

## A Study in the Gospel of St John. Part 3

When did Joseph die?

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The wedding at Cana, in John 2, is where Jesus performed his first miracle, turning water into wine.

*2:1 - Two days later there was a wedding in the Galilean village of Cana.*

*2:2-3 - Jesus' mother was there and he and his disciples were invited to the festivities. Then it happened that the supply of wine gave out, and Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine."*

*2:4 - "Is that your concern, or mine?" replied Jesus. "My time has not come yet."*

*2:5 So his mother said to the servants, "Mind you do whatever he tells you."*

*2:6-11 - In the room six very large stone water-jars stood on the floor (actually for the Jewish ceremonial cleansing), each holding about twenty gallons. Jesus gave instructions for these jars to be filled with water, and the servants filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, "Now draw some water out and take it to the master of ceremonies", which they did. When this man tasted the water, which had now become wine, without knowing where it came from (though naturally the servants who had drawn the water knew), he called out to the bridegroom and said to him, "Everybody I know puts his good wine on first and then when men have had plenty to drink, he brings out the poor stuff. But you have kept back your good wine till now!" Jesus gave this, the first of his signs, at Cana in Galilee. He demonstrated his power and his disciples believed in him.*

After the wedding ceremony, the guests went to the reception, a celebration which typically lasted for a week.

It was the duty of the bride and bridegroom and their families to provide plenty of food & drink.

It seems that Mary, Jesus' mother, was a special guest at this wedding as she took the responsibility for the wine.

There was a tradition that the bridegroom was John himself, or as some have speculated the wedding was of Jesus' brother James to a sister or daughter of Nathanael.

Cana was a place to which Jesus can return, and as with Capernaum, it served as a kind of "home" for him. Whoever was getting married though, it was certainly a family affair.

Mary had some responsibility for the wedding, because she took responsibility for the wine, and she had the authority to give orders to the servants.

These circumstances imply that Mary's husband Joseph had died. Mary expected that Jesus would help her to get some more wine, so the celebration could continue.

This would explain why Jesus lived with his mother and his brothers until he was 30 years old. As he was the oldest son, it was his duty to look after the whole family.



## Subtle extortion

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In John 2:13-15 Jesus and his disciples travel south to Jerusalem for the Passover. The Passover is the most important Jewish festival, and took place every year in the Spring.

*2:12-17 - After this incident, Jesus, accompanied by his mother, his brothers and his disciples, went down to Capernaum and stayed there a few days. The Jewish Passover was approaching and Jesus made the journey up to Jerusalem. In the Temple he discovered cattle and sheep dealers and pigeon-sellers, as well as money-changers sitting at their tables. So he made a rough whip out of rope and drove the whole lot of them, sheep and cattle as well, out of the Temple. He sent the coins of the money-changers flying and turned their tables upside down. Then he said to the pigeon-dealers, "Take those things out of here. Don't you dare turn my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered the scripture - 'Zeal for your house has eaten me up'*

Four courtyards surrounded the main part of the Temple. The outer courtyard was called the Gentiles' Courtyard. This was where the merchants and the moneychangers did business.

Animal sacrifices had to be perfect, without a mark or blemish on them. The Temple officials examined all the animals that people brought for sacrifices. They dishonestly rejected animals that people had bought into the Temple, and forced everyone to buy animals from the Temple merchants, at inflated prices.

Also all Jews had to pay a Temple tax. People had to pay this tax with special coins only available from the moneychangers, again at inflated rates.

## Subtle discrimination

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Mark also quotes Isaiah 56:7: 'People will call my house a place of worship for all nations.' 'All nations' here refers to the Gentiles.

*He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of the dove-sellers, and he would not allow people to carry their water-pots through the Temple. And he taught them and said, "Doesn't the scripture say, '**My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?**' But you have turned it into a 'den of thieves!'"*

*Mark 11:15-17*

The merchants and the moneychangers did business in the Gentiles' Courtyard. Gentiles who wanted to worship God came into this courtyard. The Jews allowed them to do this. But they did not allow the Gentiles to go any nearer to the main Temple. So, for the Gentiles, this courtyard was the only place in the Temple where they could pray. But it was very difficult to pray because it was so noisy! So Gentiles who wanted to worship God could not do this. This is probably another reason why Jesus was angry.



