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

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: Chapter 4**

**Hangin' Out with The Man Called God**

S

peaking of "Survivor," this 4th book of the New Testament, a kind of personal diary, was written in late 1st century A.D. by the last *survivor* of Jesus' twelve disciples. Its author is John, the one closest to Jesus during His three-year teaching career on earth.

John, the erstwhile fisherman, bolts from Jerusalem after the Romans level the temple in A.D. 70, beginning a stretch of non-Jewish control there that lasts until Israel recaptures it from Jordan in the Six Day War in 1967.

John settles in Ephesus in today's Turkey where he selects seven statements spoken by Christ and seven of His miracles, or signs, and writes this treasure whose purpose he clearly states. **Let's read John 20:30-31.**

Does John cover *all* that Jesus said or did? **Let's read John 21:25**

Philip Yancey, whose books about Jesus are the most reader-friendly, says, "We still lack certain basic information about Jesus. The four Gospels skip over nine-tenths of His life, omitting much that would interest modern readers. We have only one scene from his adolescence and know nothing about His schooling. Details of His family life are so scant that scholars still debate how many brothers and sisters he had. We also know nothing about Jesus' shape, stature, or eye color."

So, we're left to learn about Jesus in the pages of the Bible. But that should be enough to keep you and me busy 'til we see Him in person. And, the Bible promises, each of us will.

In John 4 Jesus meets a down-and-outer and an up-and-outer. She's an ethnically mixed tramp in disgrace; he's probably a powerful Jew, living *La Vida Galilee*.

Does Jesus discriminate, since 2,000 years ago Middle Eastern women were low life, especially Samaritans? Stay tuned but …

**Return with us now to those thrilling days of yestermonth**

As the announcers said in the action-adventure series of radio's "golden era," "You remember *last* time……" In John 3 we meet a Judean bigwig, an honest truth-seeker named Nicodemus. To avoid being criticized by his fellow, super-religious Pharisees, he comes to Jesus after dark, earning the moniker, Nick at Night. If *moniker* is not your synonym of choice, we can go with everyday favorites like *appelation*, *epithet*, *cognomen* or, in this case, ….. *nick*name!

Convinced by Jesus' miracles, character and teaching, Nick admits that Jesus had "come from God," but he personally feared coming out of the closet with that confession.

Nick knows the Old Testament intimately; he's trying to obey the Scriptures fanatically; he wants to live a moral life. But he hasn't taken the all-important step which Jesus calls being "born again."

We spent time last month digesting the Bible's most famous verse. It's the Bible in one sentence! **Let's re-read it -- John 3:16.**

God loves us…and proved it! Because *true* love exacts a price, in order to have your sins and mine totally forgiven, God paid the ultimate price by sending His only Son Jesus to be crucified for us.

John lays out what the Bible says each of us is to do if we're to live with God forever in His presence, instead of frying forever *out* of His presence in a pit the Bible calls hell. **Let's read John 3:36.**

The paranoid Pharisees get wind of Jesus' growing fame and sense that He, not they, is becoming the top story. To avoid a rumble, Jesus straps on His REI backpack, buckles His Birkenstocks, grabs the trail mix and hits the road for home up north.

Opting not to take the five-day-long, desert detour *around* Samaria, as the Jewish bigots did, He chooses the direct route (half as long), right *through* Samaria, "the wrong side of the tracks," ex-capital of the old northern kingdom of divided Israel.

Samaria had long been a center of idolatry. In 721 B.C. King Sargon II of Assyria captured 27,000 of its citizens, terminating the northern kingdom. Assyria replaced Samaria's exiles with its own people, fusing religions.

Alexander captured it in 331 B.C., then destroyed it. Late in the 1st century B.C. King Herod revived the city which sits atop 16 archeological layers, dating back to the early Bronze Age.

Jews classed Samaritans as unholy heretics. Ironically, Samaritans -- not Jews -- are seen in the New Testament as being more open to Christ. **Let's let John tell the story as we read all of ch. 4.**

**Got Water?**

Engaging a scarlet lettered Samaritan woman in conversation, Jesus displays God's love for all races, genders and social positions. Even *where* these two meet has historical import. It was at Jacob's Well, at the base of Mt. Gerizim. 1,700 years earlier Jacob (whose name God changed to *Israel*), the founder of the Jewish faith and father of the "twelve tribes of Israel," dug this well to sustain his family, keeping alive the very roots of the Jewish race.

Mt. Gerizim was the Samaritans' sacred mountain where they'd built a temple to rival the one in Jerusalem. Gerizim symbolized the two groups' differing views of God and the Scriptures. Here, where two belief systems collide, Jesus chooses to bridge a religio-cultural chasm, introducing Himself as "the Water of life."

Tired and thirsty, the Son of God, showing His humanity, stops to rest at Jacob's Well. Striking a blow against injustice, He speaks with a person despised by Samaritans and Jews alike. Jewish law wouldn't permit a rabbi to talk to a woman in public, not even his own wife or sister! Theology was supposedly over their heads.

But Jesus ignores political correctness to introduce "living water." Just as Nick at Night took "born again" literally, and puzzled about the lunacy of re-entering his mother's womb, so the woman also takes Jesus' water metaphor literally rather than figuratively.

With this unnamed, notoriously immoral woman, Jesus raises the question of sin -- just as He'd done with Nick, a highly moral, religious big shot. Both had the same need. Jesus says He alone can satisfy our thirst for purpose, stability and fulfillment. One swallow of this Living Water -- taken by placing our personal faith, fortunes and future in Christ -- will give you and me what the Bible calls *eternal life*.

