Suggested Reading

**A** **Recommended Reading**

**John 6:1 – 71.**

**B** **Read Carefully**

| | |
|---|---|
| John: 6:1-15 | The Feeding of the 5,000 |
| John: 6:35-50 | The Bread of Life = The Wisdom of God |
| John: 6:51-58 | The Bread of Life = The Eucharist |

**C** **Background Reading**

***John: 6:35-58*** Exodus 16 Psalm 78:17-31
Ecclesiasticus 24:1-27

**Prayer**

O God, who through the blessed apostle John
have unlocked for us the secrets of your Word,
grant, we pray,
that we might grasp with proper understanding
what he so marvellously brought to our ears,
Through Christ our Lord Amen.
*(From the Feast of St. John)*

PFP v2/2026

# Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Henley on Thames

## From Cana to Cana 4

John 3: 1 – 4:54.



The Gospel of John is rightly praised and treasured for the many characters whose presence enriches its pages. The reader is offered several differing characters to which we can compare and contrast ourselves. They might be models of authentic faith: Nathanael, John (the Baptist), the Beloved Disciple. Those who struggle to come to faith: Nicodemus, Thomas. Those who are on a journey of faith: The Woman at the Well. Those who come to faith in the midst of adversity: The Royal Official, Martha, Mary Magdelene. I am sure that we all have our favourite character from the Gospel of John. Today we will look in more detail at three characters: Nicodemus, The Woman at the Well, The Royal Official.

| Nicodemus | Samaritan Woman |
|---|---|
| At Night | At Noon |
| Israelite | Samaritan |
| Teacher | Housewife |
| Male | Female |
| Impervious to learning | Progressive Learning |
| Jesus = “Teacher” | Jesus = “Prophet” & “Messiah” |

This comparison between Chaps. 3-4 offers at a glance a clear overview of the contrasting characters of Nicodemus and the Samarian Woman. Their character and their respective contrasting cultural backgrounds are clearly set out. As part of the biblical motif of the ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ whose roles are reversed; Nicodemus, the insider *par-excellence* in terms of cultural affinity, becomes an outsider in terms of faith. Meanwhile, the Samaritan Woman, a quintessential outsider becomes an ‘insider’ as her faith leads her to become a disciple of Jesus.

The table above reveals that the Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman are contrasted on two levels:

- Race, gender, religious status, and background are the immediate contrasting feature. Hence, we compare the Israelite male teacher of good standing, with the Samaritan female housewife (?) with a past, and a reputation. However, we are surprised that this is not where the real contrasts take place.
- It is upon the level of faith that more significant contrasts and judgements can be made. It is at this level that the true insider and outsider are revealed. The faith of the Samaritan Woman is noteworthy inasmuch as she comes to belief gradually, which reveals stages of belief.

Next Week

## The Bread of Life Discourse

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Next time we shall study Chapter Six, which has two signs and a discourse.

The signs are the Feeding of the Five Thousand, and the Walking on Water, which are linked together in each of the Gospels.

The discourse is the Bread of Life Discourse, which draws out the meaning of the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

The Discourse is in two parts;

Firstly, the Sapiential Section = the first part is called sapiential (Latin = Wisdom). This discussion reflects on the Exodus experience of the people of Israel and contrasts this with what is doing today – in the life and ministry of Jesus.

He is the bread of Life, the heavenly bread that has come down from heaven.

We shall study the Old Testament background of offer a deeper understanding of this section.

Secondly, the Eucharistic Section, which as the title suggests focuses on the mystery of the Eucharist.

For the moment we will skip Chapter Five, this is because it has similar features to Chapter Nine – the Man born Blind. We will return to compare and contrast these chapters later.

**The Samaritan Woman at the Well.**

The Samaritan woman begins by defining herself *in contrast* to Jesus:
*'How is it that you, a Jew, ask me a Samaritan woman for a drink?' (4:10)*
The encounter between Jesus and the woman of Samaria; raises distinctions of gender (Male/Female), race (Jew/Samaritan), religion and true worship (Judaism & Jerusalem/Samaritan & Mt Gerizim) as well as the chequered historical relationship between Jews and Samaritans.

Speaking in the first person, she contrasts herself against this male Jew. Throughout the second section, 4,19-23, she speaks in the plural as she represents the Samaritan people: *"Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, though you say …'* (4,20).

The Samaritan Woman is also understood to be representative of the outsider. She, a female, is an ethnic outsider, considered unclean by the Jews, a sinner and adulteress. However, this understanding is formed by our understanding of her five husbands. Jesus asks her, *'Go call your husband and come back here'*; to which Jesus responds, *'you have had five men and the one you now have is not your husband'* (4,17-18). These verses are the subject of vigorous debate. In short, the argument hinges upon whether these verses are understood symbolically or literally. If literally, this woman may be considered to be a sinner and an adulteress. However, Samaria's history stemming from the five tribes forcibly settled by the Assyrians alongside the remnant of the Israelites may equally be the symbolic background of this verse. Is she representing herself or the nation?

