**THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

We’re continuing our jog through some highlights of the world’s greatest document, the Bible, written over a span of 1,600 years by some 44 men who hailed from society’s lowliest to loftiest. Together, inspired by God’s Holy Spirit, they wrote 39 books in the Old Testament (OT) and 27 in the New (NT).

The Bible has one paramount message, pointing to one Person -- the all-God-yet-all-human, only Son of God, Jesus Christ.

No other collection of books compares since it can only have come from one transcendent Author. As Paul writes (II Timothy 3:15-17),

*“There’s nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another -- showing us Truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way. Through the Word we’re put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.”*

The late Ray Stedman, one of my heroes of the faith, wrote, “In this book God has incorporated all the truths we need to know about ourselves.” The Bible is written not only *for* but *about* you and me! It explains where we came from, why we’re like we are, and what incredible things God has in mind for us to become and do.

As Tom Shrader, a friend in Phoenix, says, *“A timeless God doesn’t produce dated material.”*

The object of vitriolic seek-and-destroy missions by many murderous despots over the centuries, the Bible has nevertheless been miraculously preserved for you and me to read and profit from.

What’s the big deal about the Bible? What’s God trying to tell us in it anyway?

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (1:9-12) he gives us the answer:

*“(God) thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans He took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in Him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth. It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, He had His eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose He is working out in everything and everyone.”*

Now there’s a flash -- the very Person who created the universe, speaking a billion galaxies and giga-billions of stars into existence, literally knows who you and I are (and loves us anyway!), knows our names and has Plan A for our lives. And He took the wraps off that purpose in His “Manufacturer’s Handbook,” the Bible.

Why do we need all 66 books of the Bible? In the first book, Genesis, we learn how God intended for us to live originally. We see the pure, pristine, innocent, peaceful, lavish life enjoyed by Adam and Eve, our first parents. Then sin entered the world, and since then each human being has been born carrying its curse of eternal death (meaning eternal separation from God).

The rest of the Bible was written to tell how God has made it possible for each of us to be restored to that original, personal, intimate relationship He wants to have with us.

My fellow Wheaton College alum and ex-U.S. Senate Chaplain, the late Dick Halverson, put it like this:

*“The fundamental problem in history is* ***alienation****. Jesus Christ is the essential solution in bringing* ***reconciliatio****n. ... You and I were made to be Christ’s, and we’re never ourselves until we’re Christ’s. We will never reach our potential until we belong to Christ.”*

Crazy Tom Shrader says he once asked a guy, “Are you a Christian?” “No,” he replied, “not in the *biblical* sense.” Which is like saying, “I’m a hockey player but not with a stick or puck.”

Throughout this Book we’re introduced to a colorful parade of men and women, all imperfect just as we are, struggling through the same types of experiences we face today. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Daniel, Ruth, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Mary, Peter, Stephen, Paul, Timothy and others -- they all tapped into the same brand of supernatural strength that’s available to us today. In this sense there’s no more relevant book at Amazon.com at half the price.

In the Major and Minor Prophets we see God revealing His plan for mankind, from Day One in the Garden of Eden right on through and including all of eternity’s tomorrows. As we munch on this Book, we find ourselves actually beginning to think God’s thoughts! No mortal could’ve ever dreamed up this galaxy-sized scenario.

In the NT’s first four books, the Gospels, we see “God in the flesh” (Jesus Christ) as He walked, talked and performed miracles during His 33 years on earth. We see His power and pain, His life and death -- and His resurrection from the dead.

In the letters to the churches which sprang up after Christ’s birth along the Mediterranean, we see how the lessons Jesus taught in the Holy Land can be applied in real life today, two centuries later.

In the Bible’s last book, Revelation, we witness horrors, monsters and big-screen battles that Steven Spielberg would give his stock portfolio to buy the rights to. With Earth set for annihilation, we see the triumphant return to this planet of Christ who will, once and for all, trash satan and his henchpersons, banishing them to the fiery pit God has reserved for all who reject His free gift of eternal life in heaven with Him. So much for “light reading.”

The NT was written A.D. 45-100. Its first four books, the Gospels, capture the birth, life, death and resurrection of God’s only Son who swaps heaven for a Bethlehem stable.

Each Gospel gives us a different look. Writing to Jews, Matthew sees Jesus as King. Targeting Romans, Mark portrays Jesus as Servant. Writing to Greeks, Luke (the NT’s only Gentile author) reveals Jesus as the perfect Man. John portrays Jesus as the Son of God.

