

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

Ch. 3

A serious study of Jesus Christ's life on earth, as chronicled by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John generally finds a seeker arriving at one of three conclusions: Jesus is a liar, a lunatic or the Messiah, the Son of God. What He is *not* is simply "a good teacher."

Jesus claimed to *be God*, to have control over creation, to have authority to forgive sins. He predicted He'd die and three days later live again! He said He *was* Truth and is the *only* door to have eternal life! He even encouraged people to *worship* Him!

This astonishing Carpenter said, "Anyone who's seen me has seen (God) the Father." He also said, "I and the Father are one." When the Jews were about to stone Him, He countered, "I've shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" 'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied His tormentors, 'but for blasphemy because you, a mere man, claim to be God.'"

For hundreds of years before Christ's birth in Bethlehem, Old Testament prophets had foretold that God would come to earth as the Jews' Messiah, God's "anointed One." The mathematical odds of these prophecies all coming true in one Person are uncountable.

Honk If You Know John

John the apostle and his brother James, Jesus' first cousins, were fishers. But when he met Jesus in about AD 27, John devoted the rest of his long life to being a disciple and apostle of Christ. (An apostle is "one who is sent," who'd literally seen Christ {**I Corinthians. 9:1**}, and one who does miracles {**II Corinthians 12:12**}).

An "unlearned man," with no rabbinical schooling, John had been trained at home in Hebrew and in the OT, typical for most Jewish families back then when their children were said to be the best educated in the world.

John hears that some refugee from the desert named John the Baptist (JB) is preaching and baptizing east of Jerusalem. He and thousands hear JB promise that the Messiah is coming soon, and that all should repent of their sins, believe in this Jesus and thus become a child of God.

When Jesus shows up, JB tells his followers, "Look, there's the Lamb of God!" At this, John the author and his pal Andrew instantly latch on to Jesus. John, James and Andrew's brother Peter become Jesus' inner circle, His own rat pack. In fact, while hanging on the cross, Jesus selects John, over His own half-brothers, to care for His mother Mary.

John leaves Jerusalem in AD 70 when the Titus-led Romans overthrow the city and level the temple. He lives out his later years in Ephesus, in today's Turkey, where he drafts this Gospel and 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, before being exiled to Patmos in the Mediterranean where he pens

Revelation. As the only one of Jesus' "12" to die of natural causes, their sole survivor dies in about AD 98.

His Gospel's central purpose is found in **20:31**: "... (this is) written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." No Bible author makes a stronger case for Christ's deity.

DISCUSS:

Nick at Nite

Nicodemus is a player, "a ruler of the Jews," a rabbi, a lawyer who sits on their supreme court. His mortal enemy is Jesus since he's a member of the Pharisees, an elitist group of 8,000 who took solemn vows to keep the 10 Commandments. Given to Moses by God atop Mt. Sinai 12 centuries earlier (**Exodus 20:1-17**), these ten weren't specific enough for the Pharisees. So they had their office temps, the Scribes, spell out in painstaking detail how they were to be obeyed.

These "how to's and NOT to's" were published in the *Mishnah* which contains *24 chapters* just on how Jews are to live on the Sabbath! For instance, farmers and fishermen are not to tie knots on the Sabbath. But as long as you use only *one hand* to tie it, it's OK. This fanatical fixation was the rigid, myopic focus of the Pharisees, of whom Nick is a top gun.

He sneaks in to see Jesus after nightfall lest he be called a traitor. He concedes that he and his cronies believe Jesus is a fellow rabbi sent from God. But Nick wants to know "the real Jesus." **Let's read John 3:1-36.**

DISCUSS:

Jesus spots a gaping hole in the life of our ultra-religious, highly-respected friend Nick. Like you and me, he's a sinner, doomed to pay eternally for his sin by spending unending life-after-death in a "lake of fire" the Bible calls hell. The only way to get a reprieve, Jesus says, is by having a spiritual rebirth.

