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

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: Chapter 12**

***“Dinner, Donkey and Destiny”***

O

ur audacious mission at these lunches is to demystify the Bible. Daunting? Not after *this* scenario…. A caffeine-and-rain-soaked region of non-conformists, with a star-crossed baseball franchise, playing in a concrete crypt, owned by fickle millionaires who forever threaten to flee. Fast forward, and, poof, we have the sport’s runaway team, SRO crowds, and the nation’s top ballpark.

If *that* can happen, with a little NoDo MoJo, let’s see if this old Book can inform and transform our lives here in ’01.

Someone said, “To know God, you’ve must understand the Bible. To understand the Bible, you’ve must learn about Jesus. To learn about Jesus, you’ve must read the Gospels” (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

Our jog through this 4th book of the New Testament brings us to perhaps the Bible’s most pivotal chapter. In AD 85-90 the aging author recalls his days as Jesus’ closest friend 60 years earlier. Most of his readers were not yet born when Jesus taught across Israel. He recaps Jesus’ seven most telling miracles and statements, evidence, he says, that this Carpenter from Nazareth truly *is* God. **Let’s read John’s goal in ch. 20:30-31.**

In John chs. 1-4 *another* John (the Baptist) formally intros Christ as the Messiah, “Son of God,” a Hebrew phrase synonymous with “God.” It means “This man is God.” **Let’s read John 3:28-36.**

Claiming to *be* God, Jesus alienates the religious elite. His “blasphemous” rap and miracles become Item #1 on CNN, the Canaan News Network, dividing Jews who believe He’s the promised Messiah (“anointed One” - Malachi 4) from those who don’t.

In chapters 5-12 John tracks the power factions lining up against Jesus prior to His crucifixion and resurrection.

***From Being Worshiped on an Ass,***

### To Being Treated Like One

This happened to you? Your poll numbers spike, then plummet. You’re Fair-Haired Boy; *then* you’re Village Idiot. Wha? Does your card suddenly read “Jekyll, Hyde and Partners?” Last month they thought you hung the moon. Now you’re banished to it!

Before you return your client’s call, you want to do a focus group! Yesterday they loved your ideas, service, loyalty, accessibility. Today you’re a jerk. You feel like a NASDAQ stock. What happened!

Dallas Willard writes, “Recently a pilot was practicing high-speed maneuvers in a jet fighter. She turned the controls for what she thought was a steep ascent and flew straight into the ground. She was unaware that she’d been flying upside down. (M)ost of us live at high-speed and often with no clue to whether we’re flying upside down or right-side up.”

You have the data, but are you reading it right? Maybe you’re saying, “I don’t know what I *need* to know, so now I must devote my full attention and strength to finding out!”

It’s c. AD 30, a week from Jesus’ date with death. History says He had about 5,000 “believers” then, but only about 500 were seeking to *live* His way. And He had only 11 faithful disciples – men who’d soon face persecution, imprisonment and martyrdom. From this handful sprang the NT and millions of Christ-followers over these two millennia. **Let’s read John 12:1-50.**

***Dying to Get to Dinner***

### John 12:1-11

Jesus returns to the scene of His grandest proof so far that He’s God -- Bethany, 2 miles east of Jerusalem, home to His friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus whom Jesus had just raised from the grave. A special dinner is thrown, the other gospels tell us, in the home of Simon the Leper (howzat for a name!). We can bet he’s no longer a leper since those were outcasts. No doubt Jesus had healed him.

At this intimate meal Martha serves, as “the boys” visit. Lazarus’ return from death has given him national Ichiro status. The chief priests are so hacked that his grave-opening put Jesus on page one, that they’ve now got hitmen tailing Lazarus too. Laz has risked his life (again!) just being with Jesus.

Mary is bursting with gratitude to Jesus for saving her brother, and for changing her *own* heart with His teaching. Aware that Jesus is on “Israel’s Most Wanted,” she breaks out some costly perfume that would cost in today’s dollars about 10-grand. Other writers say she first anointed Jesus’ head, then His feet which she washes with her hair in a lavish act of worship.

