

Lesson 46: Jesus Begins His Public Ministry: The Choosing of His First Disciples and His 1st Miracle.

A. Introduction: Covered in the Dust of the Rabbi

In the first century, if a young Jewish man wanted to become a disciple of a rabbi (teacher) –he was expected to leave his family and his job to join his rabbi. They would live together 24 hours a day—walking from place to place, teaching and learning, studying and working. They discussed and memorized the Scriptures and applied them to life.

In the first century, education was of utmost importance. The highest aim was to become a Rabbi, but it was a long and difficult process. Boys started studying at the synagogue by the age of five, all training, hoping, dreaming that one day they would be the teacher, the Rabbi.

At age fourteen, after nine years of studying, the best of the students would have the entire Old Testament memorized. Can you imagine? The entire Old Testament! But the age of fourteen was very important because this was the age that a boy could approach a Rabbi and ask to become their disciple.

If the Rabbi thought they were smart enough, he would agree to an interview. During which time the Rabbi would grill the young teen on all the theology, often using what seemed like trick questions. If the boy was found fitting, the Rabbi would say he could be his disciple, after which time the boy would leave everything (family, home, any profession) and follow the Rabbi in every movement for the rest of his life. But the Rabbis were very selective -- they wouldn't accept someone that they didn't think could make it.

Sadly, not many boys got their dream. It was normal for a Rabbi to only choose one or two disciples. After which time, the rest of the boys would be told that they were done learning and needed to go home and learn their family trade.

Now this is where it becomes really interesting. Remember Jesus' twelve disciples? They would have gone through this same education as children. At the age of fourteen they would have sought out the Rabbi they most wanted to be paired with. And you know what? The Rabbi's rejected all of the twelve. That's why Jesus finds his disciples fishing, banking, doctoring, and working in the law. Do you see---the twelve had been told they weren't good enough and had already been dismissed to go back to their family and find a job. **They weren't the best of the best. They were losers--Rejects.**

When Jesus approaches Andrew and Simon/Peter on the shore and asked them to follow him, they toss down their nets immediately. Why? Because someone was finally telling them they were worth it. That they were wanted. These men were most likely in their late teens and early twenties, and thought their opportunity to follow a Rabbi was a ship that had sailed long ago.

So that is a little bit of the back story of what's going on here as Jesus calls his first disciples.

B. Jesus Chooses His First Disciples

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, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

There were two disciples of John the Baptist who heard him pointing to Jesus as God's lamb. Only one of the two is named and that is Andrew, who then finds Simon Peter his brother. We don't know who the other disciple was. Although because he isn't named, it is highly likely that we are meeting here the author of this gospel, John himself.

Here's that scene in the film, *The Gospel of John*, part of the Visual Bible series. (starts 7:50-10:08)

When these two disciples heard John the Baptist's witness, pointing to Jesus as the Lamb of God, they left John the Baptist and followed Jesus. Jesus turns to them and asks, “What do you want?” They wanted to know where Jesus was staying. Jesus invites them to “come and see.” He is really inviting them to abide with Him, to begin following Him.

Let read John 1:43-51 (ESV) to see who is next in line to become one of Jesus' disciples:

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!”

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.”

Here is that scene depicted in the 2003 film, *The Gospel of John*, part of the Visual Bible Series. (Time: 10:19)

On His way north to **Galilee**, He called **Philip** to be His disciple. Philip's hometown of **Bethsaida** was on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee

Philip's testimony to **Nathanael** stressed that Jesus is **the** Promised **One** of whom **Moses** and **the prophets wrote**. Surprisingly Philip called **Jesus... the son of Joseph**. But this is what the disciples would have believed at this time. Yet Nathanael would soon recognize that He is "the Son of God."