Matthew zones in on genealogy, describing the *promised* Savior. Mark is impressed with this *powerful* Savior. Luke stresses that He’s a *perfect* Savior. John’s “good news” is that Jesus wants to be our *personal* Savior.

Oh yes, all these notes from our previous sessions are available. No cost. No obligation. No salesman will call.

**The Gospel of John**

The author is John, one of Christ’s 12 disciples who followed Him along the dusty trails of Judea, Samaria and Galilee. John’s dad was a well-off, Ballard-type fisherman named Zebedee married to Salome, a devoted follower of Christ who, some believe, was a sister of Mary, Jesus’ mom. John’s brother James was also one of Jesus’ special 12.

About age 25 when Jesus invited him to “follow Me,” John went on to outlive the other disciples. Sometime between A.D. 80-100 John completed the NT with his writings. By this time Jesus’ teachings had spread around the Mediterranean, Paul and Peter had been martyred and Jerusalem had been destroyed, just as the prophets predicted, in A.D. 70 by Roman troops under Titus.

In his book John refers to himself as “the disciple Jesus loved.” He’s the one we see leaning close to Jesus during the famous Last Supper scene. He stood at the foot of the cross on Golgotha as Jesus hung there dying. It was John whom Jesus asked from the cross to take care of His mother. Along with Peter and James, John was in Jesus’ “inner circle,” affording us a very intimate perspective.

The no-frills point John makes in this book is that Jesus is the Messiah that OT prophets foretold; He’s the Son of God; and since no man can see God the Father, Jesus came to earth to show us what God is like. John says again and again God wants to establish a personal friendship with all humankind, and that the only way to do this -- to be assured of spending eternity with Him in heaven as opposed to in a place the Bible calls hell -- is by believing in His Son Jesus.

In chapter 1 we see Christ described as “the Word,” the One who spoke the universe into existence. **Let’s read John 1:1-46.**

Throughout John we meet credible witnesses who testify that indeed this Nazarene carpenter is the Son of God. After all, no mortal could do the miracles He did before their eyes. The first of seven covered by John is in chapter 2 when Jesus attends a wedding reception where the host runs out of wine. No problem; Jesus simply turns some water into wine that would make a Parisian salivate.

**Let’s pick up the story and read 2:13-25.**

Arguably the Bible’s best-known verse is coming up. The scene is late night as a moral, upright guy, one of the religious biggies, comes to Jesus on the QT. As a Pharisee, this man Nicodemus was schooled to believe his heavenly bags were packed and his first-class seat had already been confirmed. But Jesus has news for him.

**Let’s read 3:1-36.**

Next, the third of Jesus’ miracles in John. A chap had been paralyzed 38 years, unable to help himself or get help. 38 *futile* years. But then He hadn’t yet met Jesus who simply says, “Stand up, pick up your sleeping mat, and walk!” Instantly he was healed! But it was the Sabbath, and the religious wheels objected, saying, “You can’t work on the Sabbath! It’s illegal to carry that mat!”

**Let’s see Jesus explain His way out of this in 5:16-47.**

The next miracle is a poignant demonstration of Jesus’ desire to meet the deepest hunger of the human heart, the hunger to know God. This point is driven home as Jesus, the self-described “Bread of Life,” transforms an otherwise hopeless situation into a meal for thousands of His starving followers. **Let’s read 6:22-48.**

Late in the last of his three years of active teaching, Jesus had many followers. But others weren’t buying His act. Many thought their race and religion would assure them of a ticket to heaven. **Let’s go to 8:31-59.**

Skipping now to the night before Jesus’ death, He’s just eaten the Last Supper with His disciples, including greedy Judas Iscariot who’d been slipped 30 pieces of silver to betray Him to the authorities. 600 Roman goons are sent to arrest the unarmed Prince of Peace. **Let’s read chapters 18, 19 and 20.**

**Chapter 20, verse 31 is why John wrote this entire book. Let’s read it.** Let’s check Jesus’ statement to His friend Martha just before he would bring back to life her brother Lazarus, dead lo these four days. **Jesus sums up what He’s all about in 11:25-26.**

Put yourself in Martha’s thongs when Jesus asked her, “Do you believe this?” In chapter 21, verse 22 are Jesus’ last words in this book. His simple, two-word invitation still stands. “Follow me.”

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