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

**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: Chapter 21**

***B.I.B.L.E. =***

***Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth***

Four sportswriters might profile the Mariners' inscrutable right fielder, Ichiro Suzuki, from different angles -- his quirky batting style, lightning speed, flame-thrower arm, or stratospheric success at bat with the sacks juiced. Four looks, same Ichiro.

The Bible's four gospel authors cover Jesus differently. Matthew does Christ as King. Mark, Christ as Servant. Luke, Christ the Son of Man (God in human flesh). John, Christ as the Son of God (the God-Man, fully human yet fully divine). Four lenses, same Jesus.

John states that Jesus *is* God, the *Key* to life, the One who died that we might live forever *forgiven*! Either we buy John's assertion that God loves us sinners, and offers us eternal life instead of eternal punishment. Or we don't. No wiggle room.

To prove Christ is truly God, John highlights seven of His miracles:

• Changing water into wine (2:1-11)

• Healing a royal official's son (4:46-54)

• Healing the paralyzed man by the pool (5:1-9)

• Feeding 5,000 with only a boy's lunch (6:1-14)

• Walking on water (6:20)

• Healing a blind man (9:1-12)

• Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44)

John also singles out seven of Christ's history-rattling "I am's:"

• The Bread of Life (6:35) -- He sustains life itself.

• The Light of the World (8:12) -- He illuminates our path.

• The Gate (10:7) -- The only Portal to eternal life

• The good Shepherd (10:11) -- Our Guide and Protector

• The Resurrection and the Life (11:25) -- Our only shot at heaven

• *The* Way and *the* Truth and *the* Life (14:6) -- Period.

• The Vine (15:5) -- The Source of all that's life-giving

***The Dion Behind The Neon***

One deejay tells of the first time he ripped the news from the teletype and froze, spotting a multi-syllabic, vowel-free name. Quickly he blurted, "The king of Czechoslovakia has died. His name is being withheld, pending notification of next of kin."

Years ago I met rock-n-roll legend Dion (and the Belmonts) DeMucci. Remember "Ruby Baby," "Runaround Sue," "The Wanderer" and that musical question, "Why Must I Be-e-e A Teenager In Love?"

When I saw Dion, he'd given his life to Christ. In '68 he penned his classic about a great American trio. One was JFK, but his lyrics also fit our John who wrote a first-person bio of His friend Jesus.

"Has anybody here

Seen my old friend John?

Can you tell me where he's gone?

He freed a lotta people,

But it seems the good die young.

I just looked around,

And he's gone.

"Didn't you love the things (he) stood for?

Didn't (he) try to find some good for you and me?

And we'll be free,

Someday soon it's gonna be one day."

***"Fast-Forward Over John"***

The disciples had ridden a million Disney Matterhorns in the last three *weeks*, watching Jesus raise Lazarus to life, accompanying Him entering Jerusalem cheered by Passover celebrants, emotionally crashed after thinking He'd end Rome's rule of their country, seen their bud Judas sell Jesus down the river, heard their top gun (Peter) deny knowing their Master who was being bum-rapped right to the cross, endured their Leader's brutal death, been rocked to think someone had hijacked His body, then jolted to see Him alive, sank back into the pits when He disappeared again, then headed back home, after three bizarre years, to do their thing -- FISH.

**Let's read the end of this eyewitness bio, John 21:1-25.**

***From Net Loss to Net Gain***

***John 21:1-3***

v.3 Peter's their new leader. What have we learned from him about earning the right to lead? Have you earned that right?

Galilee was on the "Sea of Tiberias," aka Sea of Galillee. Earlier, Jesus had made six post-resurrection appearances in Metro Jerusalem. In Galilee Jesus is seen by 500 people (I Cor. 15:6), by His brother James (I Cor. 15:7) plus these men at the lake.

This was the third time Jesus had come to His disciples since busting out of the tomb. Twice they'd been cowering behind locked doors before fleeing Jerusalem to do what all depressed people do -- FISH! These are the "extreme" kind of fishermen whose kids know it's Sunday, only because the boat's not in the front yard.

Only seven disciples were there to get a primo object lesson in how they had to look no further than their workplace for the roadmap from emptiness to personal fulfillment.

***Say Hey! How 'bout This "Miracle Catch!"***

***John 21:4-8***

v.6 When you get lost, do you stop and ask for directions? Why would these pro anglers take fishing advice from a total stranger?

v.6 How could so many fish be just a few feet away? Could you be that close to what Jesus wants to show you, so close to His best for you? Where would (or did) you have to throw your net to find it?

Game 1, 1954, Giants-Indians, 2-2, top of the 8th, Larry Doby and Al Rosen on base. Cleveland's Vic Wertz crushes a 2-1 Don Liddle pitch as Jack Brickhouse gropes for words on TV's first "live" World Series coverage. Racing into center at the Polo Grounds, facing the wall, Willie "Spiderman" Mays reels in that 460-foot missile! "Just another day at the office" for Mays is *still* known as … "The Catch."

Cold, drenched and discouraged, the disciples don't recognize the Stranger on the shore 100 yards away through the mist. It's doubtful that Jesus has spotted a school of fish that far off. But having created them, He simply "knows" where "The Catch" is.

***Breakfast at Lenny's, Denny's or Tiffany's?***

***John 21:9-14***

Early Greeks identified 153 species of fish. Amazingly, sixty years after this seaside breakfast John recalls the *specific* number of fish caught that day. Maybe the significance of "153" is that Jesus is commissioning them to take His message of forgiveness to *every* person and nation in the world. In John 3 we saw that "God so loved the *world*." In John 14 Jesus says He's *the* Way for *all* mankind to have a one-to-one relationship with God. Why else would John be so specific? Wouldn't John's saying "about 150" have covered it nicely!!

