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

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: Chapter 6**

**"What have I gotta *do* -- walk on *water*?"**

D

oes God exist? If so, what's He like? Could life hinge on answering these two, unvarnished questions?

Jesus Christ claimed to be God's Son, God-in-an-earthsuit. If true, then by observing Him, we can get to know God. That's why John wrote this book. For three years Jesus hit the hustings -- teaching, hanging out and doing miracles to back up His radical claims.

Supposedly Muhammad Ali was flying in rough weather but refused to buckle up. He jabbed at the flight attendant, "Superman don't need no seatbelt." It must've be Southwest Airlines because she countered, "Yeah, and Superman don't need no airplane either!"

Today we examine a pair of Jesus' most widely-known miracles which would've awed even Lois Lane.

***To Know Him is Not Always to Love Him.***

No one has been described, debated, sculpted, painted, loved and hated as much as the Carpenter from Nazareth in northern Israel. There in the home of Mary and her husband Joseph He seems to have had an ordinary childhood, except, of course, for His…well… virgin birth! Pilgrims troop to this Bellingham-sized city to visit shrines where He walked, talked and lived, some rebuilt after Muslims destroyed them in the Middle Ages.

With all the gigs of data and gobs of devotees, millions have opted not to become associated with Jesus. Why? It seems that *hearing* about Him, even *seeing* Him is not enough. Jesus says those who come to a personal faith in Him have been *drawn* by His Father.

Belief does not result *ipso facto* from just hearing about Jesus' offer of free and full forgiveness of our sins. It seems a light has to be switched on inside us, allowing us to grasp what Jesus did -- and wants to do -- for each of us.

Ironically, we think that *we* choose Jesus, but He told His followers, "You didn't choose me; I chose you!" Big-bucks motivational speakers tell us *we* choose our *own* destiny, but Jesus says God the Father *draws* us to Himself. When at last we surrender to Him, we're *responding* … not *initiating*!

The Greek word for "draws" means "compels" or "drags along!" Nobody, not even the most genetically pious, would come to Jesus unless God the Father *compels* them. Why? So no one can take credit for anything we get from God. It's all His doing; none of ours. So much for "good works" or "high morals" getting us into heaven.

Jesus minces no words that He, not any church or religious group, speaks for His Father. No one comes to faith in Christ because of any human effort or organization. God alone brings people to Himself, giving them the desire, the faith and the will to *believe* in Christ, and to follow Him. Once God *draws* us, sometimes kicking and screaming, it's our *"response-ability"* to *believe*.

Churchill said, "People stumble over the truth from time to time, but most pick themselves up and hurry on, as if nothing happened." Dear God, may that never be said of you and me.

***Searching for John.com***

John the disciple, apostle and author of The Gospel of John, (also of First-Second-and-Third John and Revelation), was an eyewitness to the God-Man whose career spanned a north-south distance of some 80 miles in today's Israel.

His "Gospel," fourth book of the New Testament, was the last of the Gospels, written A.D. 85-90. Matthew, Mark and Luke journaled *many* events in Jesus' life, but John selected just seven key miracles.

How'd you like to try to describe God in words! Since John was closest to Jesus, he had an infinite range of fascinating events and impressions to choose from. In fact, he summed up with "There are so many other things Jesus did. If they were all written down … I can't imagine a world big enough to hold such a library of books."

So John drilled down to who Jesus *was* more than what He *did*. His purpose behind this best-read part of the world's best-read book was to bring you and me to the point of *truly believing* in Christ.

J.W. Shepard weaves some threads about Christ's life: "He received His elementary training in a synagogue school in which the Jewish child studied from ages six to twelve. … The boy Jesus had no highly literary education but became well-grounded in Aramaic, and in … the Hebrew language and the Sacred Scriptures of the Jews. He mastered Greek into which these Scriptures had been translated centuries before. While supporting as a carpenter the family of the deceased Joseph, He (devoured) the Rabbinical lore and the Hebrew prophets, becoming deeply learned in the true religion of Israel. At the age of thirty, He appeared at the Jordan, asking baptism of John (the Baptizer, not the disciple) and soon after, He initiated His ministry which grew into a religious movement that has reached today the uttermost confines of the world.

