**WHY ON EARTH GOD? WHY GOD ON EARTH?**

**CRACKING THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

**Ch. 1B**

Remember the Ratpack? Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., Joey Bishop and Peter Lawford -- swingin' stud-stars who had it all, yet Ol' Blue Eyes was, hands down, "the Lead."

2,000 years ago there was another "inner circle" that hung out along the desert trails of Palestine, in its temples, trekking its mountains, on its lakes, cruising the streets of its villages.

This pack consisted of three ordinary men named John, Peter and James -- and one extraordinary Person who was all-man yet all-God! Can you imagine watching your sidekick Jesus heal the sick, raise the dead, calm the wind on demand, and turn water into wine? You look at the Guy sleeping there by the campfire under a Mediterranean sky … and you say, "C'mon, could he *really* be the eternal ……… God!!!?"

All over, folks are wondering as well. The invading Romans, the religious home boys, the crowds who turned out to see Him teach and do miracles. They all faced a decision: is this Man truly God?

Is He the Messiah ("the Anointed One") whom Old Testament prophets have promised for centuries? Is He the One who'd come to earth to preach the good news -- then come back a *second* time to crush evil once for all, banishing satan into the eternal lake of fire.

Bigger than Elvis, more controversial than Bob Jones University, Jesus the carpenter Joseph's son was the topic of every conversation.

Perhaps you've wondered, "God, what are You like? Who in the heck are You anyway? Are You even there? If so, do You know that I exist? If you do, do You care?"

You can make pilgrimages to Tibet or Tupelo. But only ONE resource reliably answers life's biggest questions -- it's God's love letter to us, the Bible.

**John, do you want to be a millionaire…**

**or just be remembered as Jesus' best friend?**

John was born into a comfortable life as the son of Zebedee the fisherman. Zeb's wife was Salome, a sincere follower of Christ who, may have been a sister of Mary, Jesus’ mother. We know she was present at Christ's crucifixion. John’s brother was James, also one of Christ's twelve disciples and a fellow member of Jesus' inner circle.

"Up close and personal" is the assignment that John, Jesus' best bud, took on when he wrote his "gospel" about A.D. 85-95. (He wrote four other New Testament books: 1st, 2nd and 3rd John and Revelation.)

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke had already been written, prior to A.D. 70. John, the last surviving disciple of the twelve, was an aging elder in the faith who chose to address the question of the day by selecting seven of Jesus' miracles and seven of His sayings as the foundation of this, "the fourth gospel."

Matthew, one of Jesus' twelve, addresses Jesus as King in his gospel. Mark focuses on Jesus as Servant. Luke touts Jesus as Son of Man. John zeroes in on Jesus as Son of God.

Some split hairs over "Son of God," arguing that Jesus claimed only to be God's *Son*, not God. 1st century Hebrews made no such distinction. Calling someone the "son of so-and-so" was synonymous with saying he is identified with, or identical to, that person. So, "Son of God" was the same as saying Jesus *was* God in an earth suit.

**The Gray Line Tour of John**

In chapter 1 John makes his case that Jesus is the living "Word," God come to earth in human form. Jesus' advance guy is a strange duck, John the Baptist -- not to be confused with John, the writer of this gospel. That was back before there were enough names to go around like we have today -- names like Earl, Buck, Biff, Blake, Denzel, Rikki and Garth! No, they just called every fourth guy John.

In chapters 2-4 Jesus begins His 3-year teaching and miracle-working career.

In chapters 5-12 Jesus faces testy opposition which morphs into a plot by religious leaders to snuff Him out. Ironically, He enters Jerusalem, receiving a Hero's welcome.

In chapters 13-17 Jesus prepares for His imminent death.

In chapters 18-21 He's cuffed, tried, crucified and buried. He then pulls off history's grandest act, His own resurrection, followed by His in-person appearance before 500 witnesses.

John insists that Jesus is not *a* god but God in the flesh! Back then a blasphemer was to be stoned. Since Jesus claimed to *be* God, Jewish authorities considered Him guilty of blasphemy. (John 10:33)

**John rolls a pair of sevens.**

Rather than do a play-by-play of Jesus' brief career, John writes about seven "miracles" or "signs" that Jesus performed -- and seven of His key statements. First, the seven signs:

1. He **changes water into wine**, symbolizing the way He turns our ordinary existences into extraordinary lives filled with joy and hope.
2. He **heals the dying son** of a royal official, demonstrating that He came to heal the broken-hearted.
3. He **heals a man paralyzed** for 38 years, a sign that He came to set free those who've been oppressed.

4. He **feeds 5,000 people**, using only a sack lunch of five biscuits and two small fish, underscoring His desire to meet our deepest need, our hunger to know and have a one-to-one relationship with God.

5. He **walks on water**, representing His mission to free mankind from our greatest enemy, fear.

6. He **gives sight to a man blind** from birth, highlighting His mission to open our spiritual eyes which have been blind from birth.

7. He **brings back to life a man**, His friend Lazarus, who'd been buried for three days, illustrating His powerful victory over death.

These seven super-feats validate that Jesus *is* the wonder-working Messiah, foretold by the Old Testament prophets. These are His papers, His irrefutable credentials.

In Exodus about 1,400 years before Christ, God encounters a shepherd boy named Moses. Speaking to him from a burning bush that incredibly would not burn up, God reveals to this kid from the sticks His monumental plan to free His chosen people, the Jews, from slavery in Egypt and lead them into Canaan, "a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey." God tells young Mo, "I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt."