This irks Jesus’ turncoat disciple, Judas Iscariot, who has zIp time for worship, only for deception. Why, with His supernatural insight, would Jesus select a *thief* to be His CFO! Judas had a treacherous, blood-soaked role to play, but Jesus loved you and me so much, and was so obedient to His Father, that He *allowed* Judas to betray Him. Jesus can identify with you and the Judases in *your* life.

Martha *serves*. Lazarus *risks* all. Mary *gives* her treasure. How do you and I spell W-O-R-S-H-I-P?

### From Palms to Pilot

***From Wild Welcome to the Weakest Link***

***John 12:12-19***

After surprising his dad the King of Macedon (in ancient Greece) by breaking the meanest horse in the kingdom, young Prince Alexander heard his proud pop say, “Now go and become the king of the world!”

And Alex the Great did, scarfing up the Greek states, Asia, Persia, Syria, Egypt, India, Babylon and all of the then known world. Then died at 33. Jesus also died at 33.

Both were hailed as king of kings. One rode a stately steed, the Other a donkey’s foal. One’s domain was political, the Other’s spiritual. “The Great” was a human who declared himself to be a god. Jesus was God and took on human form.

Despairing of no more worlds to conquer, Alex drank himself to death, and his realm collapsed. Jesus wept over His nation’s sins, died on a criminal’s cross, and birthed a spiritual kingdom that will *never*  end.

Our author John tells us in Revelation (19:11-16) that sooner than we think, Jesus will return to earth, astride a white horse, to end the bloodiest war ever known, to sentence satan and sin to hell’s flaming pit forever, and to usher in unending peace and goodness.

In NT times all Jewish men had to be in Jerusalem thrice yearly, including Passover, spiking the city’s spring population to 3,000,000. This time out-of-towners strain to see this Miracle Worker who’s on the news more than Daniel Ben-Rather. Seeking to crown Him king, hoping He could pull off a *tour de force* and oust those Roman interlopers, they give Him a hero’s welcome, shouting “Hosanna” (“Save us now!”).

Jesus’ disciples’ gawk at this gala reception since they still don’t fully “get it” about their Mentor. Dick Paetzke says his ex-boss Don Kraft used to caution his ad agency staff, “Remember, nobody ever gets the message.” May that not be said of us.

Jesus’ triumphal entry reminds me….. When I began a 21-year stint in the NBA in ‘65, I was the Pistons’ PA announcer. They often drew no more than 3,000. My first season they went 22-58. At 24 Dave DeBusschere became player-coach; nobody else wanted the job!

After I left, they went from a 16-66 year to NBA titles in ’89 and ’90. Overnight the “Bad Boys” became the gang you loved to hate: Rodman, Laimbeer and Co. *Then* the fans came in droves.

In ’67 we migrated to Seattle, and I began 19 years as the Sonics’ PA announcer. Our first crowds were puny; the Soups sad. 12 years later hundreds of thousands jammed downtown for a victory parade. We’d gone from *Bob* Rule to *Sonics* Rule!

Five centuries earlier the Jewish prophet Zechariah delivered a word from God predicting exactly how Jesus would be greeted by the mercurial multitudes. **Let’s read Zechariah 9:9-10.**

***From Ecstasy to Agony***

***John 12:20-36***

The Greeks’ appearance at Passover sets up Jesus’ masterful metaphor about the grain of wheat that’s buried, then reproduces itself many times over. Life from Death. Another Jesus oxymoron? But this is no morbid Jim Jones death wish, no wacko cult that wants to hitch a ride on Haley’s Comet. Rather it’s believing that to embrace God as supreme commander of my life, I must abdicate that role. When a president leaves office, a part of him dies – no more little black box, bully pulpit or Oval Office. He’s now “dead” to the heady trappings of power.