"Jesus, different from any other teacher in history, called attention to His person rather than His doctrine. The religion of the Christ of the Gospels is an *experienced* relationship between Him and His believer-disciple. His personality was unique, attracting vast throngs about Him."

**… And *You* Think *Domino's* Delivers!**

We pick up the story at John chapter 6, a year before Christ's crucifixion. John the Baptist had just been beheaded by King Herod, and the extremist religious power brokers, the Pharisees, had tagged Jesus as being demon-possessed.

This was Jesus' cue to ramp up on teaching his twelve closest disciples, preparing them to carry on His work after what He knew would be His imminent, final showdown with the authorities.

Jesus leaves Jerusalem and travels north 70 miles to Capernaum, a town on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee through which the Jordan flows. Capernaum, home of Andrew, Matthew and Peter, was in the region of Galilee, a mountainous, Roman satellite that covered northern Palestine.

In the 16th century it became the Turkish province of Syria. After WWI it was assigned to Great Britain. In '47 the U.N. broke up Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, with Galilee in the Jewish sector, then into Israel when it became independent in '48.

Jesus and the Twelve had hoped to hide in Capernaum, only to discover hordes had arrived on foot, awaiting His landing by boat.

Jewish religious law urged the faithful to trek to Jerusalem each spring to celebrate Passover. This hungry multitude, enough to fill a quarter of Safeco Field, was either en route to Jerusalem or, more likely, were Jesus groupies. That's where our story begins as we read John 6:1-71. (Then discuss 1-15.)

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his ultimate "fast food" story is also covered in Matthew 14, Mark 6 and Luke 9.

After two years of seeing their Master repeatedly pull off the impossible, expecting another miracle should've been no biggie for the Twelve. Instead Jesus asks Philip where to buy bread to feed this mob. But forgetting that His Mentor had spoken the universe into existence, Philip can't see past his empty purse.

Andrew had cased the crowd but could only scrounge up five crummy loaves of barley bread -- akin to livestock fodder -- and two sardines. As was His style 10 miles away in Cana where He'd morphed water into fine wine at a wedding feast, Jesus calmly takes the lad's lunch, thanks His Father for it, and breaks off chunks, letting the Twelve pass them out to some 10,000 men, women and kids on the hillside. As the song goes, "God can make a way where there seems to be no way."

If you'd been in that sea of bodies, how'd *you* have reacted to this flabbergastronomic marvel!? They thought, "Not only is this Jesus the 'prophet' Moses predicted, He could be our King and run off these Roman ruffians. Yeah, He could feed us too!" Yeah, we'll *force* Jesus to be our King!" Some still today are willing to admit Jesus is the Son of God; yet they insist on using Him for *their* purposes instead of submitting to *His* plan for their lives.

(Discuss John 6:16-21)

J

esus' hike on the lake is also in Matthew 14 and Mark 6.

With 12 God-sized doggie bags of leftovers, the Twelve stagger down to the boat to resume their executive retreat with the Man. In the darkness, without their Leader, this weary band rows out across this cool, clear lake which supplies fresh water to the Golan Heights. It's 14 miles long, 8 miles wide, and notorious for its sudden storms.

Centuries ago, as a commercial fishing hub, many Eurasian trade routes converged here.

A fierce, fickle norther whips down from the hills, blowing the drowsy dozen off course, rowing hard into the wind, now between 3 and 6 a.m., having lost sight of shore. Suddenly the One who'd created wind and seas is *walking toward the boat…..on the water*! The guys freak, but Jesus calls out, "It's me. Don’t be afraid."

