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

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: Chapter 20**

***You Can't Keep A God-Man Down***

T

oday we come to the deal-maker/deal-breaker for every person -- past, present and future. Unless the Popeil money-machine has invented a new $19.95 "Forget-Death-a-matic," we're stuck with YB=YD (You're Born, You Die). Here's the deal:

In 1890 Margaret Fox, Spiritualism's co-founder, dies of alcoholism and rests at Cypress Hills, Brooklyn. 1892 -- Bahai founder Baha'u'llah is buried somewhere in Bahj, Israel. 1904 -- Zionism patriarch Theodor Herzl dies and lies at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

In 1910 Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, is entombed at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Mass. 1975 -- Nation of Islam founder Elijah Muhammad is interred in Mount Glenwood Cemetery near Chicago. In 1997 a heart attack takes Anton LaVey after starting the Church of Satan. Location of his ashes - unknown.

Checking the major religions, India's Hinduism has no beginning, no founder; its scriptures (the Vedas) have no origin. All who practice the Dharma code of life may call themselves a Hindu, cycling through reincarnation, or Karma, with most believing that all religions lead to the same end.

Shintoism is 3,000 years old. Each of its 13 sects has its own founder who lives and dies. Many of its faithful are also Buddhists.

Islam is begun by Muhummad, born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 570 AD, dies in 632. "To become a Muslim one has to simply declare, 'There's no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.'" Muslims believe in heaven and hell, that Moses and Jesus are Muslim prophets, but that Jesus is *not* the Son of God.

Lao-Tse starts Taoism (aka Daoism), dies in 531 BC. Confucianism founder K'ung Fu Tzu (aka Confucius) dies in 479 BC.

Buddhism is founded by Siddartha (aka Buddha) who dies in 483 BC after eating wild mushrooms, reaching Parinirvana (having no perception or sensation). His ashes are in pagodas in India and Sri Lanka, some taller than the Pyramids, and in a shrine in New Delhi.

In 1969 I interviewed Peggy Lee as one of her all-time hits was hot:

"… when that final moment comes, and I'm breathing my last breath, I'll be saying to myself... 'Is that all there is, is that all there is? If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball. If that's all there is...'"

Every human bio ends with death. Had that been Jesus' fate, He'd be merely an exceptionally moral teacher who made extraordinary, fictitious claims tossed on history's heap of heresies.

findagrave.com has this remarkable entry: "Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Messiah of Christianity." By *burial site* it says, "Blood only, brought back from Second Crusades by Count Thierry of Flanders."

While others' influence remains, only Jesus, God's Son, overcame death, forever changing humanity's calculus. His tomb's empty 'cuz He's back in heaven, as He predicted, where He's awaiting His Father's nod to fetch His believers to be with Him, always.

Christianity's case rests on authenticating that Jesus was buried Friday, that His body lay in the grave through Saturday, and that He rose from the dead Sunday. If that's bogus, we're all in deep yogurt.

**Let's read about history's watershed in John 20:1-31.**

***Rock 'n' Roll***

***John 20:1-9***

Resurrection Sunday's events, detailed in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24 and John 20, show that before sun-up an earthquake loosens the half-ton stone sealing Joseph of Arimathea's tomb.

That's where he and Nicodemus had laid Jesus' body two days earlier. An angel descends, and Jesus' body comes to life, slipping out of His wrappings unassisted.

Some women friends come to visit the tomb before dawn. Among them, Mary Magdalene is on a full-tilt boogie to anoint Jesus' body. This ex-devilwoman, from whom Jesus had exorcised seven demons, discovers her worst nightmare! She suspects Jesus' enemies have swiped His body! And she's not dissuaded even when an angel says, "Jesus is not here, He's *risen*!"

Poor, proud Mary. "She'd left a good job in the city where she was workin' for the man every night and day, worryin' 'bout the way things might have been." Hysterical, she races to inform disciples Peter and John (of Gospel of John fame) that Jesus' body is AWOL.

Other women arrive. An angel sends them to tell the disciples. More women. Two angels remind them that Jesus had predicted His betrayal, crucifixion and resurrection (Luke 24:5-7).

About 6:30 a.m. Peter and John sprint to see for themselves. Christ's predictions (John 2:22, 11:25, 16:22) and Mary's report had left them unconvinced. The burial linens were still neatly folded; no bodysnatchers would do that, for Peter's sake! Dejected, not dreaming that Jesus is alive, Peter and John head home.

***Not Your Garden Variety Gardener***

***John 20:10-18***

Mary Magdalene had heard the angel say, "He's risen." But *hearing* and *knowing* the Truth don't always arrive together. She still thinks the body's been stolen. She returns to the tomb at daybreak, sees two angels and bumps into the gardener, but wait -- *it's Jesus*!

Why didn't she recognize Him at first? Too many tears? Was it too dark, had she been blinded by the angel's radiance, was she faith-deprived, had she hyperventilated from running? Or was she frozen by fear assuming Jesus' body had been trashed, like all other criminals' corpses, in the fires of the nearby Valley of Gehenna?

Looking at this Jesus-Mary encounter, one wonders: (1) Who are you and I looking for in life, if not Jesus? (2) How close does He have to be for us to recognize Him? (3) Can you imagine what it must be like to hear Him call your name? (4) Or has He done so already?

Mary wants to cling to Christ, perhaps to protect Him from further harm, but He says there's time for us to resume our friendship, but now I must return to my Father, and send you the Holy Spirit.