Nathanael momentarily stumbled over the hometown of the Messiah and exclaims, "**Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?**" Nathanael knew of the poor reputation of Nazareth. Surely the Messiah would come from Jerusalem, Hebron, or some other prominent city. **Philip** was wise enough not to argue and he simply invited his friend to meet Jesus: **Come and see**. He knew that Nathanael's questions would then be resolved. The same is true today. Instead of arguing with someone or trying to answer their every question, often times, we be better off to just invite them to meet Jesus, or to "taste and see, and experience the goodness of the Lord."

1:47. Jesus, having supernatural knowledge called **Nathanael... a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false** –or in whom there is no guile. Upon hearing this, **Nathanael** was puzzled as to **how** Jesus knew about him. **Jesus** said He knew exactly what Nathanael was doing **before Philip** came up to him; he was **under the fig tree**. Jesus' supernatural knowledge moved **Nathanael** to confess Him as **the Son of God** and **the King of Israel**.

Let's look at Luke 5:1-11 to see his take on how these fishermen met up with Jesus.

Luke 5:1-11 (ESV)

¹ On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret,

² and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.

³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

⁵ And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."

⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.

⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken,

¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."

¹¹ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Let's take a look at how the Jesus Film from 1979 brings this scene to life.

Let's take a brief look at these four fishermen that Jesus chose as His first disciples:

Peter was a fisherman from Galilee who was previously called Simon and was also called Cephas; he was Andrew's brother; wrote 1st and 2nd Peter; preached the Gospel in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Betania, Italy, and Asia; was afterwards crucified by Nero in Rome.

Andrew: Was a fisherman from Galilee; was Peter's brother; brought Peter to Jesus; preached to the Scythians and Thracians; was crucified and buried at Patrae.

James: The son of Zebedee, brother to John; from Capernaum; referred to by Jesus as one of the sons of thunder; when preaching in Judea, was killed by Herod the tetrarch and was buried there.

John: The son of Zebedee, brother to James; from Capernaum; referred to by Jesus as one of the sons of thunder and identified as the disciple "whom Jesus loved"; he wrote the Gospel of John, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John; in Asia, was banished by Domitian the king to the isle of Patmos where he wrote the Book of Revelation; died in Ephesus.

C. The Wedding at Cana: Jesus' First Miracle

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.

Most likely, 3 days after the calling of Philip and Nathanael, they traveled to Cana in Galilee. Cana was near Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. Weddings lasted 7 days and the host would invite as many people as possible, especially prominent teachers or rabbis like Jesus.

John 2:3 (ESV)

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

It cost quite a bit to put on a wedding and the host was responsible to make sure that there was an ample supply of wine for the entire seven days. In fact, it would be a great embarrassment and you'd be talked about and a laughingstock if you did not adequately provide for the guests you had invited.

Well, after Jesus' mother informs him that the host has run out of wine, here's what happens next....

John 2:4-11 (ESV)

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.

Here is that scene as depicted in the Gospel of John film in the Visual Bible Series. Gospel of John: Wedding at Cana, 13:30 – 14:45

Jesus and His disciples are also at the wedding as invited guests and at this point, it appears that Jesus has his first disciples accompanying him: Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and John. This might well have been the wedding of a friend that was known to both Jesus and his mother.

Bob Deffinbaugh at Bible.org makes this observation:

Well into the festivities, Jesus' mother becomes aware of a most embarrassing situation—the wine has run out, and there appears to be no solution. Either no more wine is available, or there is no money to buy more wine. The guests seem unaware of what is happening. If something is not done, all will be embarrassed. Jesus' mother seems to step in and take charge when she says to Jesus, "They have no wine left."

Even though Jesus has performed no miracles up to this point, his mother expects him to do something to turn this disastrous situation around.

⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." When Jesus addresses his mother as "woman"—for that day and time, it's not as harsh as it sounds. It was a term of respect and courtesy, yet it also was establishing some distance between Jesus and his mother. In other words, he was saying that the old days of being subject to her were behind them and he now had to be about his Father's business, meaning the business of Yahweh, the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

John 2:5 (ESV)

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Mary knows her son and she has a confidence that He is going to do something to turn this embarrassing situation around. So she tells the servants to be ready to do whatever Jesus tells them to do. She has a quiet confidence in Jesus, her son, and her Lord that He will do what's right, and that's how we ought to face each disastrous situation—with a quietness and confidence that God has everything under control.

Isaiah 30:15 says, "Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength."

On several occasions, such as before festivals, and after contracting ritual impurity, Jewish people would ceremonially purify themselves. A devoutly Jewish wedding ceremony might have required many ceremonial cleansings. To facilitate these washings, a substantial amount of water was kept on hand. Nearby, within sight of our Lord it would be six large stone water pots. Each pot has a capacity of between 20 and 30 gallons of water, a total of around 150 gallons. The 6 water pots were available at the wedding because of the matter of purification and the large amount of water would suggest a mikveh. It's also possible that the water pots at Cana were used specifically for ritual washing of the

hands rather than for the mikveh. The tradition of Jews called for pouring water over the hands before eating.

Jewish tradition greatly praised weddings, but did not approve using for wedding wine any vessels set aside for ritual purposes. Holy vessels that were used for ritual washing or cleansing set aside for sacred purposes and were not to be used for profane purposes such as storing wine. But Jesus cared more about his friend's honor than the religious tradition of the time.

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

The water that they used to fill up these 20-30 gal. water pots may not have been drinkable water. So you can imagine the shock and surprise to the servants when next Jesus says to them:

"Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it.

Jesus does not even tell the servants that the water has become wine. They must have thought, "If we serve this water to the head steward, he'll fire us!" Jesus doesn't do any magical incantation, no "abra-cadabra" garbage; he doesn't wave his hands over the water pots. There is no indication in this story that he did anything other than ask the stewards to fill the water pots and then serve the contents. And the question arises: At what point did the water change into wine and did it change color?

I like Bob Deffinbaugh at Bible.org take on how this might have gone down from this point on:

The head steward has no idea where his drink has come from, but the servants know. The suspense of those moments between the time the head steward drinks the wine and the time he responds must have been sheer torture for the servants. The head steward sniffs the cup, and then sips. He then calls for the bridegroom—what is he about to say? The scenarios which played in the heads of the servants would make interesting reading.

With a smile, and perhaps a pat on the bridegroom's back, the head steward proclaims this wine to be great—the best yet. The timing is a little unorthodox, he tells the bridegroom, but the wine is great. Usually, he notes, the trick is to save the inferior wine until last. When everyone has had their fill of wine, or more (literally "have become drunk"), their taste will not be as discerning, and thus the inferior wine may not be detected. But this wine is the best yet! The bridegroom has outdone himself, saving the very best until last. What looks like certain shame has turned to sudden fame for the bridegroom and the head steward.

What is so special about Jesus changing water into wine? I've been to numerous wineries and wine tastings. My wife has heard me say on more than one occasion that my secret desire is to be a vitner-to own a winery and make the best wine and have people show up for wine tastings and to drink the wine with friends and family. I have yet to go to any wine tasting where the people who are gathered—always family and friends have a dour look. They're always smiling, laughing, talking in animated conversations and having a great time.

But to be a good winemaker –you’ve got to know how to take a watery substance such as grape juice and turn it into wine. First you wait for the grapes to grow and mature. Then you pick the choicest grapes for the best wine you want to make. You crush the grapes into a mush. Then you add some water, yeast, and sugar. You allow this mixture to ferment over a period of several weeks. During that time you skim off the solid material until you are left with pure liquid - wine. Wine must be slightly aged to be drinkable - white wine must sit for half a year, and red wine for a full year.

Some of the most famous wines are aged for many years. Jesus didn't turn the water into a fruity grape juice, as some preachers and Bible teachers teach, nor did he turn it into ordinary table wine.

