Jesus, and they would soon have little if any doubt that He was the Son of God.

When the master of the feast commented about saving the best wine until the end, there could be a deeper message in his comments, a message beyond a compliment concerning good wine. The significance of this miracle could be that Christianity is far better than

¹⁵ Robertson, A.T.: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997, S. Jn 2:4.

¹⁶ Robertson, A.T.: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997, S. Jn 2:9.

Judaism. God has kept the best gift, His Son, until last.¹⁷

The question on some of your minds might be, “How could Jesus create all of this wine for people to drink? Does He approve of drunken orgies?” The answer is no. Warren Wiersbe said the following in his commentary:

“It is worth noting that the Jews always diluted the wine with water, usually to the proportion of three parts water to one part wine. While the Bible does not command total abstinence, it certainly *magnifies* it and definitely warns against drunkenness.

Wine was the normal drink of the people in that day, and we must not use this miracle as an argument for the use of alcoholic beverages today. A man given to drink once said to me, ‘After all, Jesus turned water into wine!’ My reply was, ‘If you use Jesus as your example for drinking, why don’t you follow His example in everything else?’ Then I read Luke 22:18 to him. This verse clearly states that, in heaven now, Jesus is a teetotaler!

Sincere Christians of our day consider such verses as 1 Corinthians 8:9; 10:23, 31 before concluding that the use of alcoholic beverages is a wise thing today. I am reminded of the story of the drunken coal miner who was converted and became a vocal witness for Christ. One of his friends tried to trap him by asking, ‘Do you believe that Jesus turned water into wine?’ ‘I certainly do!’ the believer replied. ‘In my home, He has turned wine into furniture, decent clothes, and food for my children!’¹⁸

In verse 11, John refers to the miracle as “a sign.” What is a sign? What does a highway sign tell you? It points you to something else. Jesus did not want to be known exclusively as a miracle worker. It was His ultimate purpose for people to believe He was the Messiah and also to believe in the Father who sent Him (John 5:14–24). Therefore Jesus would often include a message along with the miracle. The message would be what the sign pointed to. In John 5, the healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath pointed to Jesus as being God, “the Lord of the Sabbath.” The feeding of the 5,000 (John 6) pointed to a sermon on the Bread of Life.

Some churches falsely teach that Christ performed miracles when He was a child. They get this from some writings that could not meet the tests applied to the four Gospels and therefore were not considered to be truly God’s Word inspired by the Holy Spirit. But

¹⁷ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:278.

¹⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 2:1.

even more importantly John 2:11 clearly states that the turning of the water into wine was the beginning of His miracles. It was the first of Jesus' miracles. Keep in mind that John recorded these signs in order to prove that Jesus is God (John 20:30–31) so that people might believe in Him and be saved.¹⁹

¹⁹ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1997, c1992, S. 214.