3:1-2 - One night Nicodemus, a leading Jew and a Pharisee, came to see Jesus. "Master," he began, "we realise that you are a teacher who has come from God. Obviously no one could show the signs that you show unless God were with him."

3:3 - "Believe me," returned Jesus, "a man cannot even see the kingdom of God without being born again."

3:4 - "And how can a man who's getting old possibly be born?" replied Nicodemus. "How can he go back into his mother's womb and be born a second time?"

3:5-8 - "I assure you," said Jesus, "that unless a man is born from water and from spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh and spirit gives birth to spirit: you must not be surprised that I told you that all of you must be born again. The wind blows where it likes, you can hear the sound of it but you have no idea where it comes from and where it goes. Nor can you tell how a man is born by the wind of the Spirit."

3:9 - "How on earth can things like this happen?" replied Nicodemus.

3:10-13 - "So you are a teacher of Israel," said Jesus, "and you do not recognise such things? I assure you that we are talking about something we really know and we are witnessing to something we have actually observed, yet men like you will not accept our evidence. Yet if I have spoken to you about things which happen on this earth and you will not believe me, what chance is there that you will believe me if I tell you about what happens in Heaven?"

3:14 No one has ever been up to Heaven except the Son of Man who came down from Heaven.

The Son of Man must be lifted above the heads of men - as Moses lifted up that serpent in the desert - so that any man who believes in him may have eternal life.

3:16 For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes

in him shall not be lost, but should have eternal life.

3:17-21 You must understand that God has not sent his Son into the world to pass sentence upon it, but to save it - through him. Any man who believes in him is not judged at all. It is the one who will not believe who stands already condemned, because he will not believe in the character of God's only Son. This is the judgment - that light has entered the world and men have preferred darkness to light because their deeds are evil. Anybody who does wrong hates the light and keeps away from it, for fear his deeds may be exposed. But anybody who is living by the truth will come to the light to make it plain that all he has done has been done through God."



Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a group of 70 Jewish leaders, plus the High Priest, all were from rich and important families.

There are two possible reasons why Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night.

Perhaps he didn't want the other Jewish leaders to know that he had spoken to Jesus. Jesus wasn't popular with the Jewish leaders. He often argued with them in public.

Also Jewish teachers taught that the best time to study God's Law was at night. Jesus was very busy all day. He was a popular teacher and crowds followed him. So maybe Nicodemus wanted to discuss important spiritual matters in private, when Jesus was alone.

Jesus told Nicodemus that there is only one way to enter God's kingdom. A person has to be born again or 'born from above'.

Verses 9-11. Nicodemus is clever, he knew the Scriptures well and he taught people about them, but he did not understand what Jesus was teaching. Nicodemus really wanted to learn and understand so Jesus explained things to him, seeing his honesty and sincerity.

Jesus used the plural 'we' in verse 11. Some commentators suggest he was referring to the disciples, but the disciples had known Jesus only for a short time, and couldn't claim to be "*witnessing to something we have actually observed*". It is more likely that Jesus was including God the Father and the Holy Spirit with himself.



Verses 14-15 refers Numbers 21:8-9, the Israelites were wandering in the desert. They had complained about God, so he sent snakes to punish them for their bad attitude.

The snakes bit and killed many people. Then God told Moses to make a metal snake and told Moses to put it on the top of a pole.

When the snakes bit the people, the people had to look up at the metal snake. If they did this, they would not die.

Sin is like a snake's bite. A bite poisons our bodies, and sin ruins our lives. But God has provided a way to cure us, a way to save us from sin and death.

Jesus said that people would lift him up, like the metal snake. He was referring to the time when they would put him on the cross. They would lift him up on the cross for everyone to see.

Verse 16 is probably the most famous verse in the Bible. It expresses in only a few words what Christians believe.

- He did it because he is fair.
- He did it because he is holy.
- He died instead of us.
- All because God loves us all so much.

Love is more than just one of God's qualities. His entire nature is love. God does everything because he loves. God's love always reaches out to us. God's love is never selfish. He gave to us the most precious thing that he had: his only Son.

#### The final collect

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*'I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean:*

*From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.*

*I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you;*

*And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh,*

*And I will give you a heart of flesh.*

*I will put my Spirit within you,*

*And cause you to walk in my statutes,*

*And you shall keep my ordinances,*

*And do them.'*

*Ezekiel 36:25*