

ENGAGING GOSPEL DOCTRINE 131

Lesson 5: “Born Again”

Class Member Reading: John 3-4

Nicodemus Visits Jesus

³Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews (probably a member of the Sanhedrin, made up of chief priests, elders, and scribes). ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ ³Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see **the kingdom of God** without being **born from above** (The Greek “anōthen” can mean both “again” and “from above”).’ ⁴Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ (Note the misunderstanding, which is a common Johannine theme—Jesus makes an ambiguous statement, his listener misunderstands, which provides him the opportunity to expound about his identity and mission) ⁵Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can **enter the kingdom of God** without being **born of water and Spirit**. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ ⁹Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ ¹⁰Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? (knowledge of worldly things vs. knowledge of spiritual things)

¹¹ ‘Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. (Note the shift to the first person plural here, which reveals the hand of the later editor and community) ¹²If I have told you about **earthly** things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about **heavenly** things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be **lifted up** (In John the crucifixion is not a tragedy, but rather an exaltation), ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who **believes** in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (Gospel summary)

¹⁷ ‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (do we speak and act to condemn or to save?). ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and **people loved darkness rather than light** because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.’ (imagining how we would feel if everything we

thought and said and did became widely known is a good way to examine our lives. Being accountable to others helps us be our best selves).

Jesus and John the Baptist

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized (3:22, 26 give us our only references to Jesus performing baptisms).²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized—²⁴John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison.

25 Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew.²⁶ They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him.'²⁷ John answered, 'No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven.²⁸ You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, "I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him."²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled.³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.'

The One Who Comes from Heaven

31 The **one who comes from above** is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things (lots of dualism in John light/dark, above/below, heavenly/earthly). The one who comes from heaven is above all.³² He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony.³³ Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true.³⁴ He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands.³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.

Jesus and the Woman of Samaria

4 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John'—² although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized (This contradicts the previous chapter. This verse was likely added by a later editor, perhaps out of concern that Jesus baptizing would make it seem he was imitating John)—³ he left Judea and started back to Galilee.⁴ But he had to go through Samaria (How tied are we to the "normal", or social conventions? This story is filled with Jesus doing highly unusual things his fellow Jews would disapprove of).⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon (an unusual time to travel).

7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'.⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that

you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ (multiple taboos broken, Jew and Samaritan, male and female strangers) (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)¹⁰ Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink”, you would have asked him, and **he would have given you living water** (same pattern as the previous chapter: a term with a double meaning [flowing as opposed to stagnant water, then water that gives life]).’¹¹ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?’¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?’¹³ Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. **The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.**’ (I really love this idea of spiritual self-sufficiency, or more accurately, each of us having our own access to God)¹⁵ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.’ (This woman’s journey is touching—even with all her challenges and shortcomings and the fact she is an outcast from a Jewish perspective, she continues to openly question and seek and thus draws closer to the truth, even becoming an effective missionary) “Jacob’s well, the woman’s many husbands, the food that the disciples bring to Jesus, the time of harvest, are concrete starting points for discussions about spiritual matters” (Oxford Bible Commentary, 967).

16 Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’¹⁷ The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, “I have no husband”;¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!’¹⁹ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, **I see that you are a prophet.** (The woman gains increasing understanding about Jesus because of her faith and openness)²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’²¹ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.²⁴ God is spirit (‘God is spirit’ has nothing to do with the Enlightenment description of the nature of God, but underlines that God will give his Spirit through his Messiah”, Oxford Bible Commentary, 968), and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’²⁵ The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’²⁶ Jesus said to her, ‘**I am** he, the one who is speaking to you.’ (Several times in the Gospel of John, Jesus indirectly declares himself to be God. “I am” is an allusion to Exodus 3:14. The most striking is the Garden arrest scene in John 18)

27 Just then his disciples came. They were **astonished that he was speaking with a woman**, but no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you speaking with her?’²⁸ Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,²⁹ ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, ‘Rabbi, eat something.’³² But he said to them, ‘**I have food to eat that you do not know about.**’ (I love this feeling—a passion or losing

ourselves in something so fully that even eating seems a distraction) ³³So the disciples said to one another, ‘Surely no one has brought him something to eat?’ ³⁴Jesus said to them, ‘**My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.**’ ³⁵Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest?’ But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.’

