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

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: Chapter 7**

**"Jesus: History or Hoax?"**

T

oday we parachute into the world of two millennia ago. Rome's fist grips tiny Palestine. Roman stooges rule beleaguered Jews and Gentiles who pray that a knight on a white horse will toss Caesar, and return them to their salad days. Bitter, melancholy Tiberius is running this early Roman Empire. Disdaining power's trappings, he cedes authority to Sejanus, prefect of the Praetorian Guard, who appoints as governor of Judea wussy Pontius Pilate, immortalized for crucifying Christ.

To observe their manmade traditions, 1st century rabbis will not stoop to touch lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors -- anyone "unclean." How ironic that these hate-filled, elitist power brokers can’t wait to *get their hands on* Jesus…..God Himself!

Religious bigotry majors on minors, laying ritualistic tracks to direct our wandering worship, instead of focusing on the mercy of God.

These jealous leaders are incensed that, despite Jesus' miraculous proofs, His exact fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets who'd foretold His coming, and His extraordinary, brilliant teaching, this Nazarene carpenter has the chutzpah to claim to be God's Son! Why, you'd have thought Jesus was hip-hopping on the winner's stage in Sydney, awaiting a gold medal!

After 2000 years Christ's believers are often marginalized as "intolerant, judgmental." Why? … because they believe the Bible says that faith in Christ is the *only* way to heaven. If TOLERANCE not TRUTH is the Holy Grail, let's delete our spiritual convictions. Amoral, 100% neutral, fat-free

-- that's today's recipe for a bland ethics diet that's neither right nor wrong. Bring on The Gutless Gourmet.

But U. of Texas Prof. Jay Budziszewski, in his book, *The Revenge of Conscience*, reasons thusly that this flawed thinking strikes out:

If total tolerance is the ideal, eventually we must *tolerate intolerance*! "Strike 1." If being skeptical is being tolerant, we'll have to doubt that even tolerance is good! "Strike 2." If expressing our convictions is intolerant, we forfeit our rights to even promote tolerance! "Steerike 3."

So where does "anything goes" go? Who owns the virtuous high ground?

Thanks to the Supreme Court, Microsoft will again test the waters of our justice system's appellate process. But when it comes to ultimate right and wrong, life and death, heaven and hell, who has the supreme right to tolerate only what He chooses? In John ch. 6, Jesus answers this seminal question, this *signpost of civilization*. **Let's read John 6:63-69.**

***One More Time, Tell Me Who John Is***

John, one of Jesus' twelve *disciples*; was also an *apostle.* Some apostles wrote *epistles*, or letters written under the inspiration of God to individuals, churches or followers of Christ in general. John wrote five NT books: the Gospel of John, 1st John, 2nd John, 3rd John and Revelation.

*Apostle* is Greek for *messenger*. Jesus' original, hand-picked, twelve apostles were: John, Peter and his brother Andrew, James " ,” Philip, Bartholomew, (doubting) Thomas, James "The Less,” Thaddeus, Simon the Caananite (not Simon Peter) and Judas Iscariot. After Judas hung himself following Christ's crucifixion, the remaining eleven elected Matthias to fill the open slot. Later the title *apostle* was bestowed on other messengers of Christ -- like Paul, Barnabas and Timothy.

***Billy Carter, Roger Clinton and Jesus' brothers***

In ch. 7 Jesus takes hits from both His enemies and His own family just six months away from His date with Calvary.

Knowing the Jewish heavies are plotting His death, He's lying low up near the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias), His old 'hood. Six months earlier He miraculously took a lad's lunch of bread and fish and fed 10,000 who'd gathered to hear Him teach and pull off another of His supernatural signs. Late that night He literally walks across the lake to join His terrified disciples who are rowing like mad in a fierce storm.

Next He addresses His followers at the temple in Capernaum saying, "I'm the Bread of Life. No one who comes to Me will ever be hungry again. … you shouldn't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that I, the Son of Man, can give you. For God the Father has sent Me for that very purpose. … This is what God wants *you* to do: believe in the One He’s sent. … I’m the true bread from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever and not die."

The literalists there don't get the bread shtick. They'd traipsed from village to village as Jesus groupies, but suddenly are turned off by His "my way or the highway" talk .. and opt to get back to Oprah and their copy of *National Enquirer*. Even His disciples grouse, prompting Jesus to ask, "Are *you* going to flake on Me too?"