The encounter in Samaria reaches its climax when the people of the town ask Jesus to stay with them. Their declaration of faith: that Jesus is *'truly the saviour of the world'* is significant because this finally transcends all the distinctions we noted above. Their faith in Jesus enables them to move beyond such boundaries and distinctions. The Samaritan woman has proven herself to be a significant dialogue partner and a missionary.

<u>Stages of Belief</u>

| | |
|---|---|
| v9 | A Jew |
| v11 | Sir |
| v19 | A prophet |
| v25 | Messiah/Christ |
| v26 | I am the Messiah |
| v42 | Saviour of the World |

Throughout the story the Samaritan Woman's growth of insight is accompanied with a gradual acknowledgement of Jesus identity. This ongoing revelation echoes the gradual revelation of Jesus throughout *1,29-51*. The final acknowledgement of Jesus as the (v42) Saviour of the World by the townspeople is the climax of the story. Such insight goes far beyond what could be announced by the woman, and more fittingly represents the erasure of ethnic boundaries as well as the replacement of Mount Gerizim and Jerusalem as sacred spaces.

**From Cana to Cana: Setting and Time, as clues to character.**

*Setting:* Each of these encounters take place within the broader context of Jesus journey 'from Cana to Cana' (via Capernaum and Jerusalem). The major setting; Cana draws the link between these two signs, which are made explicit, *"he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine"* (4:46).
However, Capernaum is also mentioned. Following the first sign at Cana, Jesus, his mother and his disciples "went down to Capernaum" for a few days (2,12). As the narrative inverts the settings now the royal official comes from Capernaum and asks Jesus to *'come down and cure his son'* (4,47). It is in Capernaum that the miracle takes place – 'off-stage', (which is also true of first sign, the water becomes wine off-stage). It is only on his return to Capernaum that the father, as he has now become, learns that his son lives.

*Time:* Note how often each chapter begins with a description of the place and time, and a summary of the main character: For example: the next day (1,29, 35, 43) on the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee (2,1), The time of the Jewish Passover was near and Jesus went up to Jerusalem (2,13), Jesus went up the mountain … the Passover the festival of the Jews was near (6:3), Jesus went around in Galilee ... the Jewish festival of Tabernacles was near (7:2) at daybreak he appeared in the temple again (8:2) The festival of Dedication took place at that time in Jerusalem (10:22), six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany (12;1) Early on the first day of the week when it was still dark, Mary of Magdala … (20:1).

Therefore, we should not be surprised at the contrast between Nicodemus and the Woman at the well. Nicodemus meets Jesus at night, while the Samaritan woman encounters Jesus at noon. *[Nicodemus] 'came to Jesus at night'* (3:2) which is a symbolic clue: coming at night is both literally and metaphorically to be *'in the dark'* = not to understand at all. (See *20;1* = when Mary Magadelene arrives at the tomb 'when it is still dark').

The importance of time is essential to understand the cure of the royal official's son. The emphasis within this narrative is temporal rather than geographic. The time the boy is cured matters much more than where he is cured. The 'hour' at which the cure takes place unites the time and the place. Although the royal official believes the word Jesus spoke, he does not discover the outcome until the following day. Only the Father knows the significance of the hour and therefore *'he asked them the when the boy had begun to recover'* (4,52) *'The Father realised that this was the time when Jesus had said, "Your son is living"'* (4:54)

Of course, the time between the royal official leaving Jesus and meeting his household, are the long, unknown and difficult hours which only emphasize the faith and trust of the father. The outcome of which is that *'he and all his household believed'* (4,54).

**Character:**

Time and setting offer clues to character, such as Nicodemus in the dark, but it the interaction with Jesus and the growth in faith that begins to define the Samaritan Woman – and is seen most clearly in the Royal Official.

**The Royal Official:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Basilikos* | a royal official | (4:47) |
| *ho anthrōpos* | the man, | (4,50) |
| *ho patēr* | the father | (4,53) |

What is a royal official? Firstly, a *basilikos* is connected to the Herodians and maybe a servant to the royal household. Secondly, we do not know if he was Jewish or Gentile. Either is a possibility. However, scholars have generally settled upon Gentile. Therefore, our character study begins with a Gentile *basilikos* – a Royal Official, a person with a political or social function, from Capernaum, who has heard of Jesus from the Galileans who saw his signs in Jerusalem. This 'second hand' knowledge of Jesus may also favour a gentile background.

But there is more to this person as his plea *"Sir, come down before my little boy dies"* (4,49) suggests. The use of the word, *paidion* – (child, little boy in this case) indicates the affectionate intimacy that exists between this concerned father and his child. He is no longer defined by his role: (political and social functions) but as a person with significant personal relationships. Accordingly, the narrator calls him *ho anthrōpos* – the man, (4,50).

At the end of the story, as the household tell him that his son lives, he is called *ho patēr* – the father (4,53). Here his character and his relationship become one, as his faith and trust in Jesus define him, as a concerned and loving father.