

NT LESSON #5

“BORN AGAIN”

John 3,4

by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: Turn in your scriptures to Moses 6:58-60. Note the command of the Lord that believers teach what is to follow “freely unto [their] children...” And what are they commanded to teach?

That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, *and inasmuch as ye were born into the world of water, and blood, and the spirit*, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so *you must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit*, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten . . . (emphasis added).

I worked through the delivery of 10 children with my wife. The truth is, she did most of the work, but I was there with her; that should count for something. In each of those instances, except the last which was a Caesarean birth, the rupturing of the amniotic sac and the loss of fluid was one of the first signs of the impending birth of one of our children. This is usually referred to as the *breaking of the water*. Accompanying the birth that followed was the issuing of blood from the uterus through the birth canal. That “cleansing” often continued for two to six weeks. And sometime in that process of birth—perhaps before either the water or the blood became evident, a spirit entered the body of those tiny babies, and each of my children “became of dust a living soul.”

The Lord, in Moses 6:58-60, commands all of us to teach our children of their mortal beginnings so that we can then use those beginnings as a metaphor for the requirement that they take the necessary steps to be born again, of the water and the Spirit, and be cleansed by the blood of the Only Begotten. Ponder for a moment the power of this teaching method. The Lord has given every child a lesson in eternity, a pattern for being prepared to receive the things of the Spirit and thereby enter the Kingdom of God.

I. JESUS TEACHES NICODEMUS THAT ALL MANKIND MUST BE

BORN OF THE WATER AND THE SPIRIT TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD. (JOHN 3:1-22)

Nicodemus came to see the Savior by night. Why? Two reasons suggest themselves. 1) He may have wanted to come without observation. The ministry of the Savior had already troubled the leaders of the Jews, the Pharisees and the Saducees, and Nicodemus is a Pharisee, and a “ruler of the Jews.” (John 3:1) Footnote 11-b suggests that Nicodemus is a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jewish nation. It is even possible that the Sanhedrin sent him to evaluate the Savior. In John 3:32, Nicodemus says “we know . . .” The plural pronoun may indicate that his mission this night is not a personal one. 2) Nicodemus may have come by night because he wanted a long talk, which would have been difficult with the daily crowds that surrounded the Savior.

Later indications imply that Nicodemus had some feelings for the Savior. In John 7:50-53 he spoke in defense of the Savior to other Pharisees. In John 19:39 he provided the spices for the preparation of the body of Jesus for interment. Whether those feelings preceded the meeting in John 3, or arose as a result of them or at some other time is not clear, but even at this stage of the ministry, Nicodemus acknowledges that Jesus is “a teacher sent from God” as witnessed by his miracles. (John 3:2)

Even though Nicodemus spoke in this way, Jesus appeared to know that what he was saying was not a testimony of the truth. He instantly replied, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Whatever Nicodemus has seen, it is not the mantle of divinity resting on Christ as the Redeemer of all mankind. This is made clear by the response of Nicodemus to the Savior’s declaration: “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (John 3:4)

Nicodemus’ response teaches us something about the Jewish mentality. It demonstrates the worldliness, the *literalness*, the blindness of the Jewish nation, probably because of the Law of Moses. Nicodemus cannot understand the spiritual implications of the Savior’s words. For other examples of this “blindness” from this lesson, see John 4:10, 11, 15, 31-33. Years of preoccupation with the letter of the law, with inches and knots and jots and tittles, must have left many of the Jews unable to see through

symbolic language to the truths that lay behind and beyond it.

What does Jesus now suggest that a man must do to “enter into the kingdom of God”? (John 3:5) Joseph Smith taught that

It is one thing to see the kingdom of God, and another thing to enter into it. We must have a change of heart to see the kingdom of God, and subscribe to the articles of adoption to enter therein (*Teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 328).

The following verses describe what happens when one is “born again.” Read and mark them and ponder the power of the experience of being reborn.

Mosiah 27:25

Mosiah 5:7

Mosiah 27:26

Alma 5:14,19

Alma 5:21

Some danger might perhaps occur if a person, fascinated with the experiences Alma and the Lamoni and the sons of Mosiah and others, thought that spiritual rebirth could only occur with a powerful, spiritual experience. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught that being born again “doesn’t happen in an instant. [It] is a process.” (“Jesus Christ and Him Crucified,” in 1976 Devotional Speeches of the Year, p. 399)

The sixth and final point I wish to make about the process of repentance is that we must be careful, as we seek to become more and more godlike, that we do not become discouraged and lose hope. Becoming Christlike is a lifetime pursuit and very often involves growth and change that is slow, almost imperceptible. The scriptures record remarkable accounts of men whose lives changed dramatically, in an instant, as it were: Alma the Younger, Paul on the road to Damascus, Enos praying far into the night, King Lamoni. Such astonishing examples of the power to change even those steeped in sin give confidence that the Atonement can reach even those deepest in despair.

But we must be cautious as we discuss these remarkable

examples. Though they are real and powerful, they are the exception more than the rule. For every Paul, for every Enos, and for every King Lamoni, there are hundreds and thousands of people who find the process of repentance much more subtle, much more imperceptible. Day by day they move closer to the Lord, little realizing they are building a godlike life. They live quiet lives of goodness, service, and commitment. They are like the Lamanites, who the Lord said “were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not.” (3 Ne. 9:20; italics added.) [Ezra Taft Benson, “A Mighty Change of Heart,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1989, 5]

Before a man or woman can subscribe to the “articles of adoption,” what must he or she do according to John 3:15, 16? Part of this process occurs in the continuing activities of believers. Read John 3:18, 19. Believers do the outward things, as the Zoramites did in Alma 31 (they attend meetings and say public prayers and bathe and wear nice clothes), but that is not sufficient. They also do the inward things: they look for opportunities to share the gospel; they forgive readily; they repent quickly; they serve gladly; they do their home and visiting teaching because they want to bless those they visit; they accept and magnify callings in the church; they rejoice in temple service and genealogical work, etc.

Why are unbelievers “condemned already”? Consider this analogy: if you were to go into a strange house in the dark, and refuse to turn on the lights, even though they were available, you would undoubtedly be condemning yourself to certain unpleasant experiences as you ran into tables and chairs, and mistook walls for doorways, or stairways for hallways. What does John 3:19 suggest about those who walk in darkness when light is available? In the activities of believers, we “turn on the light” (See John 3:15,16,20, 21) and begin the process of being born again. Thereby we begin to “see the kingdom of God.”

II. JESUS TEACHES A SAMARITAN WOMAN AT JACOB’S WELL

Your appreciation for the account in John 4 might be enhanced if you were to recall a time when you were terribly, desperately thirsty. We do not often have such experiences in our cultures now, but you may have had a time when your entire focus in life was to get a drink of something cold and wet.

For me, it was a hike out of the canyon where Gooseberry River flows from the Gooseberry Reservoir to Schofield Reservoir. I had been fishing for several hours along the river with only one can of soda, long since consumed, to quench my thirst. I would have gulped water heedlessly from the river but my fishing companion was a medical doctor who assured me that deadly diseases were waiting if I chanced it. The trek back the car when the fishing was over was about 5 miles. By the time we reached the car and the cooler with its additional iced soft drinks, I was parched and frantic. I think I finished three cans of grape soda before I set my pole down. If you can recall a similar experience in your life, reflect on it as you stand next to Jacob's well with the Samaritan woman and the Savior.

Note that the first four verses of John 4 are found in the JST appendix. Verses 5 and 6 are also slightly different in the JST. Here they are:

1. When therefore the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, 2. They sought more diligently some means that they might put him to death; for many received John as a prophet, but they believed not on Jesus. 3. Now the Lord knew this, though he himself baptized not so many as his disciples; 4. For he suffered them for an example, preferring one another. 5. And he left Judea, and departed again into Galilee, 6. And said unto his disciples, I must needs go through Samaria.

Turn to a map in the back of your LDS edition of the Bible that shows Judea and Samaria. The Samaritans were hostile to the Jews (especially those traveling southward for religious festivals). Even though it was a three-day journey through Samaria, the Samaritans often refused lodging. Thus the Jews regularly avoided Samaria as they traveled between Judea and Samaria, traveling on the east side of the Jordan through Perea.

But what did Jesus say about his journey to Galilee in John 4:6? The phrase "I must needs go through Samaria" suggests that this trip is based on his mission and not on the geography. Note the comment in John 4:35- "Say not ye there are yet four months, then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." This image is one of the most common in the early sections of the D&C. The Lord announces again and again that the field is white and it

is time for a harvest (see D&C 4:4; 6:3; 11:3; 12:3; 14:3; 33:3; 33:7). Samaria, at least this part of Samaria, was ready for a harvest, not in the future, but now! (See John 4:39-41)

What is a Samaritan? See this heading in your Bible Dictionary. Then note the statement of the Samaritan woman in John 4:9 and the events in Luke 9:52, 53. How often in your own life have you avoided sharing or helping or teaching because of some inherent or traditional or senseless prejudice? What does the journey of Jesus through Samaria teach us about our responsibility to look everywhere for opportunities to share the gospel?

What does verse 6 teach you about the Savior? “Now Jesus being *weary* with his journey, it being about the sixth hour, sat down on the well” (emphasis added). Cross reference this verse with Alma 7:11 and Hebrews 4:15. Jesus became weary just as we do. How does this awareness affect your sense of *his understanding of your needs* and weaknesses? What does Paul tell us Jesus can be “touched with” in Hebrews 4:15? Note the first phrase of D&C 133:53. “In all their afflictions, he was afflicted.”

Jesus and the woman of Samaria had a discussion about water. What is “living water”? (See John 4:10, 11—Jesus answered this question in John 7:38, 39; see also 1 Nephi 11:25, D&C 63:23)

The discussion about water is related to this matter of *thirst*. In the context of Jesus’ teachings, what is this “thirst”? Matthew 5:6 suggests that it is a longing for righteousness. Perhaps it is also a need to know that life has meaning and that there is a God in heaven who is concerned about us. Jesus Christ is the divine answer to both of these needs. (See John 4:10)

What did the woman of Samaria ask for in verse 15? Her request for this living water was a proper one, but she needed to be prepared to receive it. The directive of the Savior in John 4:16 seems to be the first step in this preparation: “Go, call thy husband, and come hither.” Her honest response prepared her for some personal teaching.

Note the question implied in the statement of this Samaritan woman once she perceives that she is in the presence of a prophet.

The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a

prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship (John 4:19,20).

The city of Sychar is at the foot of Mt. Gerizim. In about 400 BC the Samaritans built a temple on that mountain. In 128 BC, the Jews destroyed it. This is the basis for the statement by the woman. What is the Savior saying to her in the next four verses?

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:21-24).

Is he not telling her that how she worships is much more important than where she worships. She does not seem to understand and says,

I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things (John 4:25)

I supposed this brief testimony explains why the Savior “must needs go through Samaria.” There are people there waiting and believing, And note the Savior’s response: “Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26).

This simple and powerful declaration is witness enough for this wonderful woman. She is ready for the living water.

What actions and attitudes prevent us from partaking of this living water? Of what might the Savior have been speaking in Jeremiah 2:13 when he said,

For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed they out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Think about the things that people seek to satisfy their “thirst” that could be described as “broken cisterns. Are there any of these in your life? Could such things as sports or wealth or power become “broken cisterns?” How would you recognize them in your own life? What must you do about them? What did the woman who had come to the well to seek water do with her waterpot after she met the Christ? (John 4:28). What did the two disciples do with their nets when they met Jesus (Matt. 4:20) .

Our discipleship may require us to leave more behind than our broken cisterns, of course. The woman who left her waterpot, went into Sychar to tell people about the Savior. What are you willing to leave to tell people about him? Will you leave your comfort zone? Your circle of friends? Will you avoid prejudice and visit your own Samarias? Will you, when the time comes, leave home and family to serve as a full-time mission, whether you are 19 years old or 21 years old or retired?

Would it not be a glorious thing if we could share our witness of the Savior with others who would “believe on him” (John 4:39) for our sayings. And then, as they practiced the activities of believers, they would “see the kingdom of God” and would then say,

Now we believe, not because of thy saying; we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

CONCLUSION

Consider thoughtfully, even prayerfully this matter of being born again, of putting on the spiritual robes that accompany believing and obeying. You do not remember the process of your own birth, but you know the process. Ponder carefully the steps of spiritual rebirth and ask yourself if you are working within the process spoken of by Elder McConkie. Then compare your thirst for living water, your longing for that mighty change of heart, with the thirst and the actions of that wonderful woman at Jacob’s well in Sychar of Samaria. We must pay the price to drink from this Eternal Well, this unbroken and unbreakable cistern, and then we must invite others to come and drink with us.

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