Moses replies, "What makes You think the big guy in Cairo will turn my people loose just because I ask him to?" God assures Moses that He'll stick with him all the way.

Then Moses hits God with the BIG QUESTION: what do I tell the Israelites when I say that You've sent me to be their leader? They'll ask me for Your name. THEN what do I say?"

God fields this one handily in one of the most powerful statements in the entire Bible. **Let's read Exodus 3:14.**

God calls Himself "I am." Those two words embody the fact that God is self-consistent, self-perpetuating and self-existent. During His three-year tour in Palestine Jesus makes seven, ringing "I am" statements, recorded for us here by John:

1. **"I am the bread of life."** He permanently satisfies our spiritual hunger.

1. **"I am the light of the world."** He leads us out of spiritual darkness into eternal light.

3. **"I am the gate for the sheep."** He's the *only* way to eternal life.

4. **"I am the good shepherd."** He's the one who can safely lead us through dangers and death into the green pastures of His presence.

5. **"I am the resurrection and the life."** His miraculous power gives and restores life itself, when all other hope has been exhausted.

6. **"I am the way, the truth and the life."** He is ultimate reality, the substance behind all of life's smoke.

1. **"I am the vine; you are the branches."** He's the Source of life itself, giving meaning to our otherwise parched existence.

Thanks to John's capturing them for us, we have these seven blazing word pictures to help us understand that Jesus is God.

**"Who Do You Trust" is NOT a game show.**

Each of us wants to fully live life, to find lasting fulfillment. John convincingly describes the Goal of every person's search, whether we admit it or not. Only a personal connection to Jesus Christ allows us to be all that He, our Creator, desires us to be.

We have our heroes. We may even "worship" them at times, trusting them to lead us into war or into more federal hand-outs or into bigger tax cuts. But *ultimate* worship is simply recognizing that Jesus is who He says He is ….. God. Recognizing that He gave His life on a Roman cross for you and me, paying the debt we all owe to God, securing for us God's forever-forgiveness of our sins, reserving for us a place in heaven for all eternity… WITH GOD!

The other option is too ugly to contemplate -- "eternal death" in a place the Bible calls hell, forever removed from all that's good and wholesome and loving, tormented in the "lake of fire" with satan and his angels in a non-stop rumble that's beyond description.

The Bible says God created hell for one purpose -- for satan and his henchmen. God sent Jesus to the cross so that you and I could KNOW once and for all that hell is NOT our ultimate destination. Jesus did the heavy lifting; all we have to do is to *believe* that He did it for us. It's a personal choice, *the* *most* personal you'll ever make.

Contrary to some opinions, the Bible doesn't teach that we're *saved* or *born again* by having someone or something waved over us, or by having someone get us wet, or by having us go through an extended waiting period while we "get holy" and do good works in order to *deserve* God's grace.

Stepping from unbelief into belief, entering a very personal relationship with God, coming to the point of placing all of our trust and hope in Him because of what Christ did for us on the cross, is not a protracted ordeal. It's not even a religion. It's a decision of the heart to follow Jesus. **Let's read John 1:12 and John 3:16-18 and 36.**

**John the Baptist….**

**"Say the secret *Word*, and the dove will come down!"**

John the author clearly tells his readers *why* he's written this book. **Let's read John 20:30-31**

John wants us to get the message, in no uncertain terms, that Jesus is God, and that our *only* hope of being *saved* from eternal damnation is by entrusting Him with our very souls and lives.

To establish his contention that Jesus is God, John wastes no time by hitting this theme in verse 1 of chapter 1.

Seven centuries before Christ, the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 40:3) announced to the Jews that a voice would rise from the desert wilderness to prepare the way for the revealing of God-come-to-earth, the long-awaited Messiah.

Long past child-bearing years, Zechariah the priest and his barren bride Elizabeth (cousin of Mary, Jesus' mother) were told by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:5-80) that Zechariah's old juices will flow one more time. And Lizzie will get pregnant!

Out of the womb of this Gramma Walton look-alike comes young John. When he was about 31, somewhere along A.D. 27, he wanders out of the Judean desert, dressed in camel's hair, eating dried insects and wild honey. No glib Tony Robbins, he was sent by God to confront sin with the scalpel of repentance -- a fiery message that drew crowds from miles around.

John had strong convictions about who Jesus was and why He'd come to earth. He contended that there was but one Christ, one Messiah, and that He was to be accepted, believed and embraced for who He is, the very Son of God.

"Turn from your sins and be baptized and God will forgive you. Get ready for the coming of the Lord, our Messiah," he shouted. John didn't even know he was talking about Jesus 'til the Son of God appears one day at the Jordan River, insisting that John baptize Him (Luke 3:21-22). Suddenly a dove rests on Jesus' shoulder, and an audible voice from heaven says, "You are my Son, whom I love; with You I am well-pleased." (Mark 1:10-11, Matt. 3:17)

Jesus describes John as "greater than any who has ever lived." But he didn't live long. He turns outspokenly critical of King Herod who marries his (Herod's) sister-in-law. That lip lands John in the slam. He's made the political and the religious power-lunchers uneasy and could only be silenced by being beheaded.

What are your convictions about Christ? What do you know about him for sure? Would you be willing to risk your neck for those convictions, as John did? This book, the Gospel of John, was written to move us from ambiguity to total commitment to Jesus.

**What did we learn about Jesus last month in the 16 verses that we drilled down into? (John 1:1-16)**

**Now let's resume our discussion at John 1:17.**

His Deal

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