

“Key Players Introduced”
 Pastor Sam Richards
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 Texts: John 4:21-26

In the first four chapters, after the magisterial prologue, in which we are informed about the Word eternal (Christ) and the Word incarnate (Jesus), if we were to take a 40,000 foot view, we would surmise that John is doing an introduction. In John 1:19 he includes the testimony of John the Baptist as to the ***Baptizer’s identity***. Jews, priests and Levites came to John and asked: **“Who art thou?”** They wanted to know if he was claiming to be the prophet prophesied by Moses back in Deuteronomy 18:15. Was he the Messiah? The woman at the well had the same question (as did Nicodemus (see 3:2)) when she declared to Jesus, **I know that Messiah cometh that is called the Christ, when he is come he will explain all things**. Jesus’ breathtaking affirmation, **I that speak unto thee am he** (vv. 25-26) actually answers the question that has haunted the entire introduction! Now, remembering that we are at 40,000 feet, we should make a few observations. The Apostle John is introducing the key players in his gospel narrative. First and foremost there is Jesus Christ himself—co-creator with the Father, our source of **life and light**. (1:3-5) And we read, **And the light shineth in the darkness** (of this fallen creation) **and the darkness comprehendeth it not**.

Next comes John the Baptist, **the forerunner who came for a witness, to bear witness to the Light, that all men should believe through Him—meaning, Christ, the Light of the world. And he witnessed to the true Light that had come into the world—and the world knew Him not**, despite being made by Him . . . **He came unto His own**, the Jewish people, as he came from the line and lineage of King David with whom God had made an everlasting covenant! **And they received Him not**. However the rejection was not entire, or complete. **But as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God. Even those who believed upon his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.** And these converts were gathered, household by household throughout the region! I pause to note that something hugely significant has just been registered with us; namely that the kingdom of God was being established on earth!

The Apostle John then testifies (v.14): **And the Word was made flesh** (Christ incarnate/Jesus), **and dwelt among us, (and we behold His glory the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth**. In 1 John 1:1-3, the apostle amplifies his meaning here: **That which was from the beginning** (the eternal Christ), **which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and with our hands handled** (examined thoroughly/extensively—all sensible, material and physical realities!) **of the Word of life** (made real/visible see John 1:4) . . . **that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with the Son, Jesus Christ**. Our first key players are divine!

John the Baptist first denies that he is neither the prophet of Deut. 18, nor Elijah and affirms **I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord,’** according to the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3. The Pharisees come questioning why he is baptizing for the repentance from sin? And again, later, the Baptist defers to the Coming One, **whose laces I am unfit to untie**. But he is a player in this introductory

pageant. Then, **The next day, John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and declares, “Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world.”**(John 1:29) And two of John’s disciples, the day following, chose to harken to Jesus’ teaching and they, namely Andrew and John, follow Jesus to his dwelling. Then Andrew finds Simon Peter and then, a day later, Jesus finds Philip, and Philip finds Nathaniel. Before Chapter One concludes, we have the makings of Jesus’ band of disciples with five named disciples so far.

The third day, the band attends a wedding feast (possibly Nathaniel’s wedding) ***This feast is a major metaphor for the coming Messianic age in Scripture introduced early on!*** And Jesus’ mother, Mary, is a guest there and they run out of wine. A huge *faux pas* in Jewish culture. And Jesus’ first miracle, the changing of water into wine—and some use has been made out the fact that the water transformed into wine was found in water jars stored for the rites of purification *ie the washing of feet)—the amount of wine is estimated to have been 108-162 gallons. The feast master declared that wine to be most excellent. And what matters about that is the practice of putting the best wine first had been inverted; perhaps signaling that *a new day had dawned*. **This was the beginning of the miracles Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee, manifesting his glory, and his disciples believed on him,** (That is they trusted him to be the Christ! **In deed.**) Now the text then suggested that following this time in Cana, that Jesus, and his mother, and his brothers, and his disciples had moved to Capernaum¹ (*Capernaum would be the mission headquarters for the Galilean mission and Jesus would recruit several other fishermen in this location to follow him.*). **And they continued there not many days when the Jewish passover was at hand and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.** (John 2:13) They would return shortly.