Here, in Matthew's gospel, fearless Peter asks Jesus if he can exit the boat and walk toward Him. "Come," was the reply. Would you plant your foot in an angry wave!!? Peter's chutzpa dares to do what only God could do, and he takes a few steps before panic sets in. As he sinks, Jesus hoists him up, puts him in the boat, and John writes, "…*immediately* the boat arrived at their destination." Not "soon," but "immediately" they were in port! This hidden "miracle within a miracle" may be Jesus' way of saying, "Let Me into your boat, and I'll get you safely home, not because you've struggled, but as evidence of my grace, love and power."

(Discuss John 6:22-71)

H

ere at the synagogue at Capernaum Jesus addresses the thousands who'd tailed him from their supernatural picnic on the eastern shore. How He got here so quickly baffled them; they'd seen the Twelve shove off without Him. "Oh well…. must be a God thing!"

Jesus could've done the big, political suck-up now. They were ready to crown Him King. He could've promised a sardine in every pot, free drugs, tax cuts, campaign finance reform. But He unmasks them, saying, "You don't want a Messiah; you want a meal ticket!"

When they ask, "What works does God require of us?" they do so in their own religious context of feasts, fasts, sacrifices, rituals, icons, baptisms, the whole shot. Jesus says, "You got it all wrong. It does you no good to keep bread in the breadbox; ya gotta ingest it, make it part of you, become one with it. Same with Me. Invite me into your life, and I'll give you the quality of life that only comes from above. It has nothing to do with money or fame or power or religion. Get it? I came straight from my Father in heaven. I'm the only One who's seen Him; I alone can tell you what He's like.

"Okay, you wanna know what 'work' God wants you to do? I'll tell you! He wants you to put your total trust in Me, the One He sent you via "air mail," the One Moses and all the prophets have been setting you up for for centuries. Helloooo, it's Me, I'm here!"

That *really* hacked off some of the Jews, that part where Jesus claims to come from heaven. After that, free meals aside, great numbers of those who'd been following Him, playing the religious game, now turn their backs on Him, even grow to hate Him and conspire to kill Him. Fortunately, Jesus is not a poll-watcher; He sets His face like a flint toward Calvary where He has a date with *your* destiny to be the supreme, the only Sacrifice for your sins and mine -- the Lamb of God, up on the altar for you and me.

Like He told the crowd, God wants *everyone* to believe in His Son; He wants *all* of us to have eternal life, the kind only He can give, the kind referred to in John 3:16; the kind available to *"whosoever"* believes in Jesus.

With many deserting Him, Jesus asks His dozen, "Are you outta here too?" "No way," says Peter, "nobody else has the words of eternal life. After all, You're the Holy One of God."

***Gigaflops or Gospelflop?***

WIRED magazine's October 2000 issue touts a new Apple's G4 processor that reaches speeds of over 3 gigaflops!??? And a new digital, credit card-sized camera that attaches to your cell phone and sends photos over the Net. And a laser that fires a speed-of-light "bullet" that's "several seconds long." This bullet tracked and destroyed a 10-foot long, 5-inch diameter missile from 9 miles away!

But the faster the world changes, it will never outrun the God who made it … and holds it together by "the word of His power!" Gigaflops or not, God's plan and purpose do not change. Smart as we might get, speaking of what's on God's drawing board, the Bible says, "NO one's ever seen or heard anything like this, never so much as imagined anything quite like what God has arranged for those who love Him."

Whether you're tattooed and pierced, or can't remember where you left your AARP card, the smart move is to be sensitive to the drawing of God. If He's nudging you to come to Him, why not respond to His loving invitation today?

Even with your eyes open now, you can pray, "God, I know You're speaking to me. For whatever reason You apparently love this sinner. You even sent Your Son Jesus here to die for me, to pay the price for the forgiveness of my sins. I want to turn my life over to You right now. I accept Your gracious gift of total forgiveness, even though I don't understand it, but somehow I believe You're giving

me just enough faith to take this step. Make me Yours, Father, and I'll follow You. Because of Jesus, I'm asking. Amen."

His Deal

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www.HisDeal.org

george@HisDeal.org

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