When we crawl off the throne of our lives, and give that authority to Jesus, He lets us participate in His life forever, free from sin’s guilt and death grip on us. (John 11:25-26, 17:3)

Re this grain of wheat, Jesus speaks of His own life which He voluntarily laid down, taking your place and mine, making eternal life available to ALL, just for the asking. **Let’s read John 3:16**.

Here’s another way to translate that verse: “God’s care for humanity was so great that He sent His unique Son among us, so that those who count on Him might not lead a futile and failing existence, but have the undying life of God Himself.”

This gift is not something we can earn. It’s a GIFT! And the Bible says we can only get it by believing that Jesus canceled the debt that we owed to God because of our sin. **Let’s read how John puts it in John 3:36.**

Three times in three years those near Jesus hear God’s voice from heaven, validating His Son’s credentials. As Jesus faces the onerous task of carrying our sins to the cross, how would God “glorify” Him?

1. By exposing the world’s evil when it executed the Son of God.

(2) By defeating on the cross satan’s grip on our lives.

1. By making heaven accessible to all, but only by faith in

Christ. God will bring *ultimate* glory to His Son because all roads eventually lead to Jesus. Each of us, the Bible says, will one day be drawn to face Him either as Savior or Judge. It’s our choice.

***Some Bulbs Are Only Screwed In;***

***Others Are Turned On***

***John 12:37-50***

Why, despite His sinless life, His indisputable miracles and His life-changing teaching, why didn’t every single person that came in contact with Jesus those three years accept Him as their Messiah?

Ray Stedman defines three “steps to unbelief.”

1. They exercised selective faith, believing only what they *wanted* to believe about Jesus and about the Scriptures. They chose the God they *wanted*, not the God who *is*.
2. They ignored their present opportunity. They were face to face with the living Son of God. What a blown opportunity!
3. They denied their need for light. Like the upside-down pilot, they thought they were doing fine, thank you. But in a matter of only days the Light of the world would be gone. I stood twelve inches from Elvis Presley when he and I were teens in Memphis. I regret that I never took the initiative to meet him. My prayer is that you, and our families and friends and others, will not wait ‘til it’s too late to meet Jesus as Savior.

700 years back, Isaiah prophesied that the Jews would reject Jesus. Many leaders believed in Him but kept mum about it. The Greek for “believed” (v. 42) means “entrusted to;” they had a genuine change of heart. But because they feared how others might feel, they became “secret service” believers.

In His last public address Jesus reaffirms His deity, saying He came this time to shine the light of His truth into a dark world, to *save* it, not *judge* it, to offer every person eternal life.

He’s not looking for our mental assent. No, He wants you and me to have the courage to commit our lives to Him. He wants to

permanently steer us away from spending eternity in a place the Bible calls hell. He wants us to live forever with Him, starting *now*, then later bursting through death’s door, united with Him always!

In I Thessalonians we saw that Jesus could return to earth at any moment, triggering a 7-year period known as The Great Tribulation.

What a phony friend I’d be if I didn’t urge you to skirt the wrath that the Bible says is coming! Put your confidence in Jesus. Trade your sins for His righteousness. Settle this matter now; secure your future. If life is a hard drive, back it up with a ZIP that’ll never fail.

Salvation is God’s gracious gift to you, and received by faith that’s also given to us by God. Ask Him to give you enough faith to believe that His offer is sincere, then receive His forever-and-total forgiveness, and make Jesus your Savior and Lord.

Simply whisper to Him in your heart a prayer something like this:

“Jesus, I give You the highest place of influence in my life. I believe God exists, I believe that You’re His Son, that You love me and died for me, and I want to live my life for You, whatever that may mean. I believe that only through You are my sins forgiven, giving me an authentic relationship with God. Please take the steering wheel of my life, turn it right side up, and make me all that you created me to be. Lord, by faith I give my life to you. Thank You for being my Savior, not my Judge. Amen.”

His Deal

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