Peter replies, "Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We've already committed ourselves, confident that You are the Holy One of God." (See John 6:53-66.)

Now in ch. 7 it's time to ask, "What's with celebrities' brothers? Has their hard drive crashed or what?" Skirting the danger-fraught limelight, Jesus is hunkered down up north when His four half-brothers start egging Him to crawl back on stage, take a few bows and earn His star on the Walk of Fame. James and Jude, who'd later write New Testament books of their own, are joined by Joseph and Simon in this sibling babble. Jesus also has sisters, but the Bible doesn't reveal their names. It seems Mary's husband Joe didn't spend *all* his time in the shop!

It's early October long ago as we tune in today and **read John 7:1-53.**

***Man with the Plan***

Few have a written plan for their life. Jesus' brothers are trying to write the script for His. It goes like this: "Wanna gain market share? Then advertise, be visible, press the flesh! Ask for the order!" But *James, Jude, Joseph & Simon Advertising* didn't get the account.

In the ad biz clients hammer you to buy and use their product yourself. They insist, "How can you promote my bank, boat, beer or brokerage….if you yourself aren't a satisfied customer!"

Oops -- verse 5 says, "Even His own brothers didn't believe Him." They probably loved Him, but believe He was God's Son??? "Jeez, Jesus, you're just our brother. Lighten up on this deity thing, for Pete's sake."

His Father wrote Jesus’ marketing plan, and He was simply following it, day by day, right to the cross and the open tomb. But His brotherly braintrust had no clue.

Jesus knew He wouldn't be crucified for your sins and mine at the Feast of Tabernacles. God's timetable, like the Jews' religious calendar, sizzles with symbolism. Jesus knew His death would be six months later, in the spring at Passover. This ceremony commemorates the exodus from slavery in Egypt 1,475 years earlier when God told Moses to have his indentured people kill a lamb and sprinkle its blood on their doorposts.

That night the angel of death visited this thriving, 1,500-year-old civilization and took the life of the firstborn in every home -- except those covered by the blood. This was the straw that broke Pharaoh's back, convincing him to free the Jews; it also forecast the sacrificial death of their Messiah, 15 centuries in the future. Jesus was following the plan, and His brothers weren't about to speed it up for Him now.

What's *your* plan? What are you living for? William Wallace was a rebel and freedom fighter in medieval Scotland, portrayed by Mel Gibson in *Braveheart --* ready to pay any price to free his country. His final cry of "Freedom!" from the executioner's block fired up others to achieve it.

Each of us gives our life for something -- career, comfort, carefree retirement, fame, physique, family. Every day we make choices that cost us time and money in the pursuit of that goal.

Saul of Tarsus was a radical persecutor of Christ's followers shortly after Jesus' return to heaven. Saul would make Joel Klein and the Justice Department look like part of Bill Gates' friendly foursome at the first tee. He was bent on eradicating every vestige of Jesus' memory. Then on the road to Damascus, Syria, to do more damage, he was blinded by a heavenly light, and a voice from above saying, "Saul, why are you persecuting Me!" Not ”why are your persecuting Christians,” but “Me!”

Saul surrendered to the Christ he'd hated. God changed his name to Paul, and he went on to write half the New Testament! That same Paul said, "All the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, first-hand, everything I once thought I had going for me is dog dung.

“I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by Him. I didn't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ -- *God's* righteousness."

What's your reason for living? Are you investing only in this life…..or also in the next? Jesus tells the people in the temple, "You *think* you know Me. You've heard Me speak, seen My miracles, read the Scriptures. But My true origin is in the One who sent Me, and you don't know Him at all. I come from Him; that's how I know Him. He sent me here."

He goes on, "I'm with you only a short time. Then I go on to the One who sent Me. You'll look for Me, but you won't be able to find Me. Where I am, you can't come…..If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in Me this way….."

Jesus' brothers were in sync with the world, but their Brother was a target for hatred …. because He called sin sin. And we don't like that.