He instantly produced the finest and most expensive of wines - a fine vintage wine that would normally take years to age. That is as amazing as turning the water into wine itself. He turned the water into aged, vintage wine! And He didn't produce just enough wine to satisfy the embarrassed bride and groom and guests. He produced 120 gallons! An abundance. The instantaneous turning of water into wine shows Jesus' supernatural power to transform natural things - what is physical and material - into something of a higher order. He has the same power which God possesses - to create, transform, and change creation itself.

Let's pick up on this scene where we left off in the film, *The Gospel of John* (14:48-16:15)

D. What conclusions can we draw from this miracle?

1. God cares about everything in our lives.

I like how Bob Dillenbaugh states this as a miracle of luxury, not out of necessity. There was no one on their death bed or suffering from a debilitating infirmity. God is concerned about our non-critical problems, about the everyday issues of life. He's not just a God to whom you reach out to when it's a 911 type of emergency. He cares about the little things and those things that make for joy; and those things that keep up from being embarrassed in front of our friends and family. So often, we are led to believe that we are bothering God or "over-burdening" Him with our problems. He is the Almighty God. He's omnipresent, He's everywhere, and He can answer your prayers as well as be attentive to the prayers of everyone else who is seeking Him out, around the world, at the same time.

2. Jesus is not a killjoy—He wants to bring joy and happiness into our lives and those special occasions in our lives. Sadly, some have a misguided view of God that to follow Him means that he wants us to live lives that are devoid of joy and happiness. There are some sects of Christians who would have you believe that to follow Jesus, you can't smile or laugh. The look on their faces is as though they've been baptized in lemon juice. Always a frown. But as we see here at this wedding; Jesus put his stamp of approval on weddings and celebration, and His first miracle of turning the water into wine allowed the party to go on.

3. Most people didn't even know this miracle had taken place. Jesus made no announcement. No one knew what had happened except for the servants, Mary and the disciples. Since it was not yet His time to reveal Himself, he did this first miracle under the radar.

4. Jesus manifested His glory. John 2:11 (ESV) ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. He put who he was as God

on display for His followers to witness. He wanted them to see that He was fully God. And John tells us that Jesus' disciples believed in Him. In other words His disciples saw His glory and were strengthened in their faith in Him. This is just what Jesus intended.

Here's how Jesus' glory was manifested. This miracle, this sign at Cana shows us that He cannot only improve the quality of our lives, but change and transform us to be like Him. He takes the ordinary like a vat full of water and transforms it into something special, something desirable, something that brings great joy. And that is what He does in our lives as well. He takes you and I as ordinary people, who may have nothing going for us, who may be considered by the world to be poor, uneducated losers, and He transforms our lives into that which is special and He adds great value to our lives, because He adopts us into His family as sons and daughters. He wants us to experience His joy, His peace and His love. He wants us to know the power of His Holy Spirit and He wants to set us free from the fear of death. He wants us to experience life in His Kingdom as sons and daughters of the Almighty God. Jesus blessed this nameless couple at their wedding reception in Cana, not only with His presence but with His life-changing power.

E. Did Jesus really create alcoholic wine or just grape juice?

Jesus' first miracle at this wedding was to make 100-180 gallons of the finest wine. However, one commentator said it's not a sin to make wine, it's a sin to consume wine. If you can't connect the dots that some of that alcohol will end up in some of those people, you're living in a parallel universe.

If God makes wine, and Jesus drinks it, and it's given for the gladness of our hearts, then someone who says it's vile, wicked and wrong has got a real problem, because they're saying that God sinned by making alcohol, and Jesus sinned by putting it to his lips—and that's a foolish position.

