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

**FINDING THE BIBLE'S SWEET SPOT**

**IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

**John Chapter 3**

T

oday we rock on in John, 4th book of the New Testament. Of the Bible's 66 books, John is the most-read, its 3rd chapter the most popular and verse 16 its most famous sentence. In a minute we'll see that those "John 3:16" signs at NFL games are *not* John Madden's weight.

Since 1991 we've been scanning the Bible once a month here at Nordy's, hardly sufficient to earn us a seminary degree. But a *serious* study of Jesus Christ's life on earth, seen in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, generally finds a seeker arriving at one of three conclusions:

(1) Jesus is a lying, evil son of a gun. (2) He's a loonie right out of the Cuckoo's Nest. Or (3) as advertised, He's the Messiah, the Son of God. Cop-out deduction #4 goes like this: "He was simply a good teacher."

But that's bogus since Jesus claimed to *be* *God*, to have control over creation, to have authority to forgive sins. He predicted He'd die and three days later live again! He said He *was* Truth and was the *only* door to have eternal life! He even encouraged people to *worship* Him! Does this sound like a "really good teacher?" Unless … ooh … He was right.

This astonishing Carpenter said, "Anyone who's seen me has seen (God) the Father." He also said, "I and the Father are one." When the Jews were about to stone Him, He countered, "I've shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied His tormentors, 'but for blasphemy because you, a mere man, claim to be God.'" They *had* caught His drift.

For hundreds of years before Christ's birth in Bethlehem, Old Testament prophets had foretold, some 109 times, that God would come to earth as the Jews' Messiah, God's "anointed One." The mathematical odds of these prophecies all coming true in one Person are uncountable. You might as well bet that Donald Trump's hairspray will not survive a hurricane.

**Honk If You Know John**

John the apostle wrote the Gospel of John; also 1st, 2nd and 3rd John; and Revelation. He and his brother James, Jesus' first cousins, were fishermen north of Jerusalem on the Sea of Galilee. But when he met Jesus in about AD 27, John devoted the rest of his long life to being a disciple and apostle of Christ. (An apostle is "one who is sent," who'd literally seen Christ {I Corinthians. 9:1}, and one who does miracles {II Cor. 12:12), thus refuting all post-1st century quacks who call themselves an apostle. They might as well call themselves a cab.)

The evidence that John *wrote* John is stronger than proof that Josephus wrote his famous Jewish history classic, that Caesar wrote his Commentaries, and more convincing than the credentials of any of the revered, non-Bible writings of antiquity. Scholars have recovered more than 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the NT alone.

An "unlearned man," with no rabbinical schooling, John had been trained at home in Hebrew and in the OT, typical for most Jewish families back then when their children were said to be the best educated in the world.

John hears that some refugee from the desert named John the Baptist (JB) is preaching and baptizing east of Jerusalem. He and thousands hear JB promise that the Messiah is coming soon, and that all should repent of their sins, believe in this Jesus and thus become a child of God.

When Jesus shows up, JB tells his followers, "Look, there's the Lamb of God!" At this, John the author and his pal Andrew instantly latch on to Jesus. John, James and Andrew's brother Peter become Jesus' inner circle, His own rat pack. In fact, while hanging on the cross, Jesus selects John, over His own half-brothers, to care for His mother Mary.

John leaves Jerusalem in AD 70 when the Titus-led Romans overthrow the city and level the temple. He lives out his later years in Ephesus, up in today's Turkey, where he drafts this Gospel and 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, before being exiled to Patmos in the Mediterranean where he pens Revelation and, as the only one of Jesus "12" to die of natural causes, and their sole survivor, passes away in about AD 98.

John's Gospel basically selects seven of Jesus' miracles and seven of His sayings to prove that Jesus is God. His book's central purpose is found in 20:31: "….(this is) written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." No Bible author makes a stronger case for Christ's deity.

**It's Time to Watch "Nick at Night"**

The scene opens as Nicodemus comes to Jesus after dark. Nick's a player, "a ruler of the Jews," a rabbi, a lawyer, a member of the Sanhedrin (70 heavies who run Judea's religious life and Jews everywhere.)