39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’ ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for **we have heard for ourselves,** and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.’

Jesus Returns to Galilee

43 When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee ⁴⁴(for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honour in the prophet’s own country). ⁴⁵When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival.

Jesus Heals an Official’s Son

46 Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official (This royal official was likely a Gentile, which further touches on the theme of Jews rejecting Jesus but outsiders accepting him) whose son lay ill in Capernaum. ⁴⁷When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸Then Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.’ ⁴⁹The official said to him, ‘Sir, come down before my little boy dies.’ ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son will live.’ **The man believed the word** that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. ⁵¹As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. ⁵²So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, ‘Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.’ ⁵³The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, ‘Your son will live.’ So he himself believed, along with his whole household. ⁵⁴Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Scripture Chain

[John 3:3–5](#)

[John 3:16–17](#)

[Mosiah 5:1–7](#)

[Mosiah 27:25–26](#)

[Alma 5:14–16](#)

[Alma 22:15–18](#)

[John 3:3–5](#)

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, **Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit**, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

[John 3:16–17](#)

16 ¶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

[Mosiah 5:1–7](#)

1 And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had thus spoken to his people, he sent among them, desiring to know of his people if they believed the words which he had spoken unto them.

2 And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has **wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.**

3 And we, ourselves, also, through the **infinite goodness of God**, and the manifestations of his Spirit, have great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, we could prophesy of all things.

4 And it is the faith which we have had on the things which our king has spoken unto us that has brought us to this great knowledge, whereby we do **rejoice with such exceedingly great joy.**

5 And we are **willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will**, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days, that we may not bring upon ourselves a never-ending torment, as has been spoken by the angel, that we may not drink out of the cup of the wrath of God. (willingness to accept greater and greater responsibility is a key to agency and progression)

6 And now, these are the words which king Benjamin desired of them; and therefore he said unto them: Ye have spoken the words that I desired; and the covenant which ye have made is a righteous covenant.

7 And now, because of the **covenant** which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, **this day he hath spiritually begotten you**; for ye say that **your hearts are changed through faith on his name**; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.

[Mosiah 27:25–26](#)

25 And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, **must be born again**; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;

26 And thus they become **new creatures** (This summary resonates with me: we must become new, transformed, reformed in the image of our Heavenly Parents. And we do this through living the gospel); and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

[Alma 5:14–16](#)

14 And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye **spiritually been born of God**? Have ye **received his image in your countenances**? Have ye experienced this **mighty change in your hearts**?

15 Do ye exercise **faith** in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an **eye of faith** (“eye of faith” is one of my favorite terms in the scriptures. It is an extraordinary sensation to see a hoped for outcome, even if it seems unlikely, and watch as it happens), and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?

16 I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth? (useful exercise)

[Alma 22:15–18](#)

15 And it came to pass that after Aaron had expounded these things unto him, the king said: What shall I do that I may have this eternal life of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, having this **wicked spirit rooted out of my breast**, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, that I may not be cast off at the last day? Behold, said he, I will give up all that I possess, yea, **I will forsake my kingdom**, that I may receive this great joy.

16 But Aaron said unto him: If thou desirest this thing, if thou wilt bow down before God, yea, if thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, believing that ye shall receive, then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest.

17 And it came to pass that when Aaron had said these words, the king did bow down before the Lord, upon his knees; yea, even he did prostrate himself upon the earth, and cried mightily, saying:

18 O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and **I will give away all my sins to know thee**, and that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day. And now when the king had said these words, he was struck as if he were dead.

Other Reading:
