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

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: Chapter 10**

**“Shepherd’s Pie in the Sky? It’s Your Call.”**

A

gaggle of voices claws for our attention. Competing political candidates and issues, weight loss gurus and ab machines, designing and attractive people who are not our spouse, and juicy stock picks (that is, if NASDAQ hasn’t surgically removed your stomach yet). Each wants a piece of us. Whom do you believe? Most look goood.

Take campaign finance reform --it just *sounds* right, doesn’t it? As do tax cuts, environmental protection, free speech, choice. Well, sure, but who has time for all the “do diligence?” Some conscientious souls may. Most just flip over to Sports.

If only there were a single source lie detector, a universal search engine to ferret out substance from sham.

Perhaps that’s why you’ve come to Nordy’s. Sumpin’ tells you that we’re not random acts of chance, that there must be a purpose for living, something post-grave, a Master Designer. Houses of worship are on every corner, all with their own slants. But do you just go with the one that 4-out-of-5 dentists recommend, or what!?

### Checking The John File

John, son of a well-to-do Israeli fisherman named Zebedee, wrote the Gospel of John. At about age 25, in 26 A.D. or so, he and his sibling James left their fishing biz at the invite of a charismatic carpenter from Nazareth who said, “Follow me.” They did, became two of Jesus’ 12 disciples, and ….. changed the world.

John was with Jesus three years, soaking up His teaching, awed by His miracles, standing by the cross as He was executed, discovering the empty tomb, seeing Jesus walk’n’talk in His post-resurrection body, then watching Him return to heaven. Pretty heady stuff.

While Domitian ruled Rome, John was banished to an Aegean isle where he wrote the majestic, prophetic, last book of the Bible, Revelation. He died in his 90’s, the last survivor of “The 12.”

By 80 A.D. when John began writing his Gospel, and 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, and Revelation, the rest of the New Testament was already put to bed. Peter and Paul had been martyred. Rome had destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. And now, 50 years after Christ’s death and resurrection, false teachers were denying that Jesus was God.

But just 50 years earlier, doubting these facts would’ve been as goofy as saying Regis really needs Kathi Lee, or Vince McMahon is a football genius, or Billy Ray Cyrus is an actor. So John, an eyewitness, writes to reaffirm Jesus’ divinity and historicity.

John’s theme is “believe.” He refers to Jesus as “The Word” because God’s always been communicating to us. God the Son came to earth -- and became a man! -- with breaking news that only those who follow Him will spend eternity *with* Him. (That’s the *Good* News.) All others will spend eternity in a place the Bible calls hell. (And that’s the *Bad* News….which makes only the Good News gooder!)

Paul wrote to believers in Rome that sin’s take-home pay is eternal death and punishment, but, by contrast, God’s *gift* is eternal life, thanks to Christ’s death and resurrection.

Perhaps there’s one skeptic left -- in Hog’s Breath, SD – who doubts the overwhelming evidence that Christ rose from the grave. Even some people with seminary degrees do, I’m told. But Paul wrote to Christ’s early followers in Corinth that if Jesus had not been raised from the dead, their faith was futile, and they were still mired in their sins. No resurrection? No Bible. No hope. You can turn out the lights; we won’t have to wait for Boeing to do it for us.

In his Gospel John singles out seven of Jesus’ many miracles, or signs, and seven of Jesus’ famous “I am” statements. Why was John so selective? Why didn’t he write a complete account? **Let’s read John 21:25, the last sentence of this book, then John 20:30.**

### The Bleating Hearts Club

Middle Eastern shepherds lead flocks from pasture to pasture to find grass in the desert. At night they herd their stock inside stone or mud walls, or caves, known as sheepfolds, topped with thorn branches. The lone herdsman stations himself at the entrance to ward off thieves or predators. During the day the sheep follow the shepherd who uncannily recognizes each one, even by name! Since many flocks often share sheepfolds, the sheep grow to recognize their own shepherd’s voice. Shepherds have been known to search for even one stray sheep, risking their lives for their flocks.

Equipped for this eco-challenge, ancient shepherds braved the elements wearing a heavy, camel-hair cloak and a head veil, toting a slingshot, a staff, a rod, a bag for food, and a flask of olive oil to medicate their wounded sheep.

In preceding chapters John shows us Jesus performing boffo signs -- turning water into wine, feeding thousands with a mere handful of bread and fish, walking on the Sea of Galilee, healing the blind and lame. Each miracle clearly proving He was, as advertised, God’s Son. Many were convinced and placed their faith in Him. Others, like the Pharisees, called Him a blasphemer and set out to destroy Him.

Jesus, the consummate communications maven, knew how to relate His bigger-than-life message to everyday folks in terms they could get. He opens John ch. 10 by telling another of His earthy parables, starring Himself as the Good and True Shepherd, the promised Messiah whose ancestors included other famous shepherds like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David.

Jesus carefully distinguished Himself from the “false shepherds,” i.e., that sect of 6,000 Pharisee rustlers who, by insisting that Christ was a phony, were robbing their flock of the truth that believing in Jesus alone provides personal salvation. Jesus was accusing them of twisting and distorting God’s law. Their teachings became the basis for today’s Talmudic Judaism.

As we come to ch. 10, it’s early October in 29 A.D., the season of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, a time for recalling when they’d roughed it in tents during their 40-year wilderness trek from Egypt to the Promised Land. **Let’s read all of John ch. 10.**

### Crib Notes on John 10:1-21

Jesus lays out five criteria for identifying the True Shepherd who gave His life so that you and I can have real, eternal life to the max:

1. He enters by the gate. No one but Jesus ever came to Israel in total fulfillment of what the Old Testament prophets had predicted about their coming Messiah.
2. The gate had been opened for Jesus by the gatekeeper, John the Baptist, who identified Jesus by saying, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”
3. The sheep listened for His voice, and He called them by name. Jesus deals with us one-to-one, as He did with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the invalid at the pool of Bethesda, the man born blind. Jesus is not some impersonal statue, some dead deity. He loves you and comes to you intimately.
4. He leads His sheep out to pasture, going ahead of them. He wants to take you and me out of spiritual darkness, to be our Guide in this life, even walking with us through death into eternal life with Him.

(5) His sheep follow Him because they know His voice. They run from strangers. Alluring sirens tempt even Christ’s followers to check out a new “prophet of God.” But Jesus’ sheep have come to recognize His voice as He speaks to them in the Scriptures. As they’re led by Him, they’re uninterested in switching shepherds.

Reading ahead in John, as we near Easter, we find that the Good Shepherd is also the Lamb of God, foretold by Isaiah 700 years B.C. (Isa. 53:3-11). This Shepherd loved us so much, He was willing to die for us. Reading John, Peter, James and Paul, they’re awed that the perfect Son of God would lay down His life for sinners like them and us. What’s more, this Shepherd wants to live *with* us. Forever!

Jesus’ Good Shepherd story further deepens the rift in the Jewish ranks. Some reject Him. Others believe. There’s no middle ground.

### Dissolve to John 10:22-39

##### Three months pass after verse 21. It’s late December, Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication, marking the rebuilding of the temple in 165 B.C. Syrian King Antiochus Ephiphanes desecrated it, trying to replace Judaism with Greek culture, ushering in the Maccabean Wars.

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##### The Pharisees push Jesus: “Are you the Messiah or not?” He’d fulfilled prophecy to a T, did miracles, told the woman at the well He’s the Messiah. What more do they want, except to stone Him?

Jesus gives three reasons why people reject Him. (1) They opt to ignore info they have about Him. The Pharisees expected a military hero to overthrow the Roman oppressors. But Jesus came to die for their sins, to be their Savior. They didn’t see Him as “the God who is.” He just wasn’t “the God they wanted.” (2) They flipped Him off because their minds were made up. And (3) they never got close enough to experience Him personally, to find out who He really is. They made their decision about Christ too complicated. Ya know, you can pass by the Poulsbo bakery ‘til you die, and never know the sensual satisfaction of Scandinavian pastry …. ‘til you taste it.

Verses 27-29, one of the Bible’s all-time passages, answers two huge questions: (1) how can you identify a genuine follower of Christ? And (2) can a truly “born-again” (Jesus’ words) follower of Christ ever lose his salvation? His answers: (1) those who are related to Christ through faith are drawn to Him, want to be close enough to hear and recognize His voice, to trust Him with life’s unknowables. And (2) Jesus says nobody can snatch His sheep from Him. Ever.

### River Dance on over to John 10:40-42

Weary from debating the contentious, plotting Pharisees, Jesus gets some R&R on the east side of the Jordan in Perea where Rome ruled and the Jewish rulers were out-of-bounds. There He found receptive ears among those who’d three years earlier heard John the Baptist introduce Him. They’d also heard about Jesus’ teachings and miracles, and many of them placed their faith in Him.

Which side of the Jordan are you on? Have you taken in a lifetime of info about Jesus and examined the evidence? Have you seen that He defeated the power of sin at the cross, and the power of death and hell at the empty tomb? Have you let these words of John (3:36) sink in: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him?”

Perhaps the most famous sheepherder in history is the one sung about by the shepherd boy-turned-king, David, in his 23rd Psalm that goes, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” You’ve heard it at funerals. You may have memorized it in Sunday School. **As we read it, see if you can subsitute your name for “my” and “me.”**

### Tuesdays with Nordy

In *Tuesdays with Morrie* author/TV talker Mitch Albom watches his old college prof gradually slip into death. I heard Adolph Coors IV say, “Life doesn’t end with a shout; it just runs out.” When all’s said and done, you either believe in the God of the Bible, or you don’t. The Bible declares that your eternal destiny rides on this choice.

Adrian Rogers says, “Everyone has an eternal *existence*. What we need is everlasting *life*, and I’ve decided to spend *mine* in the no-smoking section! If you’re wrong about Jesus, it doesn’t matter what you’re right about.” It’s been said, “If you have it ALL and miss God’s presence, what you have is worthless.” Please get it right.

A week ago I heard a man say, “Salvation is like a parachute. You don’t put it on to enjoy the flight. You put it on to save you from sure death when you jump.” Where will you be when you jump into eternity? Is your answer based on fact or fancy? Is giving Jesus the keys to your life really a bigger risk than trusting someone or something else?

Easter reminds us that Jesus, God’s sinless Lamb, willingly became the Perfect Sacrifice for your sins and mine. In the eyes of our just God, someone has to pay for our sins. The Bible says either we will, by spending forever in hell, or Jesus will, as He did on the cross. Who’ll pick up your tab? You or your Stand-in Savior? If we’ve made this even halfway clear today, that should be a gimme.

The same Jesus who as Creator hung 250 million x 250 million stars across our vast universe, and who created dirt each speck of which contains billions of micro-organisms, this same, big God created you, knows you by name, and laid down His life to save you from your sins. He’s asking you to let Him be your Good Shepherd. He wants to walk with you, to be your Guide, even through death.

If you’ve never accepted His invitation, set down your latte’ this afternoon, or right now, and say, “God, I can’t believe that You cared enough to sacrifice Your only Son for *me*. I certainly wouldn’t do that for anybody. Please, take this mess I’ve made of running my life myself. I gladly, and gratefully, accept Your permanent forgiveness for my sins. Please take the wheel of my life, and help me fit into Your plan for my life. In the name of Jesus, who’s now *my* Good Shepherd, amen.”

His Deal

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