God often chooses an unlikely sort to go tell others about Himself. Here He taps a former madwoman who, while others strayed, had stayed with Him at the cross, at His burial, at the empty tomb.

He tells her to "go tell" His *brothers* that He's alive. Once He'd called them *servants*, then *friends*, now *brothers*, signaling a new relationship. All six billion of us are *not* His children, but we *are* all His *creation*. The Bible says we only enter into His *family* when we come by faith through Jesus.

***Introducing…..***

***Doubting Thomas and The Doors***

***John 20:19-29***

After meeting Mary, Jesus appears to some women at the tomb and dispatches them to the believers up in Galilee. About 4 p.m. He confronts His comrade Peter. Next, Jesus drops in on two followers who are walking to nearby Emmaus. About 8 p.m. He slips through locked doors to see the other disciples and friends who'd bolted themselves in, fearing what the government might do to them.

Parts of 300 corpses were recently found in Georgia -- never cremated. The survivors had received dust instead of ashes, and they're yelling, "What have you done with my loved one's body?"

Huddled like rats, Jesus' friends are clueless, numb. They'd been with God for three years *up close!* Now they cower behind locked doors, fearing reprisal lest others think *they'd* hijacked the body!

Just then Jesus digitizes Himself into the room, calming their terrified hearts, shows them His wounds and eats with them (Luke 24:42). Gollllll-eeeeeeee, it's really the Master!

He leaves for a week, then reappears through barred doors. Despite this, and eyewitness reports from friends, Thomas is still a "faith hold-out." He's mumbling, "Sometimes I lie awake at night and ask, 'Where have I gone wrong?' Then a voice says to me, 'Charlie Brown, this is going to take more than one night.'"

Christ invites skeptical Tom to touch His wounds, to "stop doubting and believe." And so he does. For 20 centuries millions have believed that Jesus is alive. He tells Thomas that these millions (including you and I) will be *specially* blessed for having believed *without* seeing and touching.

Not one disciple had harbored hopes that the Master would come back to life. Only His actual presence made them accept the resurrection. So what chance do we have of believing today? Paul writes that the faith to believe is purely a gift from God (Eph. 2:8-9). Has He given it to you? If so, have you acted on it?

***Why John Wrote John***

***John 20:30-31***

John couldn't include *everything* Christ said and did. But he forever benchmarks the incontrovertible proof that the rock rolled.

He did this not to earn a Pulitzer, but so that his first-hand account would lead you and me to place our full faith and confidence in Jesus, both for today, and for the other side of our tomb as well.

***Open Tomb, Open Mind, Open Heart.***

Recently archeologists discovered the very bones of Caiaphas, the high priest who expedited Christ's death. And 2nd century Roman historian Tacitus writes that Christianity was founded by "Christus" (English for "Christ") who was "put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius."

People rarely risk their lives to cover a lie; even suicidal terrorists believe. 500 of Christ's followers were eyewitnesses to His post-burial guest shots. Like many of them who were beaten, stoned, martyred and turned the world upside down, you can stake your life on the fact that Jesus lives!

Belief in the risen Christ is still inspiring and emboldening His people overseas who are imprisoned, tortured, even killed for their faith. Where are the media? Busy covering endangered species, but silent while a "whale" of a lot of believers are brutalized.

Death is not unconsciousness. The Bible says, "It's appointed unto man once to die, and after death, the judgment." For those *in Christ*, death is not to be feared (1 Cor. 15:56-58). Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live; and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

Creature comforts can make it hard to seehow desperate we are, like happy tourists on a train speeding toward a washed-out bridge.

The Bible says we've all sinned, we all need a Savior (Rom. 3:23). We won't make it past heaven's bouncers because we're nice guys, or because we got wet at church, or both! If that makes you mad, simply note your objection on your PDA, and argue with Him later.

God won't *send* anyone to the place the Bible calls hell. Nope, He's done everything to *keep* us from going there.

After Jesus returned to heaven, Peter and John were preaching in Jerusalem. The chief priests, temple police and Sadducees were hacked, duh, that they were claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. So they arrested Pete and John on the same day that *thousands* of people in the streets believed their message and were saved! Peter's message? "There's salvation in no one else! Under all heaven there is no other name for men to call upon to save them" (Acts 4:12)

God has set things right between us and Him based solely on the life, death and resurrection of His Son Jesus, and He no longer holds our sin against us (2 Cor. 5:17-20).

Easter is more than singing "In your Easter bonnet….." Hey, if Christ didn't rise from the dead, then let's party down, pile up the toys, do some IPO's, and die.

Recently I was in a room with the dad whose 10-year-old daughter had just been killed by an 82-year-old motorist. Tomorrow's not guaranteed to us. The most pivotal question you'll ever be asked is…… "Are you ready for eternity?"

If you aren't, but you want to be, today's the day, and now's the time to whisper to God a prayer like this:

"God, You must love me a lot. You gave me *human* life. And in spite of my sins and screw-ups, You're offering me *eternal* life. Because I could never, on my own, be moral enough to deserve to be in Your presence, You bridged the chasm between You and me with a cross. There Your Son Jesus took my place as the only acceptable Sacrifice for all my sin. And the empty tomb proves Jesus is who He said He is. Because He conquered death, He'll do that for me too. God, please take the reins of my life. I'm ready at last. Thank You. Because Jesus lives, I'm taking Him to be my Savior. Amen."

His Deal

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