

Research on Lesson 5 – Water to Wine

John 1:35-51; John 2:1-11
by Jan Walsh

Questions:

1) Who was Nathanael?

Many theologians believe that this disciple was the same as Bartholomew. It is only in the book of John that he is called Nathanael.

2) Why did Nathanael ask, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

Nazareth is the place where Joseph and Mary made their home while Jesus was still a young child. It was a small insignificant country town about a hundred miles north of Jerusalem. It was never mentioned in the Old Testament. It was thought of as primitive and its inhabitants spoke with a rude dialect typical of other Galilean towns. The religious authorities in Jerusalem claimed that the people of Nazareth were lax in following the Law, making the place all the more despised.

3) What is Nazareth like today?

It is a city of almost 100,000 people, now famous for being the childhood home of Jesus.

4) What is the significance of this statement? “I saw you when you were still under the fig tree.”

Nathanael may have been studying and praying in a favorite spot in the shade of a certain fig tree. Fig trees were known for providing the densest shade available in that part of the country. He seemed to be familiar with the Scriptures – the law of God and the writings of the prophets.

5) What do we know about Cana?

The village of Cana was Nathanael’s hometown. It was located about four miles north of Nazareth on a beautiful hill that gradually sloped toward the west. Homes were built in terraces up the slope so as to receive the cool west wind which blew in from the Mediterranean.

South of the village was a copious spring which yielded an abundant supply of clear, fresh drinking water—and thus Cana was a resting-place, a refreshing place, for Hebrew herdsmen and other travelers. It was also located on an imperial road used by the Romans—and thus Cana was flush with residents who secured their livelihood through trade with military soldiers.

It is estimated that approximately 400 families lived in Cana in Jesus’ day. In the context of occupied Galilee, it was a good place to live, and it was a good place to be from.

6) How big were the stone pots?

There were six stone pots that could hold two or three firkins apiece. A “firkin” was almost nine gallons, therefore, each pot could hold 16 to 27 gallons.

7) Who was the manager “ruler” of the wedding feast?

According to the custom of the time, one person would preside over the wedding festivities. Our modern “toastmaster” is probably a relic of this ancient custom.

8) This was the first miracle that Jesus performed.

Seeds for discussion:

1) Why didn’t Philip explain to Nathanael that Jesus wasn’t originally from Nazareth, but had been born in Bethlehem?

That would have been a convenient answer for Philip to have given. But John’s Gospel does not use this rebuttal. In fact, John’s gospel has no account of Jesus’ birth. Philip simply responds: “Come and see.” And to the surprise of the reader, the passage ends with Nathanael proclaiming, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” It was probably a surprise for Nathanael as well.

2) Why doesn’t John’s Gospel tell about the birth of Jesus?

John already made the point clear: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us....” Jesus is from GOD!

Also, John’s Gospel isn’t concerned with geography because it doesn’t matter what town Jesus grew up in or even what town he was born in – Jesus is from GOD!

3) “You have kept the good wine until now.”

It is part of Christ’s system to reserve the best until the last. Sin’s first cup is always the sweetest, but with God that which follows is ever superior to that which has preceded it. – (McGarvey and Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel*, 1914)