As a Pharisee, Nick's mortal enemy is Jesus. The Pharisees, an elitist group of 8,000, had taken solemn vows to devote every waking minute to keeping the 10 Commandments and pleasing God.

"The Big 10," given to Moses by God atop Mt. Sinai 12 centuries earlier (Exodus 20:1-17), dealt with general rules like "You better worship only God, and you better not sin." But this wasn't specific enough for the Pharisees, so their sub-set, the Scribes, spell out in sub-atomic detail how the Commandments were to be obeyed.

These "how to's and NOT to's" were published in the *Mishnah* which contains *24 chapters* just on how Jews are to live on the Sabbath! For instance, farmers and fishermen are not to tie knots on the Sabbath. But as long as you use only *one hand* to tie it, it's OK. This fanatical fixation was the rigid, myopic focus of the Pharisees, of whom Nick is a top gun.

Last month in chapter 2 we saw Jesus livid that merchants and rabbis had turned the temple into Sacrifices-R-Us. So Nick sneaks in to Jesus after nightfall lest his peers think he's turned traitor. He concedes that he and his power lunch cronies believe Jesus is a fellow rabbi sent from God. But Nick wants to know "the real Jesus," not just the public miracle worker.

Let's overhear this midnight meeting at Denny's and read John 3:1-36.

In his chapter 3 John introduces **the either/or** **that none can ignore**:

belief = life

unbelief = death.

In *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking*

*of American Religion*, author Wade Roof says a third of America's 77 million Baby Boomers identify themselves as "born again Christians." But what do they mean by that?

Roof says, by and large, they mean that they've had a "highly personal spiritual experience that has changed their lives." They believe that you're born again "because of certain feelings . . . and experiences, not because you believe any particular set of doctrines."

Nixon hatchetman Chuck Colson went to the slam for his crime and chose to repent of his sins and follow Christ. His book, *Born Again,* was a best-seller. In '76 Jimmy Carter, our first self-confessed "born again" President, took office. In recent years "born-a-gins" have been fricasseed by the media. But Colson and Carter didn't coin "born again." That happened 2,000 years ago in John chapter 3.

Jesus spots a gaping hole in the life of our ultra-religious, highly-respected friend Nick. Like you and me, he's a sinner, doomed to pay eternally for his sin by spending unending life-after-death in a "lake of fire" the Bible calls hell. The only way to get a reprieve, Jesus says, is by having a spiritual rebirth.

Many scholars insist that being "born of water," as Jesus said, refers to baptism. But it's clear from Paul's later teaching that baptism is *not* a requirement for salvation. He wrote, "For by *grace* (by definition, something given that's undeserved) you have been saved through *faith* (not by a physical act like baptism) and that not of yourselves; it is the *gift* of God (not earned); not as a result of works, that no one should boast." (Eph. 2:8,9)

Some insist that we can't know 'til we die whether we'll wind up in heaven or hell. Not true, says God's Word. In the last verse of this chapter John shines the light of truth in this murky corner. Let's read John 3:36.

Despite his theological degrees, Nick can't answer life's #1 question: how can a person get to heaven? So Jesus makes it clear that nobody -- not the nicest guy, or biggest donor to charity, or most religious person -- *nobody* enters the kingdom of God without being born again.

Aware that Nick could dazzle even Regis with his recall of the OT, Jesus cites a historical event Moses had recorded in the book of Numbers. After the Israelites escaped from Egypt's Pharaoh, dashing across dry ground in the Red Sea, they were slogging through the Arabian desert, moaning about the grub God was providing. So God sent venomous snakes to get their attention, inflicting fatal bites. Answering Moses' cry for help, God had him make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Any who were snakebit should look up at this virtual viper, and they'd be healed.

Jesus' point? People -- you and I -- have been infected by sin, sentencing all of us to never-ending, spiritual death. Just as the bronze snake was lifted up, so Jesus was hoisted on a cross. If we look to Him in repentance and faith, you and I will be assured of spending forever with Christ in heaven. It has zip to do with how moral or religious we can make ourselves, or keeping the 10 Commandments. It has *all* to do with God's loving gift of total, unconditional forgiveness. It's not what we *do* that must be changed; it's who we *are*! This free offer of God's pardon is available for you and me to accept, through repentance and faith.