The woman admits having what really is a thirst for true, lasting love, and asks for Christ's amazing elixir. Men had left her empty. With her life on "empty," she's at last ready to hear truth.

With no condemnation, Jesus drills down to this unmarried, forlorn woman's central issue, saying, "Get me your spouse." He likes to use key situations to point us away from ourselves to Him. It might be death, disease, failure, fear or the shallowness of earthly success.

The Bible invites us to release our death grip on our own life, and let God slide into our pilot's seat. By admitting that we're sinners who need a Savior, we, by faith, drink the Water of life and receive God's total forgiveness for all our sins -- past, present and future.

Touched by Jesus' insight, the woman acknowledges Him as a prophet, but, like us, she tries to steer the conversation away from her and onto religious minutiae. Not taking the bait, Jesus says "true worship" isn't about buildings, icons, robes or rituals. It's about letting God's Spirit take up residence in our hearts.

Jesus tells her He's the Messiah, putting the lie to any who insist He never claimed to be God. Hearing this, and having just experienced His gentle, heart-searching grace, she leaves her water jar behind, revealing that physical thirst is no longer the issue.

She races into town where she'd always felt like a floozy, and

becomes the first evangelist to the Gentiles! A social leper becomes the aqueduct to bring spiritual life to an entire city. Samaritans start seeing Jesus not as their hoped-for political liberator, but as the Savior of all who repent of their sins and follow Him.

She tells everyone about this man -- no ordinary drifter -- who'd told her all about her innermost self. The she winsomely asks them, "Could this be the Christ?" A question you and I also must answer.

Like Billy Graham, her message sends the town off not to see Jesus do His miracle tricks, but to see if He knew all about *them* too! All this … without a tent, church or TV evangelist.

Jesus chills two days in Samaria, then resumes His journey to Galilee near Nazareth where He'd grown up, and Cana where He'd done His first miracle.

**HomeBoy Comes Home**

Rarely does a hero like John Olerud get to return to his hometown and play before adoring fans. After His lukewarm reception in Cana, despite His water-to-wine *tour de force*, Jesus had taken His message to Jerusalem, searching for kinder audiences. Coming home, He brings an impressive resume', gets a warm welcome and continues His campaign to win the hearts of His countrymen.

**The Nobleman meets the No-Bull GodMan**

News of Jesus' arrival reaches Capernaum, twenty miles away, where a government official, a nobleman, is grief-stricken over his deathly ill son. As a concerned dad, he seeks the finest care. It just so happens God is in the next town!

He hustles to Cana and asks the Messiah to return with him to heal his dying son, implying that Jesus, who'd *spoken* the universe into existence (!), had to actually be *with* the boy to pull this one off.

Jesus' response is shocking. Has He no compassion for this hurting family! But the original Greek text tells us that Jesus is actually speaking to a *group* -- perhaps to the privileged class to which this man belongs, perhaps to Jews who always demanded miraculous proof. Jesus is saying that supernatural signs are NOT the point; *believing* in Him IS. He wants the nobleman to not go for the short-term miracle…..but to place his trust in God, not theatrics.

Refusing to hop over to Capernaum, Jesus still meets this dad's need, but not how the nobleman expected. Jesus wants to do more than heal the lad; He wants to transform his dad's life into one marked by a strong, lasting faith in Him. Jesus is saying, "Don't just believe I can heal your son; believe in who I am!" And the man did.

If you haven't yet, are you willing today to worship "the God who *is*" instead of "the God you *want*?" God doesn't expect you to put your brain in neutral. He simply wants you, by faith, to take Him at His Word, and decide to place your life in His hands.

God wants to give you the gift of saving faith. He wants to transform your life, to walk with you moment by moment, to live with you forever in heaven at His place.

With this second miracle in His old 'hood, Jesus graphically demonstrates that He's both the Lord of nature (turning water into aged wine) -- and the Lord of Life (with authority over disease and death). He proves we can trust Him with everything.

He wants to be both the Giver and the Object of our faith. Whether it's our need to be loved unconditionally (like the Samaritan woman) or our fear of death (like the broken-hearted nobleman), Jesus is the only One to whom we can reliably turn. By His words and actions He reveals to us what God the Father is like.

The Samaritan woman and the nobleman end their search when they meet Jesus. He brings meaning and fullness to their lives. In writing about these real people, John confronts us with the fact that JESUS IS GOD, something each of us must accept or reject. There's no middle ground.

If Jesus is God, we must worship Him, recognizing

that He laid down His life to save you and me. Genuine worship is

making Christ the Center of our life, doing all we do to please Him.

Nick's religious fervor left him hungry for a spiritual rebirth. The Samaritan lady had been abused by life's "takers" 'til she met the *Giver* of Life. The nobleman freaked at the prospect of his son's death. At your life's crossroads God allows you to run out of options, then says, "Come to Me, and I'll give you rest."

**Before we jet, let's re-read John 3:16-18.**

If today, like Nick, the woman and the nobleman, you've realized that Jesus, not you, has all the answers for life's questions, just say quietly, inwardly to God, "Father, I surrender to You. I believe that You love me, that You sent Your Son Jesus to pay for all my sins, and that You want to live right inside me. I don't understand all this, for sure, but I actually believe it. So please come into my life right now because I now know that You are God, and I'm not. Thank You, Father. I'm asking this in Jesus' name. Amen."

If you've already prayed a prayer like that, or if you did it just now, somewhere the angels are doing The Wave! If you haven't done that yet, do it soon….unless, of course, you're clairvoyant and know exactly how many minutes are left in overtime.

His Deal

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