

CHAPTER 23, Part 2, pages 267-69
Acquiring followers and the wedding at Cana

John's testimony

Page 267 begins with the interrogation of John by the religious leaders (John 1:19-36). The interaction between John and the religious leaders illustrates the pattern of conversation in John's Gospel --- the participants talk past each other. The authorities ask questions and John responds with ambiguous comments.

In John, we do not see Jesus's baptism. In fact, John does not even claim to have baptized Jesus. He does relate that the Spirit came down and "remained" on Jesus. John identifies Jesus as "the Lamb of God." Only in the Gospel of John and the Revelation is Jesus given this title.

Jesus acquires some followers (John 1: 35-51)

In the ancient world philosophers and teachers often had groups of students or "disciples" who lived with them, observed their lives, and listened to their teachings. Usually a person had to request permission to become a student of a teacher. In the Gospel of John this is the pattern we see: Some of John's disciples hear John call Jesus "the Lamb of God," and they go after Jesus. Jesus invites them to stay with him and they do.¹

Nathanael is a skeptic. He does not believe that anybody worth following could come out of little back-country Nazareth. Philip repeats the invitation Jesus had issued to Peter and Andrew: "Come and see." Nathanael is flattered with the compliment Jesus pays him ("Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit") and responds, "How do you know me?" assuming, perhaps that his good reputation has preceded him. Jesus's answer with specifics about Nathanael's recent location cuts short his self-

¹ If you are wondering what happened to the story about Jesus walking along beside the Sea of Galilee and calling four fishermen from their work, good for you. That story is in Matthew and Mark, but not in John, which is the Gospel that THE STORY is following at this point.

congratulation and provokes the first confession of faith in this part of the STORY.

See the single quotation marks around ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’? **Have someone in your group who has a complete Bible look up Genesis 28: 10-17, from which those words in single quotes are taken. What do you think this allusion is trying to say about Jesus?**

The wedding at Cana

This story is found only in the Gospel of John (2: 1-11), where it is called “the first of the signs through which [Jesus] revealed his glory.” “Sign” is the word that John uses for “miracle,” to show that all of Jesus’ miracles are signposts pointing to God.

Here’s the cultural setting: Weddings in Jesus’ setting were not religious ceremonies as much as they were parties. The couple did not make public promises to each other as Christians do now. The two families just agreed on how much the man’s family had to pay the woman’s family, the man was escorted to the big party by his friends, everybody had a good time, the couple had sex and that was it (See Genesis 21:29-30). There was a lot of celebrating, eating, and drinking. The best quality wine was served first and then after the guests were already so drunk that they wouldn’t know the difference, the poorer quality wine was served.

In this case, the wine gave out before the party was over. Jesus’s mother Mary drops a hint to him but he responds, “My hour has not yet come.” Jesus takes direction only from God; he does not act based on what he wants or what others want from him.

Observant Jews would wash their hands before eating. That’s why there six water jars the size of 30-gallon trash cans. The story does not describe the miracle happening; we are told that the servants filled the jars with water and somehow by the time it got to the master of ceremonies it was delicious wine---better than anything that had been served so far at this party.

With many of Jesus's miracles it is easy to see the point: blind people are able to see, deaf people are able to hear, sick people are healed, etc. To many readers, this story seems rather frivolous, except that such an impressive miracle certainly would "reveal" Jesus's connection with God. There are miracle stories in Matthew, Mark, and Luke that John does not tell and some that only John tells, like this one. So we know that stories are included for a reason in addition to the mere fact that they happened.

Discuss in your group some ideas about why John might have included this story besides just that it happened first. Does it have a theological meaning? By the way, there is no "right" answer.

Thoughts on Christian maturity

Jesus' invitation to two of John's disciples was "Come, and you will see." Philip's invitation to the skeptic Nathanael was the same. Nathanael's skepticism is not that far removed from the attitude of many today. We don't know why he looked down on Nazareth, but we do know why people say, "Can anything good come out of a big-steeple Baptist church?"

"Can anything good come from those Christians who hate everyone who is different from them?"

"Can anything good come from those Christians who reject science in favor of myths?"

"Can anything good come from those Christians who think God wants them to be rich?"

"Can anything good come from those Christians who think it was "God's will" for my husband/friend/child/wife/mother/father to die?"

It usually does little good to argue with people. Sometimes the most effective thing we can say is, "I understand why you might think that, but just come and see. Jesus is so much better than the church. Come and see. All I know is that Christ changed my life. Come and see."

Pray that the Holy Spirit will make us a community of faith that evokes this response from people who come and see: "Oh, I didn't know . . . I'm glad I came."