Many scholars insist that "born of water," as Jesus said, refers to baptism. But it's clear from Paul's later teaching that baptism is *not* a requirement for salvation. He wrote, "For by *grace* (given tho' undeserved) you have been saved through *faith* (not by a physical act like baptism) and that not of yourselves; it is the *gift* of God (not earned); not as a result of works, that no one should boast." (**Ephesians 2:8,9**)

Some insist that we can't know 'til we die whether we'll wind up in heaven or hell. Not true, says God's Word. In the last verse of this chapter John shines the light of truth in this murky corner. **Let's read John 3:36.**

Jesus makes it clear that nobody -- not the nicest guy, or biggest donor to charity, or most religious person -- *nobody* enters the kingdom of God without being born again.

Jesus cites an event Moses recorded in the book of Numbers. After the Israelites escaped from Egypt's Pharaoh, dashing across dry ground in the Red Sea, they were slogging through the Arabian desert, moaning about the grub God was providing. So God sent venomous snakes to get their attention, inflicting fatal bites. Answering Moses' cry for help, God had him make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Any who were snakebit should look up at this virtual viper, and they'd be healed.

Jesus' point? You and I have been infected by sin, sentencing all of us to never-ending, spiritual death. Just as the bronze snake was lifted up, so Jesus was hoisted on a cross. If we look to Him in repentance and faith, you and I will be assured of spending forever with Christ in heaven. It has zip to do with how moral or religious we can make ourselves, or keeping the 10 Commandments. It has *all* to do with God's loving gift of total, unconditional forgiveness. It's not what we *do* that must be changed; it's who we *are*! This free offer of God's pardon is available for you and me to accept, by faith.

The single most treasured line in all the Bible is verse 16. It reveals the solitary way that you and I can enter the forever family of God, i.e., by trusting in His Son Jesus, by being born again.

Verse 16 says God *loves* us. He's not some cosmic killjoy out to zap us or turn us all into holier-than-thou's. Far from it. Moved by His great love and compassion for us in our sinful state, He was willing to let His only Son leave the comforts of heaven to come take our place on Death Row, so that the curse of your sin and mine could be forever erased. Let's read **2 Corinthians 5:17-21**.

DISCUSS:

God is always the Initiator; we're the responder. (**John 6:44**)

We see Nick twice more in John's Gospel. Once when Jesus is in danger of being stoned, Nick tells his fellow Pharisees that the least they can do is give Jesus a hearing first (**John 7:50**). When our Lord's body is removed from the cross, Joseph of Arimathea and Nick, perhaps now out of his spiritual closet, take the Lord's body to be buried. (**John 19:39**) Let's resume our walk-through at **John 3:22**.

Dueling Disciples

JB's groupies were fried that Jesus was grabbing the headlines now. JB knew tho' that he was a role player, and he humbly reminds his fans that he's just the opening act. The star, he says, is Jesus, the primo Person in all of history, throughout the universe, the One who speaks ultimate Truth ... because He speaks the very words that He's heard God the Father say.

The final verse of this, the watershed chapter of the entire Bible, says it all. If you place your faith in Jesus, you'll live life to the max here on earth, plus get the bonus of living forever in God's presence. If you choose not to, you'll keep living under the sin-imposed sentence of

eternal punishment. It's up to you and me. Eternal life or eternal wrath. God's done all He can do. Now the choice is ours.

Paul, once an all-out tormentor of Christ's followers, ironically became the first Christian missionary. After coming to faith in Christ, he wrote, "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ... I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ -- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." (**Philippians 3:7-9**)

If making peace with God is your destination, whose directions are you following? If you've never done so, you can talk to God right now privately and say, something like, "Father, I admit it. I need You. I *am* a sinner. I've been going my own way instead of yours. I want you to thank You for writing 'Paid in Full' across that debt that I owe You, thanks to Jesus' taking my place on the cross. I'm sorry for my sin, and I give my life to You right now. Please enter my life and show me what You want me to be. Amen." If you just prayed that prayer, according to John 3, you done good.

Real good.

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