***Car 54, Where Are You?***

The Pharisees dispatch their Keystone Cop goons to arrest Jesus, but they return empty-handed, rocked by this Teacher's winsome, convincing charisma. The Pharisees accuse them of being bamboozled by Jesus, of being as ignorant as the riff-raff in the streets … whom, incidentally, they were called by God to love, lead and serve! Bingo, they're caught red-handed as hypocrites, just as Jesus charged.

The crowds are perplexed. "Look at Jesus; He's not rattled by the Temple Police; He goes right on about His biz, handcuff-free! Whassup? Is it OK to follow Jesus, or are we gonna get vaporized when they bust Him?"

God the Father was not about to let *anything* happen that wasn't on His schedule. Jesus relied on that. We can too, when we're walking with Him. Talk about having rock-solid, personal peace! That's why Jesus could be so brave, confident, real. That's why Daniel was a lion's den survivor. When we follow Christ, we know that *nothing* happens to us that God doesn't allow. Now *that’s* owning a piece of the Rock!

***Bill Gates, Paul Allen, Jesus Christ:***

***Just Another Big Shot?***

Here in Seattle we see Bill and Paul at Sonics games, Pike Place Market, out on Lake Washington. No bodyguards fanning them with palm fronds. They may own the planet, but when it rains, they get wet just like we do.

With the Jewish SWAT team waiting to pounce on Him, Jesus, the reluctant celebrity, arrives in Jerusalem halfway through the Feast of Tabernacles, one of three religious fests each year which were command performances for every Jewish male. The city was teeming with people straining for a peek at this man who purported to be their long-sought Messiah.

The crowds were torn; they longed for the coming of their Messiah; they wanted to be free of their Roman yoke; they were riveted by Jesus' incredible feats and by the power of His profound teaching. Yet, they're no dummies; they know their rabbis are out to kill Him. So, if you want to say Jesus' name in public, you better use mental telepathy, not words!

The power, passion and purpose of Jesus' words were not His own, He says. "I didn't make this up. What I teach comes from the One who sent me. Anyone who wants to do His will can test this teaching and know whether it's from God or whether I'm making it up.”

It boils down to this: the Resurrection is either the Hinge of History or a Horrible Hoax. Before Jesus came to earth, the world could only guess what God is like. Now we know. John wrote this book so that you and I could answer one pivotal question: *Is Jesus the genuine article?*

How can a serious seeker *prove* that Jesus is the *greatest* reality we can ever know? He says the proof’s in the doing, in the believing, in life's biggest bungee jump. Jesus invites you and me to *believe* in Him, to place our total confidence in Him. Strap on His promises, and plunge headlong into the future. Guarantees? Well, if His promises are secure, Jesus says in ch. 3 that you'll have eternal life, free of God's judgment.

On the flip side, if His promises snap, Jesus is a liar, and you're back at Square One -- no harm, no foul -- one day you're still stepping out of this life into the next, into a wicked place hotter than Phoenix in July – a place the Bible calls *hell* and *the lake of fire*.

You can take Driver's Ed forever, but you'll never learn to drive 'til you take the wheel. Some flirt with the Bible all their life. They know a lot -- or a little -- about it. But they eventually use up all their lifelines. Our thirst is unquenchable until we drink the Living Water Christ described.

Physical thirst is a powerful drive. We can get by for days, weeks, even months without food, comfort, happiness, sex -- well, days anyway! But without water we can't live. We'll do anything, drink anything, to quench thirst. Christ promised if we trust in Him, we'll be satisfied forever!

Faith is not Faberge' -- you don't rub it on. You *receive* it, like the gift from God that it is. If you've never done that, you can silently,

right now, say to God, "Father, I'm tired of being a spiritual spectator. I'm ready to get in the game. This Gospel thing about sin and salvation, heaven and hell, eternal life, I guess I identify with Nicodemus and all the others who didn't quite understand being ‘born again.’ But God, I want it. I accept Your forgiveness of my sins, paid for by Your Son Jesus on the cross. God, I turn from my sinful past and commit to follow You, whatever that may mean. I can't control my present, let alone my future. So I'm ready to leave all that in Your hands. I'm yours. And, I don't mean to be presumptious, but now…… You're mine too! Let's go! Let's do it! Thank You, God, for accepting me as Your child. All because of Jesus. Amen."

His Deal

October 3, 2000

www.HisDeal.org

george@HisDeal.org

Copyright © 2019. George Toles. All Rights Reserved.