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

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: Chapter 13**

***“With Friends like Judas,***

***Who Needs Wiley Coyote?”***

C

omic book heroes have their antagonists. Roadrunner has Wiley. Superman’s super villain is evil scientist Lex Luthor.

Today we continue exploring John, fourth book of the New Testament, and meet the scheming pawn hired by Palestine’s religious bigwigs to rat on Jesus. What he did to the sinless Son of God would make Lex look like a Vienna Choir boy.

As we’ve discovered in the Bible’s sixty-six books, Jesus knits the Bible together into one consistent whole in which we find wisdom to help us understand the world and find our way in (and out of) it.

The spirituality industry is a bull market nowadays. But, says the Bible, not everyone who claims to know Jesus actually does.

I just heard a man say, “Beware the fellow who says he understands women …… because he’ll lie about something else.”

Which reminds me… We husbands don’t have a clue. This week I heard about the wife who was despondent over the meal she’d just prepared. She wept, “I’ve *never* cooked worse than this.” To which her husband said, trying to console her, “Of *course* you have, dear.”

In about 90 A.D., some twenty years after 30-year-old Nero was killed by his secretary, our author John is the sole survivor of Jesus’ twelve disciples. He passionately wants his readers to put their full faith in his best friend, Jesus the Son of God.

Claiming to *be* God, Jesus enrages 1st century Jewish power brokers who call it blasphemy. He’s skewered nightly on Jerusalem TV’s “The O’Rilestein Factor,” dividing Jews into those who believe Christ to be their prophesied Messiah, and those who see Him as a phony who claims to be God. We must make the same decision.

As we rejoin John today, it’s Thursday, the night before Passover, in about 30 A.D. Tomorrow Jesus goes to the cross. And He knows it.

He gathers His bewildered disciples in that famous upper room for “The Last Supper.” The twelve know the Jewish scribes and Pharisees are plotting to kill their Leader. John zooms in on the incredible scene of Jesus washing His closest friends’ feet. **Let’s read John 13:1-38.**

***He Stoops to Conquer:***

***From Washing Feet***

***to Footing the Bill for Our Sins***

***John 13:1-17***

Aware that sinister forces had enlisted one of His hand-picked protegés to betray Him, Jesus hustles because the devil is literally breathing down His neck.

Knowing His time on earth is short, and that He’d soon return to His Father in heaven, Jesus begins checking off his To Do list. With the original Passover in Egypt thirteen centuries earlier as His template, Jesus knows *He’s* the Lamb at *this* Passover Feast, to be sacrificed for the sins of all people.

Within twelve hours He’ll hang, held by nails through His hands and feet, and within twenty-four hours his spear-pierced corpse will lie sealed in a tomb. Yet His thoughts are on the men He’d poured His life into. Washing their feet dramatically shows His love for them, right to the very end of His earthly life.

These yahoos should’ve been washing *His* feet! And Judas, that treacherous turncoat, lay there and shamelessly *let* Jesus wash his!

God the Father had placed Jesus in charge over His own death and resurrection. Jesus could’ve easily bailed with a “Mayday,” summoning millions of angels to His rescue. Yet He maintains focus, knowing who He is, where He came from, where He’s going, and what He must do to get there. And He does it, badaboom.

Another account tells us that immediately before this meal, His disciples had been bickering over which of them is “the greatest.” Perhaps it had to do with the order of seating in that room, depicted classically by da Vinci. So the God of the universe stoops to bathe their dirty, stinky, infected feet, extravagantly modeling how they should serve others and swallow their pride. *Ultimate* power, he illustrates, comes from being a servant.

Who said, and I hate it when this happens, “You’ll know if you have a servant’s heart by how you respond when you’re *treated* like one.”

Imagine having your feet flossed by the same hands that open blind eyes, who’d taken five tiny loaves of bread and fed 5,000, who’d healed scabby lepers, who’d even raised the dead!

Peter is shocked by Jesus’ move to wash his feet. Yet Christ deals with him in love, instructing him that those who truly know Christ have already been completely cleansed of their sins. That happens only once; there’s no necessity to rebathe … they need only to have their feet washed from time to time, a metaphor for the cleansing we experience from being forgiven.

***A Tale of Two Trees***

***John 13:18-30***

Judas had been with Jesus daily for three years and *still* didn’t “get it.” Bottom line, he was seeking a political overthrow of Palestine’s invaders from Rome, and wanted to be the junta, not “the *junted*.”

The others never suspect Judas. I guess we can outwardly appear to be best buds with Jesus, but only you and He know the truth.

Jesus knew up front that Judas would burn Him. He’d told His guys a year earlier (John 6:70), “’I chose the twelve of you, but one is a devil.’ He was speaking of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, one of the Twelve, who would betray him.” Yet He loved Judas just as much as the others, even entrusting the team’s finances to him!