What can we pick up here from "The Catch:"

• All that we have, even breakfast, is an undeserved gift from God.

• As He'd done when He multiplied a few loaves and fish to feed crowds of 5,000 and 4,000 (John 6:1-14), Jesus will use whatever *we* have, to do much *more* than our solo efforts could ever achieve.

• Jesus will enrich our lives through our work, when we obey Him.

• *Authentic, meaningful* success is impossible unless we rely on God.

***Meanwhile, Back At The Campfire…***

***John 21:15-17***

Question: v. 15 "Describe how it would look for you personally to love Christ with "*agape*" love?

Question: v.17 "Lord, you know everything!" How does it make you feel to realize that God knows absolutely everything about you?

Question: A few days earlier Peter had "denied" Christ, saying that he didn't know Him. In the context of today's America how does one "deny Christ?"

Peter had boasted of his unwavering love for Christ, then later denied even knowing Jesus just a few days earlier outside the high priest's palace the night of Jesus' trials. He'd "wept bitterly" over that betrayal (Luke 22:62). Still wrestling with guilt, Peter gets

three more swings at expressing His commitment to Christ (John 15:6ff). Imagine the bouillabaisse of emotions this wacked-out Galileean feels as he faces his Lord -- joy, shame, intimidation.

The English translation here uses only the word "love." But the original Greek uses "*agape*" and "*phileo*." In the first two exchanges Jesus asks Peter if he "*agapés*" Him, i.e., "Have you decided to commit yourself deeply to me at all costs, with no limits?" But heartbroken Peter equivocates, "Lord, I *phileo* You," or "I love You fondly."

When He asks a third time, Jesus settles for, "Do you *phileo* me?" Peter replies, "C'mon, you *know* from experience that I'm your friend." Now, looking back on his own failures, Peter is ashamed and humbled. Even so, this bumbling blow-hard would go on to become Christ's #1 apostle to the Jews, as Paul would be to the Gentiles.

No matter how low we've sunk, Jesus offers His forgiveness, and His customized plan for us to be a vital, productive member of His team.

***Salvation Is Free:***

***Following Christ Can Be Costly***

***John 21:18-19***

Question: v.19 Jesus didn't say, "Peter, don't worry. I won't let any harm befall you." He could have said that. Why didn't He?

Question: v.19 If Jesus said to you, "Follow me," what would following Him look like, in your case?

Peter would become an MVP for the Lord, preaching one day when more than 3,000 would decide to follow Christ. He was jailed in Rome during Nero's persecution of Christians. Historian Eusebius tells us that in circa AD 66 Peter was crucified upside down, since he felt unworthy to die just as his Master had.

From that lakeside breakfast forward, Peter knows how his life will end. Stripped of his cockiness, he lays his life on the line each day, "following Jesus," to tell others that, because of Christ's death, God no longer holds their sins against them! Violent death lay ahead for all of Jesus' disciples, save John. But Christ had shown them often that He alone can calm life's storms

***Rumors and Reprimands***

***John 21:20-23***

v.21 It's so human to compare ourselves with others, to think that they're getting unfair treatment. What message(s) are we tacitly sending to God when we think or express feelings like that?

v.23 What had you misunderstood about Jesus that's clearer to you now?

John wants to dispel a rumor that he'll still be alive at Christ's second coming. This 90-something disciple fears that unless he clears up this misconception, there'll be great confusion at his death, if Christ hadn't returned to earth by then.

Jesus had broken the news to Peter about the kind of death he'll face for remaining true to Him. But Peter wants to know what'll happen to John. Jesus counters, "What's that to you?" He cautions Peter to not compare his lot with others -- just concentrate on serving Him.

***What More Can Be Said?***

***John 21:24-25***

Question: After spending some time reading and peering into all twenty-one chapters of this gospel of John, what two or three overarching thoughts will you take with you?

Here's a signed affidavit by John the eyewitness, attesting to his book's accuracy. And perhaps it was the elders of the church who helped him transcribe his words, who added, "We *know* it's true!"

Jesus has inspired more books and music than anyone. Wouldn't you love to hear about all the other things Jesus did and said, not just during His three years of teaching, but during His growing up, working in the family business, interacting with His six or more siblings (Matt. 13:55-56), jammin' with the rabbis, dreaming about His unique, to say the least, future….

If each of His words and acts had been recorded, all the world's libraries and google.com couldn't contain all those words! But what we have in the Bible --and *only* in the Bible -- is all that God wants us to know *now* about the greatest story ever told.

God wants to take up residence in your life. As Jesus demonstrated, death is not final. He announced, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25-26) The resurrection is our only confidence for the future, the foundation of our forgiveness from sin.

***John: Flush it? Or Believe it?***

The Bible's central message is that "God has made peace with us through Christ!" (2 Cor. 5:18) God bridged the chasm that our sin had dug between Him and us, a bridge that was completely and forever paid for on the cross 2,000 years ago. Think of it! The one true God no longer holds your sins against you because His Son Jesus paid your penalty for them when He sacrificed His life for yours.

Have you made life's only life-or-death decision, the one where you decide to trade in your sins for a brand new model you, one that Christ alone can build? How do you do it? The Bible explains: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you'll be saved!” (Acts 16:31)

Nothing would please God more -- and give you more peace of mind -- than to simply, silently tell God right now, "God, I'm one of those sinners Your Son Jesus died for. I can't let His death go to waste by ignoring the price He paid in order for You to forgive my sins. I want You to know that I believe all this. Okay, I may not understand it,

but deep down, I believe it. Please take my life and show me how to

be Your man. I want to start fresh with You right now. Thank You, Father, for giving me a brand new life, because of what Jesus did for me. Amen."

His Deal

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