The single most treasured line in all the Bible is verse 16. It reveals the solitary way that you and I can enter the forever family of God, i.e., through faith in His Son Jesus. All of poor Nick's religious studies, prestige and good deeds added up to a big goose egg as far as qualifying him for heaven. He simply needed to see that Jesus had come as his Savior, to put his faith in Him, and in so doing he'd have the ultimate fresh start; he'd be…..born again.

Verse 16 says God *loves* us. He's not some cosmic killjoy out to zap us or turn us all into holier-than-thou's. Far from it. Moved by His great love and compassion for us in our sinful state, He was willing to let His only Son leave the comforts of heaven to come take our place on Death Row, so that the curse of your sin and mine could be forever erased. Let's read II Corinthians 5:17-21.

You and I can opt out of being slaves to sin, facing certain, eternal torment. I don't know about you, but I'm sensing that this is pretty "Good News." If this sounds good to you too, God's probably already drawing you to Himself like a magnet. He wants you to say, "God, take me; I'm yours!" He's always the Initiator; we're the responder. (John 6:44)

Did Nick take Jesus' advice and become born again? The Bible doesn't say in so many words. However, we see him twice more in John's Gospel. Once when Jesus is in danger of being stoned for claiming to be God, Nick tells his fellow Pharisees that the least they can do is give Jesus a hearing first (John 7:50). Later, when Jesus' body is taken from the cross, we see Joseph of Arimathea and Nick, perhaps now coming out of his spiritual closet, taking the Lord's body to be buried. (John 19:39)

Now let's resume our walk-through at John 3:22.

**Dueling Disciples**

Can you imagine being in Seattle in the 60s and having the Beetles and the Rolling Stones in town together for several weeks? Pat O'Day would go into apoplexy, and school would be out for everybody! That's the picture for a short while in the Judean countryside, between Lake Galilee and the Dead Sea, as superstars Jesus and JB draw SRO crowds simultaneously.

JB's groupies were fried that Jesus was grabbing the headlines now. JB knew tho' that he was a role player, and he humbly reminds his fans that he's just the opening act. The star, he says, is Jesus, the primo Person in all of history, throughout the universe, the One who speaks ultimate Truth … because He speaks the very words that He's heard God the Father say.

The final verse of this, the watershed chapter of the entire Bible, says it all. If you place your faith in Jesus, you'll live life to the max here on earth, plus get the bonus of living forever in God's presence. If you choose not to, you'll keep living under the sin-imposed sentence of eternal punishment. It's up to you and me. Eternal life or eternal wrath. God's done all He can do. Now the choice is ours.

If after spending an hour in John 3 today you can answer these two questions, it was probably one of the best investments we've ever made:

1. Why did God the Father send God the Son (Jesus Christ) to earth?
2. Right now where you do stand with God based on John 3:36?

Jesus once asked His disciples and the crowds (Mark 8:36-37), "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

Paul, once an all-out oppressor of Christ's followers, ironically became the first Christian missionary. A distinguished scholar and zealous defender of the Jewish law, he wrote after coming to faith in Christ, "…. I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord … I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ -- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." (Philippians 3:7-9)

If making peace with God is your destination, whose directions are you following? If you were lost in Portland, Seattle's Thomas Guide would do you no good. Hello! You might as well be singing, "The nearer your destination, the more you're slip-slidin' away." Better to consult God's trustworthy directions. They're all right here in John3.com.

If you've never done so, you can talk to God right now privately and say, something like, "Father, I admit it. I need You. Doggone it, I *am* a sinner. Maybe I haven't committed a big one, but I've been going my own way instead of yours, that's for sure. I want you to thank You for writing 'Paid in Full' across that debt that I owe You, thanks to Jesus' death for me on the cross. I'm sorry for my sin, and I give my life to You right now. Please enter my life and show me what You want me to be. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

If you just prayed that prayer, according to John 3, you've made the biggest journey of your life in the last 30 seconds…..you've passed from a collision course with the wrath of God ….. to a date with God for spending eternity with Him. Congratulations! You done good. Real good.

His Deal

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