

JOHN 1-3 CHRIST'S FIRST DISCIPLES; CANA; NICODEMUS



After Jesus returned from being tempted in the wilderness by Satan, He came to see John the Baptist, and John bore witness that Jesus was the much awaited Messiah and also the Son of God.

John had told the Jewish leaders, out of modesty, he didn't consider himself as the Elijah to come, although he knew the prophecies about him coming in the power of Elijah. He simply let Jesus later give witness that he truly had fulfilled that role of Elijah (Mt. 17:11-13). John the Baptist also told them he considered himself unworthy even to untie the sandals of the coming Messiah (John 1:27). The teaching in those days was that the disciple was to serve his master in everything--except the humiliation of removing the dirty, dusty sandals from his master's feet. John, in his humility, said he wasn't worthy of even doing that very menial task.

Next, we read, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' I did not know Him, but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.' And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and *He* remained upon Him'" (John 1:29-32).

Notice the mistake made in the New King James version when it says "He" remained upon Him. They changed an impersonal pronoun into a personal one due to the belief in the Trinity. But many versions (including the King James version) have it correct when they say "*it* abode upon Him," from the Gk. *emeinen*. That is why it is important to have someone carefully examine the term in the original Greek.

The next day, upon seeing Jesus again, John repeats, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" Then, two of John's disciples began to follow Jesus.

We read, "One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, 'You are Simon, the son of Jonah.' You shall be called Cephas (which is translated, a stone)" (John 1:36-43). Andrew and John were fishermen by trade and the sons of two wealthy men who had formed a

successful partnership. John is so humble he doesn't even mention his name in his entire Gospel, and just identifies himself as "the disciple that Jesus loved." Notice the emphasis even here is not on him, as 'the disciple that loved Jesus,' but rather on Jesus and whom He loved. What an example of humility! Yet, at the beginning, John had a long way to go, and was even called one of the "sons of thunder" – probably for a quick and fierce temper (Mark 3:17; Lk. 9:54).

Regarding the term "Cephas," Robertson's *Word Pictures* says, "The Aramaic *Cephas* (rock) is only applied to Simon in John except by Paul (1 Cor. 1:12; Gal. 1:18). But the Greek *Petros* is used by all. In the ancient Greek *petra* was used for the massive ledge of rock like Stone Mountain while *petros* was a detached fragment of the ledge, though itself large."

Peter, who started out so unstable, would one day be a solid rock as He drew strength from that real "Petra" that was Christ.

From the Jordan River, they went to Bethsaida (literally, place of fishing), and Andrew and Peter's home. There, they found Philip, that also became Jesus' disciple (Jn. 1:44). Then came Nathaniel, who was greatly impressed when Jesus described where he had previously been. Jesus told him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (Jn. 1:51). Nathaniel is one of the twelve (John 21:2) and also had the name of Bartholomew (Mark 3:18).

Yes, the time of great miracles was about to begin. It was God the Father who was permitting this and angels would do Christ's bidding. We notice here there is a time for great miracles and a time when that is not the case. It is God the Father who determines this.

From Bethsaida, they traveled to the town of Cana, probably modern Khirbet Qana, nine miles north of Nazareth. Jesus and His five disciples went to a wedding, along with Mary, His mother.

Jewish weddings could last up to seven days, but the wine had run out. *Expositor's* explains: "A wedding is always a gala occasion, and in a village like Cana it would be a community celebration. 'Refreshments' were provided for all guests. Of these, wine was very important. To fail in providing adequately for the guests would involve social disgrace. In the closely knit communities of Jesus'

day, such an error would never be forgotten and would haunt the newly married couple all their lives. The situation prompted Mary's urgency when she informed Jesus of the emergency".

So Jesus' mother asked Jesus to do a miracle and produce some wine. Jesus rebuked her and said, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). Notice there is no veneration of Mary here.

In those days, even if Jesus' father had died, His mother still had certain authority over Him. So Jesus, in effect, said, "Woman, what authority do you have over me to ask this?" This same phrase is used in Mt. 8:29. Apparently, God the Father did give the approval and Jesus carried out the miracle. This would be the first recorded miracle in His ministry!

We read, "His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever He says to you, do it.' Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons a piece. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, 'Draw some out now; and take it to the master of the feast.' And they took it.

Expositor's mentions, "The stone jars were large, containing about twenty gallons apiece. By the social rules of the day each guest was expected to wash his hands before eating, and a considerable amount of water would be needed for this. At the lowest estimate, 120 gallons of water would be available. If made into wine, it would supply approximately two thousand four-ounce glasses; and if, as was frequently customary, the wine was further diluted by three parts of water to one of wine, there would have been enough to last for several days."

We continue: "When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bride groom. And he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!' *This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee*, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him. After this He went down in Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples, and they did not stay there many days" (John 2:9-12).

Next, Jesus and His disciple went down to keep the Passover in Jerusalem. When He saw that such a

sacred feast had been tainted by the corruption of the priests with the moneychangers, He was indignant!