We have captured here, in the introductory phrase, a sense of tightly compacted days—urgent, perhaps. It is as if the suddenness so characteristic of the gospel of Mark is here characteristic of John, too. The ministry years of Jesus were packed, intense and rapid paced without losing their sense of being purposeful and measured (strategic?). Therefore we are not surprised when Jesus comes upon the money changers, and those selling oxen, sheep and doves in the temple, formed a scourge and drove them out, saying, **Take these things hence, make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise.** This “stern and abrupt” disruption alters the pace (or nature/tone?) of Jesus’ public ministry and occasions a sudden rise of opposition and criticism. Jesus’ “authority” to cleanse the temple (perhaps as prefigured in the foot washing episode at the wedding feast?), or to reform religious practices was challenged by both merchants, and some of the religious authorities. But it would be an error to assume that all of the uproar was negative—those who pondered his actions may have also considered that propriety was on his side. Additionally the miracles he performed revved up the excitement in Cana, Capernaum and Jerusalem—building on the momentum of the Baptist’s reforming passion. All this created a groundswell of popular support and goodwill for this “miracle worker” from Galilee/ or Nazareth. Jesus presented these miracles as credentialing works of God affirming his mission and person as Messiah.

¹ If we take this move to signify that the family left Nazareth at this time, then Jesus may have sold the carpentry business rather than handing it over, father to son from Joseph to a brother— and Joseph was probably deceased.

John 3 details for us Jesus' meeting with a thoughtful Pharisee named Nicodemus and I would suggest that Nicodemus is included here because he plays a significant role in the unfolding gospel narrative. He is not a one off, so to speak and when his name recurs later on we appreciate why he was introduced early on. I have in mind the details surrounding the disposal and burial of Jesus' body, post-crucifixion—Jesus foreseeing that there would a body to be dealt with for three days made funeral arrangements. It is also conceivable that Nicodemus was more of an early adopter than he is sometimes considered to be. And I would put the woman at the well in the same category of key players—she was an “evangelistic worker,” who founded a church in Sychar which church Philip, one of the first deacons, may have presided over when persecution broke out against the Jerusalem church—after the murder of Stephen. *That provision would be an accomplishment that would argue for her prominence in the early days of the Acts church.* Her work did not appear out of thin air and validates the Samaritan/Gentile mission which, according to this take, would have a very early point of origin in church history; within months if not weeks of Jesus' coming out.

If we are persuaded thus that Nicodemus was indeed an early convert, his initial skepticism strengthens the veracity of the account to include, a questioning attitude conforms with “inquisitive ignorance” because both Nicodemus and the woman at the well have hills to climb. *They, along with the Baptist, and the first disciples, are key players introduced to us at the beginning with consideration of what's to follow later.* They all answer the pressing, particular question **Who do you say that I am?** Just as we also do—calling him our Savior so as to believe on him.

Indeed, the **darkness into which the Light has shone**, and **the Life has appeared** is a shroud of ignorance, **and the darkness comprehended it** (the light) **not**. (vv.4, 9-10) It remains for us then to lift the veil on the ignorance, or to shed some light into the darkness by expounding John 4, the conversion of the Samaritan woman, not as some incidental, off-hand event—no, when Jesus said, **I needs must go through Samaria**, His passage to Jacob's well, to this **blissful and blessed** interview. He had some important business to transact with that woman, at the hour—rather like securing the perimeter!

Whatever could that “business” have been if not that? Let's remember our 40,000 foot vantage point and ask what purpose, what long-term goal could Jesus have had in mind, when he recruited Nicodemus to the burial detail, along with Joseph of Arimathea, that Nicodemus would perform post-crucifixion? And, looking further down the line, could Jesus, foreseeing the persecutions that would follow the stoning of Stephen, have wanted to establish a church at Sychar so that Philip, the deacon and not the apostle, would have a place of refuge to find shelter in until that early storm of persecution had passed? It is written that Christ has gone ahead, **I go ahead to prepare a place for you** which of course, refers to our heavenly destination, could apply to His servant Philip as the caves of Adullam were made fit for King David to escape King Saul (who was bent on regicide)?