In that culture when the host dipped a morsel into the entree and served it to a guest, it showed courtesy and honor. Seeing this, the room would conclude that the Master held Judas in high regard.

Since none of his mates knew of his dastardly intentions, Judas could’ve changed his mind. But nope, he would not be denied his thirty pieces of silver. For three years he’d hung out with God’s Son, as a first-hand witness to the awesome acts and teachings of this perfect God-Man. But he’d never given the reins of his life to Jesus. Instead, *his* lord had become satan. He was a counterfeit disciple.

Incidentally, several prophetic references in the Old Testament, some written 1,000 years earlier, describe in detail how Jesus would be betrayed, how much money would be involved, even where the money would wind up!

When Judas exits out into the blackness of night, unimpeded by Jesus, he’d never again see morning. After his fateful kiss of betrayal on Christ’s cheek, the Bible says (Matt. 27:5, Acts 1:18-20) he stopped off at the temple, threw his blood money inside, and in despair hanged himself. Tradition says he did it in what’s now called “The Judas Tree” which explodes with redbuds in early spring, perhaps a metaphor for the drops of blood Jesus lost for you and me while hanging on another, less attractive wooden cross.

With Judas off-stage, the Master-Mentor begins his lengthy farewell comments to His mentees.

**Let’s think aloud about what *you* might say to those you care about the most, if you knew this would be your final, private moment with them before you die.**

***Peter’s Integrity: Nothing to Crow About***

***John 13:31-38***

With little time left to prep His disciples to take the good news of God’s forgiveness to the world, Jesus gives them marching orders. He knows they’ll run like deer at His crucifixion, that after His return to heaven they’ll face persecution and violent deaths.

How does listening to the daily news affect you? It’s a litany of ugliness, wars, atrocities, terrorism, racism, killing, rioting, rape, drug abuse, perversion, infidelity, greed and power run amok. How can we end this madness? By sporting bumper stickers? protest marches? arming ourselves to the teeth? enforcing the death penalty? spending more on education? more legislation?

We’ve tried ‘em all, but none has moved our planet closer to Nirvana. In this chapter Jesus prescribes THE SOLUTION, one which the media and masses would ridicule for its simplicity. His powerful key to changing the world is simply:

**“Love each other, just as I have loved you.”**

Not that I frequently succeed at it, but back in the 80’s Gary Smalley taught a group of us that love is a *decision*. Feelings may come and go, but they can often be revived by just *doing* loving things, even if I don’t feel like it.

**For a few minutes now, let’s think aloud about how this might look in our workplace, our home and our world.**

When Jesus tells His men it’s time for Him to go, can you believe that His inner circle doesn’t know what He’s talking about! After three years of investing in them to take history’s most compelling message to every person on the planet, they’re clueless.

Impetuous Peter assures Jesus he’s ready to go ANYWHERE with Him, even to die for Him. History notes that thirty years later, in Rome, Peter was also crucified. But feeling unworthy to die as His Savior had, Peter asked to be hung upside down.

On their final night together, despite Peter’s professed bravado and devotion, Jesus says with tough love, “Nice try, Pete, but tonight, before 3 a.m., you’ll deny even *knowing* Me. Not once, but thrice!”

Peter needed to plumb the poverty of his self-righteousness, to discover he could only survive with Christ’s strength. Our failures, if we learn from them, can be part of our growth.

Despite his weakness, Peter goes on to become a powerful leader in the early church, boldly inviting people to follow Christ. Once 3,000 of his hearers chose to turn their lives over to Jesus in a single day. So even when we screw up big-time, God can still use us in His great plan to tell people He no longer holds their sins against them. All that remains for us sinners to do is to simply *believe* in Him, and make Him the centerpiece of our lives.

If you haven’t yet put your life in God’s hands through trusting Christ as your Savior, you’re building your life’s house on sand. But if you *have*, you can be totally confident, based on God’s iron-clad promises in the Bible, that you’re completely safe in God’s hands, now, and in the life to come.

Please take this moment, before the hysteria of today’s All-Star Game, to add your name to God’s line-up card. Just tell Him, in your own words, “God, I’ve come to believe that You *are* speaking to me in the pages of this Bible. I know that I’m a sinner, and that I need Your forgiveness, paid for on the cross by the death of Your Son. And one day I’ll need victory over the grave, assured for me by Your Son’s resurrection. By faith I now accept that forgiveness, and I place my life in Your hands, confident that You can do a better job with it than I can. Thank You, Father. And thank You, Jesus. Amen.”

His Deal

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www.HisDeal.org

george@HisDeal.org

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