There is the abstentionist argument and it goes like this: So many people abuse alcohol that we should never drink alcohol. God gave Israel food, drink and wealth and they used it for sin. Did God abstain in giving them things that they would abuse? Has God ever given you something that you abuse? Given you a tongue and you say things you shouldn't say, given you hands and you touch things you shouldn't touch, given you a mind and you thought things you shouldn't have thought, given you a mouth and you've eaten things you shouldn't have even and drunk things you shouldn't have drunk. He's given you money and you spent it on things you shouldn't have spent it on.

The abstentionist teaching is that we should get rid of things that cause us to stumble. Is there anything on planet earth that somebody has not used to sin with? Everything has been used.

This position sounds good, but what it ends up doing is abstaining everything. You keep making rules--rules that aren't in the Bible. You keep making rules about the rules about the rules. When Jesus comes, does He break any rules in the Bible. NO. But he does break the stupid rules that we've made. **And then we'll say, "He's not as holy as we are--we should kill him."**

Did Jesus drink in a day when people were abusing alcohol. Did Jesus abstain in a society where people were over-indulging. He did not. You feel that you are holier than Jesus because you abstain.

Jesus didn't abstain in a society where people were abusing it.

I don't want to spend any more time on this argument. I just want you to understand that Jesus made wine that was alcoholic—where you could get drunk, and people probably got drunk at this wedding, but He still created the wine. If you have a pastor or teacher telling you that this wasn't alcoholic wine, that it was just grape juice, I'd be very concerned about that person's ability to read and rightly divide the Word of God. I'd be afraid of what else they might be teaching that is in error, and has no scriptural support.

Am I trying to get you to drink wine or alcohol? No. But I want you to see that it is a blessing from God and that the very first miracle was that which made people glad and joyful. And you shouldn't look down on a brother or sister who drinks alcohol, or think that they are less of a Christian. They may be more in tune with the spirit of God than you are and walking in greater liberty, freedom and joy.

- John Calvin, one of the greatest pastors and Bible commentators, he had in his compensation package that he would get 250 gal. of wine for his duties as a pastor.
- Martin Luther's wife, Catherine, was a classically-trained certified brewer of ale.
- When the Puritans landed, did they erect the first permanent bldg. as a church or a brewery? They erected a brewery.
- Martin Luther said that "Do you suppose that abuses are eliminated by destroying the object which is abused? Men can go wrong with wine and women. Shall then should we abolish and prohibit women? The answer is "No." Some people worship the stars...should we pluck them out of the sky?
- Psalm 104:14-15 (NKJV)
14 He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, That he may bring forth food from the earth,
15 And wine that makes glad the heart of man, Oil to make his face shine, And bread which strengthens man's heart.
- And I'll close this discussion here with a verse from **the Torah**:
Deuteronomy 14:25-26 (ESV)
²⁵ then you shall turn it into money and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place that the LORD your God chooses
²⁶ and spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or **wine or strong drink**, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household.

F. Conclusion

1. We learned today that the disciples were not good enough to make the cut, but Jesus gave them a second chance. He saw something in them that they didn't see in themselves. As with His first miracle at the wedding at Cana, Jesus can something so ordinary as water and turn it into

something special, something that people get excited about. And Jesus does that with us. He takes our ordinary, mundane lives and turns them into something extraordinary where He comes to live within us and empowers us by His Spirit and brings us into a Sabbath rest where we cease from our own labors. That's Good News!

2. From his first miracle, we learned that Jesus cares about every aspect of our lives, even the little things. We can come to him about any matter at any time of day or night.
3. Our God and Savior is one of great joy and He enjoyed parties and celebrations and His miracle of turning the water into wine was cause for great celebration and joy at this wedding.
4. Jesus manifested His glory by taking that which is ordinary and making it into something special, something of great value. And that's what He does in our lives—He transforms our ordinary, boring existence into something exciting and valuable—where we have meaning and purpose and a calling to live, work and play as children of Almighty God. Even as Jesus gave the ordinary water a new identity, Jesus gives us a new identity and He says we have great value and worth as sons and daughters of the Most High God.

Next Lesson 47: You Must Be Born Again