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

**CRACKING THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

**Ch. 1C**

We're examining arguably the most-read, most-quoted part of the Bible -- the fourth book of the New Testament, the "Gospel of John."

Writing late in his life in A.D. 85-95, John's collecting Medicare in Ephesus, a key city in the Roman Empire on Turkey's west coast. He'd moved there from Jerusalem after the Romans razed the temple in A.D. 70. When John's gospel was completed, all the New Testament books by Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul and Peter had already been devoured by the young churches ringing the eastern Mediterranean.

Unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke, John veers from the sequential, day-by-day model of reporting on the life of Christ, especially the three-year period when He actively taught about the Kingdom of Heaven and performed miracles, or signs, to validate His claim to be God's Son.

John's book is an intimate, selective, insider's account. Hangin' with and learning from Jesus during history's three wildest years, John's in the unique position of seeing and knowing *God-in-the-flesh*! Why *wouldn't* we want to check out his observations!

Rather than creating a purely historical biography, John openly reveals his mission statement in ch. 20: 30-31. Let's read it.

John selected seven miraculous signs to make his case that Jesus Christ wasn't foolin' when He claimed to *be* God. Having documented these startling proofs of Jesus' culture-shaking claim, John now admits his intent to convince us to receive God's gift of eternal life simply by believing that *through Christ alone* we may have that gift.

**Now, Summarizing Billions of Years…Briefly…**

If Sam, Cokie, Larry King, Chris "Hardball" Matthews or *anybody* could spot flaws in Jesus, it would've been His closest sidekick. Yet John boldly concludes, "Yup, Jesus is God alright!"

From the git-go in ch. 1 John describes Jesus as "the *Word*," God's medium of expressing Himself to planet Earth. When this Carpenter from Nazareth walked among us 2,000 years ago, He was actually telling us God's own thoughts! Imagine *that*!! You don't *get* those in *Conversations with God*, *Faith of My Fathers, The Rock Says, The Art of Happiness* or even *Hell to Pay*. God's mind is revealed only by what's preserved for us in the Bible.

John asserts that God is three Persons-in-One -- the Trinity -- a mega-mindbender too deep for man's finite faculties to plumb.

Jesus is seen as the Creator/Sustainer of the universe. He was there *before* creation -- *had* to be since He triggered it, not by firing off a big bang, but by *speaking* it into being! No biggie … if you're God.

Jesus, we learn, is the embodiment of light and life (John 1:4). While scientists and scholars grapple over what life is, the Bible simply states that Jesus is the Source of *life*.

He's also the Source of *light*, here meaning knowledge, understanding, truth. Later John records Jesus' personal testimony that echoes down the corridors of time: "I am *the* Way, *the* Truth and *the* Life. Nobody comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

John says a personal belief in Jesus is our *only* hope of life with God after we die. In 1st John, a little letter he tucked in at the rear of the New Testament, he declares, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (I John 5:12)

You can devote your life to academic discovery, but the Bible says you'll never fathom the wonders of God's ways nor His plan for your role in His grand purpose -- unless you let the light of the Scriptures help you put life's puzzle together.

**"*Any* dream will do," writes Tim Rice in**

**"Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat"**

**But…….*will* it?**

In ch. 3, John addresses a prickly, misunderstood, two-word phrase which Jesus introduces to us. In his new book, *SPIRITUAL MARKETPLACE*, sociologist Wade Roof observes the shifting religious ground in America.

Baby Boomers can see religious faith as an emotional, even "spiritual" experience. "Religion" is Latin-ish for "to bind." But Boomer spirituality blows off binding with or buying into an existing belief system, opting instead to swing by the Doctrinal Deli to build their own holy hero sandwich. But wearing Tiger's Nikes doesn't get you into the Masters.

Even many bona fide, "born again" followers of Christ are also duped. Half the born-again respondents in Roof's study said, "The various religions of the world are 'equally good and true.'"

The marketplace is teeming with appealing ideas and "isms" that, on the surface, smack of real spiritual truth. Like science-fictional super-viruses, each clamors to own a piece of our personal belief. The siren of modern culture seduces seeker and believer alike.

Some peoples are susceptible to the notion that we can create peace and perfection on earth through education, psychotherapy, or political and economic reforms. But these well-intentioned souls fail to acknowledge that *nothing* reforms sin and pride like a life-changing, one-on-one encounter with the God of the universe.

This Bible we've been studying at Nordy's for almost nine years says the *only* cure for sin is God's gracious goodness and forgiveness, offered not through reform or good works or spiritual exercises, but *only* through personal faith in Jesus Christ. According to God, any other remedy that seeks to rehab the human condition is only window dressing which we buy into at our peril.