Expositor's states, "The sale of cattle and doves and the privilege of exchanging money were permitted in the temple court as a convenience for pilgrims who would need animals for sacrifice and temple shekels for their dues. Under the chief priests, however, the concessions had become merely a means of making money and had debased the temple into a commercial venture. Jesus' action precipitated wild confusion. The animals would be bawling and running about aimlessly; the money changers would be scrambling for their coins in the dust and debris on the floor of the court; the officials would be arguing with Jesus about the rights of the case. Jesus' expression 'my Father's house' reveals his feeling toward God. The merchandising of privilege was an insult to God and a desecration of the Father's house. Jesus' vehemence revealed his inward passion for the Father and his jealous guardianship of the Father's interests. The Scripture brought to the disciples' minds is Psalm 69:9 [about the zeal of the Lord]."

When the Jewish leaders demanded a sign of authority from Him to do these things, Jesus replied, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They thought He meant destroying the physical temple, but He was referring to His coming burial for three days and then the resurrection. This reply is tied to Mt. 12:40 and the sign of Jonah—He would be in the grave for 3 days and then be raised up. Notice the consistency of His message about the only sign given of His messiahship.

Then, John adds how Christ knew what was truly in a person's heart and mind, and so He proceeded cautiously with many who followed Him, and did not put His trust in them since some were insincere.

Next, one of the chief leaders of the Pharisees, Nicodemus, a good man who later became a disciple, came to Jesus by night so he would not be seen and did confess he believed Christ was sent from God. For Jesus, though, that was not enough to acknowledge Him—Nicodemus would have to go through a conversion process and eventually, to be born into the kingdom of God.

Our doctrinal paper, *Born Again*, mentions on this section: "Why would Nicodemus even consider that Christ was speaking of 'entering a second time into his mother's womb'? How could Nicodemus come to such a strange conclusion? To zealous Jews such as Nicodemus, the concept of needing to be converted

was unimaginable. Orthodox Jews such as he did not need to be converted. They were the chosen people, sons of Abraham, children of the Covenant. Gentiles needed to be converted (to Judaism), but Jews did not. As Christ indicated, Nicodemus could not understand heavenly things (Jn. 3:12) and seemed to believe that Christ was teaching an absurd concept of ‘entering a second time into his mother’s womb.’ He totally missed the point. However, the emphasis of Jesus’ message was not merely on the beginning of the process, but on what it means to be fully born of the Spirit. He further said, ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’ (3:6). Are those words to be taken in a literal or figurative sense? Or, once again, in a dual sense?

“It is difficult to apply the term ‘enter the kingdom of God’ to the time of conversion. Furthermore, the expression ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’ (3:6) indicates a literal sense which cannot be ignored. Flesh is flesh—that is what it is. Since the second part of the sentence is dependent upon the first part, it too must be taken in a literal sense. Spirit is spirit—that is what it is. Jesus is stating what should have been obvious to Nicodemus. He was a fleshly human being who was born of fleshly parents. He could not enter the Kingdom of God while still in that state. As Paul said, ‘Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 15:50)...Only a spirit being can enter God’s Kingdom—one who *is* spirit. Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus in terms of what is required to enter the Kingdom. One must be ‘regenerated’ to enter the Kingdom of God. This does not mean that there is no spiritual element or aspect to the present Christian life as a result of conversion. There are two sources of life—physical and spiritual. Flesh can only originate from flesh, and spirit can only originate from spirit. Both ‘of the flesh’ and ‘of the Spirit’ are genitive nouns preceded by the preposition *ek*, a construction that emphasizes source or origin. Nicodemus did not understand Jesus because he was of human origin. Jesus, in addition to being human, was of divine origin. He offered them the opportunity to become sons of God (divine origin—God as our Progenitor) to those who ‘received Him’ (John 1:12-13).”

It is also important to comment on John 3:13, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.” Robertson’s *Word Pictures* mentions this refers to: “The incarnation of the pre-existent Son of

God who was in heaven before he came down and so knows what he is telling about ‘the heavenly things’”.

This is a clear scripture to prove no one has gone to heaven except Jesus Christ, who now is in heaven. So this includes Enoch, Elijah, or anyone else.

Next, John is baptizing and close by, so are Jesus’ disciples. When some asked John about this, he humbly replies with this wonderful attitude, “He who has the bride is the bridegroom [referring to Jesus], but the friend of the bridegroom [referring to himself], 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. He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is earthy and speaks of the earth”.

Expositor’s notes: “John [the Baptist] showed no jealousy whatever; on the contrary, he reaffirmed his subordinate position. He would not claim for himself final authority but avowed that he had been sent in preparation for the Messiah. As the bridegroom is more important than the best man, or ‘friend’ of the bridegroom who acted as the bridegroom’s assistant, so he would be content to act as an assistant to Jesus.”

The apostle John ends this section with this assertion: “And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. 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” (3:32-36).

What does it mean not to give the Spirit by measure? Robertson’s *Word Pictures* mentions in the Greek it means, “God has put no limit to the spirit’s [power] in relation to the Son. God has given the Holy Spirit in its fullness to Christ and to no one else in that sense.”

In the next Bible Study we will be covering the very important section of John 4, so please read it ahead of time.