The text informs us that Jesus abode there **two days** and that **many more believed on Him according to His word**. What we learn from John 3 and 4 is that the ignorance of Nicodemus and of Photinas (this non biblical name given by church tradition to the woman Jesus interviewed/recruited? at Jacob's well) was neither complete, nor entire. They knew enough to know some things, but they didn't know enough (were too ignorant) to push the matter to a successful conclusion. Let's pay particular attention to Jesus' exchange with her in vv. 21-26:

21 Jesus *said to her, “(Dear)Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.—the entire world would become God’s “sacred arena”— 22 You worship what you do not know (ignorance again!); we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 God is [a]spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” 25 The woman *said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming, bringing true spiritual worship which, it appears is the heart quest of this woman despite her life circumstances (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” 26 Jesus *said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

Neither the Samaritan orthodoxy, nor the Jewish orthodoxy will dominate in the days to come

First, Jesus says **Believe Me**. And then Jesus says twice **the hour is coming**, and the second time he added **and now is**. He is urging the **presentness** of this moment! And He does so in the midst of a prophecy: **when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father** (v.21) rather **God is a Spirit and they that worship him** (saying this, Jesus indirectly designates her as a **true worshipper**, clarifying why He is talking with and recruiting her!). Some future church business is in view—and the first order of that business is the **evangelization** of Sychar. . . the region? The countryside?).

Some would argue that the woman calls Jesus a prophet because **He told her everything she ever did**. But what Jesus revealed to her, however, was not **everything** but the **most essential missteps** she had undertaken as a woman (**five marriages** ending in divorce, **and the man she was with now was not her husband**). I would add that her truthful confession secured some kind of release for her from guilt, shame and painful rejection in which many suppose that she **may** have been walking in. (You know, we just don’t know how self-aware she was because the text doesn’t focus on that aspect of her redemption! And her supposedly immoral past is up for exposure and censure! The Lord has better things for her to do.) Therefore, the exposure of her past cannot be the only evidence of Jesus’ prophetic status. Much more compelling is this:

If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living waters. (v. 19)

For that is exactly what transpires: **Sir, give me this living water, that I thirst not, neither come here to draw. (v. 15) *Jesus apparently refreshes her right then!* *Jesus foretold what her action would be when her ignorance was removed!* And now we appreciate another little detail included in the passage: **The woman then left her****

waterpot (!) and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, ‘Come see a man which told me everything I ever did: is this not the Christ?’ (vv. 28-29) She came to the well a *mistress*, and she leaves Jesus presence a *messenger* for God, bearing, or proclaiming good news like John, the Baptist, and presenting **the Lamb of God!** And so the mission to Sychar began and a church was planted there early on in the ministry of Jesus—when he went about doing good, and performing many miracles.

Well we might ask, How did she know this for certain? And why didn’t she proclaim him to be “a prophet” having experienced three prophecies (if we count the supernatural revelation of her past!)? She introduced him rather as **the Christ**. And here is what iced the matter, or sealed the deal for her!

I know that Messiah cometh, which is called the Christ, when he is come he will tell us all things (or explain all things plainly). Jesus saith unto her, that speak unto thee am He.

And she believed on him—being refreshed! Not only that after she received the free gift of salvation—it was not her life accomplishment, her merit, or her worth that secured this gift—she was both wholly herself and saved. And so must we all, believe on Jesus, trust Him as our Savior and then we can enter with joy into the larger service of our Lord and Savior—we can leave our petty waterspouts behind and evangelize, push back the darkness, dispel the ignorance and advance the kingdom.

And that, of course, is what the gospel of John is really about!

If we would pray for the Lord to show us what the hindrances are, what the ignorance of those who are not saved is shaped like, we would be so helped and helpful. It is hard to remove a splinter if you can’t see it first and then have the tools, and the willingness to extract the splinter. Knowledge gained is good, ignorance removed is good also. We cannot share what we don’t know, but what we do know is an asset. What we know we are to share. Conversion is a commission.

Amen.