"Tolerance" is today's mantra; "Can't we all just get along?" While it "seems" politically correct to blend Christianity with other religions, this hellacious hybrid flunks the "John 3, born-again Christianity" test.

Staying true to Christ's words is our only hope of not being sucked into some faux faith whose end is a place the Bible calls hell, the home of unquenchable fire and never-ending hate and destruction.

Following Christ is not just an emotional trip -- it's a personal commitment, through faith and repentance, to a relationship with the one true God, made possible only by receiving the free gift of God's forgiveness for our sin, purchased for us by Christ's death on the cross. That "Good News" alone determines what it means to "be born-again," not what polls and PC-types may tell us.

**Let's Cut to the Chase**

Contrary to rampant misperceptions, God doesn't grade on a curve. You don't have to wait 'til you die to know for sure if you'll be spending eternity in the penthouse or the outhouse. But if we *were* to have a pop quiz on what the Bible's saying, Adrian Rogers of Memphis, my birthplace, has these crib notes to cinch your "A." He says the Bible:

• Addresses one problem -- sin

• Has one villain -- satan

• Has one Hero -- Jesus Christ, God's only Son

• Was written for one purpose -- to call mankind to know, love and serve God -- and to be with Him for time and eternity

• Has one message -- Jesus Christ is Lord, and if you trust Him, He'll save you forever.

**Let's go to the Source of this born-again business and read John 3:1-18 and 36.**

**Jesus and "The Draft"**

One of my heroes, Ray Stedman, now enjoying eternity from his "skybox" seat, recalled the ancient proverb, "To plant for a year, plant wheat. To plant for a decade, plant trees. To plant for a century, plant people."

In the section of the Gospel of John we look at today (1:35-51) Jesus begins assembling a team of franchise players who'll literally change the world forever -- twelve ordinary guys who, with Him, will forever revolutionize the relationship between the one true God …. and man.

John the Baptist (J.B.), not John the author, points his followers to Jesus, calling Him "the Lamb of God." J.B. knows that Problem #1 is dealing with our sin. By referring to Jesus as God's Lamb, he underlines Christ's ultimate sacrifice for us -- His death on the cross that paid the penalty of the sins of *all* people. He kneows that only when we confess our sin, and by *faith* -- not by any good works or ritual, simply BY FAITH -- receive God's merciful forgiveness for our sin, only then is the way cleared for us to know and walk with God.

Andrew and John (the author) are the first who, after cautious investigation, sign on to follow Jesus. Then Andrew brings his impetous brother Simon whom Jesus instantly renames Cephas (in Aramaic), or Peter (in Greek), a name that means "rock." Next is Philip, a quiet, shy sort whom Jesus seeks out. Then Philip brings Nathaniel to Jesus.

In each case Jesus looks into their eyes and souls as if He has X-ray vision. Bingo, He knows their deepest needs, weaknesses and strengths. He sees what He can make of them if they'll only respond to His "Follow me." Their potential for success lies not in their brains, brawn, network, lineage or vocation. They'll become all God has in mind for them (which, in their case, is changing the world!) by simply placing their total trust in Christ to be their Savior and Leader.

**Now let's read all of John ch. 1, then pick up our micro-look this month at verse 35.**

Remember when you first learned to float? You just laid back and let it hold you up. That's how it is to take the step of faith and give your life to Christ. Maybe you can't see the bottom because you haven't figured this "spiritual thing" out yet, but if down deep inside you sense that "now's the time" and "giving my life to Jesus" is the right thing to do, that's God knocking on your door.

Don't be fooled. The Bible doesn't say that in the big courtroom in the sky God will evaluate what kind of life you've lived and give or take away points for your good deeds and screw-ups. Nor will He say, "Oh what the heck; I'll drop the entrance requirements and let EVERYbody in." Nor will He say, "Your parents were God-fearing. And you faithfully attended church. You kept your nose clean. So, you're in, dude."

Nope, God will ask you only one question: "What did you do with my Son Jesus?"

Just as He did two millennia ago, Jesus is still calling men and women, boys and girls to "Follow me." Like that water to the neophyte swimmer, you can trust Jesus to hold you up, to always act toward you in love, looking out for your best interests, grooming you to fulfill everything He's created you to be. The *only* way you and I will ever be *complete* is to ….. follow Him.

If you haven't laid back in the water yet, please…….take a moment today…..and just say something like……"Jesus, you're right; I'm a sinner. I believe You died for my sins. I believe You love me. Right now I take that plunge by faith and invite You to come into my world because I want to follow You."

His Deal

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