

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

Ch. 5

Virtually every decision we make, consciously or not, is based on something we speak of least but rely on most -- H-O-P-E.
To hope means "to look forward to with confidence or desire, expecting that it will be fulfilled."

HOPE has nuclear power! Victor Frankl, Sigmund Freud's successor in Vienna, contends in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* that, from his personal experience in a Nazi prison camp, the "loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect on man. ... Any attempt to restore a man's inner strength in camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal."

In 1965 Jim Stockdale became one of the first U.S. pilots downed in Nam. A P.O.W. for seven years of torture and isolation, he attributes his survival to hoping that each new day could bring freedom.

Rope-a- Hope

When it comes to ultimate meaning in your life.....What gives you hope? On what is your hope based? How has it changed your life?

The three Hebrew words used in the Old Testament for *hope* all mean to look ahead eagerly with confident expectation and patience to something that would be fulfilled in the future. Just *how* God would rescue these ancients was not always spelled out for them, but they sensed that He, who'd always come through, would again.

In the New Testament "hope" refers to expecting something good. Paul writes that because Christ conquered death, we who believe in Him will also resurrect to enjoy eternal life in God's presence. That contrasts with the doom awaiting those who choose not to commit their lives and destiny to Christ since the Bible promises them eternal punishment in a lake of fire it calls "hell."

John says the believer whose hope rests in the fabulous future God has planned for him will also live a transformed, earthly life since he has nothing to fear or dread despite scary things John spells out in God's blueprint for the future in the NT's final book, Revelation.

If our hope isn't anchored in Christ, then all our beliefs and dreams are built on shifting sand. Jeremiah the prophet, who lived 600 years before Christ, told his people, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you *hope* and a future.'" (Jer. 29:11)

The Bible says God loves us. Because we're all born as sinners, God provided a bridge (His Son Jesus) to transport us from our lost state into being His child forever.

DISCUSS:

Leaving Fishing: a Net Gain

John and James were simple fishermen, yet both are immortalized as the Lord's disciples. The last living disciple of Christ, old John likely penned his Gospel from today's Turkey about 85-90 A.D. His readers were second- and third-generation Christians, probably Gentiles, who'd learned all about the life and feats of Jesus. But John was aware that false, itinerant teachers were twisting the truth about Jesus and the significance of His words, deeds, death and resurrection.

Hope to Some, Threat to Others

In his 21 chapters John uses the word "believe" 98 times. It's the theme of this book, one of five he wrote in the NT. He depicts the battle between belief and unbelief in his account of Jesus' exchanges with people of all classes, in the miracles (or "signs") He performed, and in how He affected people.

In first century Jerusalem the pool of Bethesda was fed by an intermittent underground spring. As the flow came in surges from reservoirs beneath the city, the pool would suddenly rise and fall. This activity spawned the superstition that an angel was stirring the waters. This five-sided pool was thought to be a place where the first who entered at that time would be cured.

In the 1960s excavators uncovered this site, buried for centuries, north of the Temple Mount near what's now St. Stephen's Gate. The pool contained shrines to the Greeks' gods of healing, confirming it wasn't a figment of John's imagination. Archeology cannot convince anyone to believe in Jesus, but it points to the folly of dismissing the Bible before examining the evidence.

John now brings us to this popular mecca. **Let's read John 5.**

DISCUSS:

The invalid who co-stars with Jesus here is but one of many ill, lame and blind, who in their sad plight had a modicum of hope. Of thousands of such pilgrims, on this one day Jesus selects this lone, poor soul. As God, He could've healed 'em all! Perhaps this was the most helpless and hopeless of all, and Jesus chooses him to demo His compassion for the weakest among us.

"Do you *want* to get well?" Jesus asked. Had that not come from the loving Son of God, we'd think Jesus is being cruel to this forlorn figure. It's a relevant question, tho.'

Some don't know they're *spiritually* ill, or don't *want* to be cured. Some become "comfortable" with their pain, problems and sin, beset by addiction, locked in an abusive relationship, mired in a nowhere career. Jesus wants this man to acknowledge that sometimes healing requires a *willingness* to change. Jesus asks him to do the impossible, i.e., "Get up and walk!" Lacking even the will to do so, this hapless guy gets a jolt of divine power, and instantly -- muscles atrophied for nearly forty years leap into action!

His good fortune is bad news for Jesus. 'Til now John the Baptist and Jesus have been asserting that Jesus is the Jews' long-promised Messiah, the Son of God. The Jewish religious hierarchy had not welcomed Him by tossing their yarmulkes into the air. Now, with this public healing -- done on the Sabbath and therefore deserving, in their books, of stoning -- they ratchet up their resentment to a frothy, murderous boil.

The Carpenter from Nazareth was a major threat to the legalistic system zealously promoted by the high Jewish council of learned scholars. Manmade religion always places greater value on ceremonies, rituals and customs than does God's Word. What Jesus was teaching and doing was an affront to the Jewish religious leadership who venerated their system of laws so highly that they ignored, persecuted and ultimately executed their own Messiah!

Jesus Tips His Hand

In chapter 5 Jesus reveals the Source of His awesome power, the same power available to us today. In maybe the Bible's most radical statement, Jesus admits He can do nothing by Himself, ONLY what He sees His Father doing! "C'mon, Jesus, New Age gurus say we just need to release the power that's in us. Don't wimp out, Jesus."

If Jesus couldn't make His life count without relying on His Father, what hope do we *have*? To find satisfaction and meaning, our only hope is to unlock God's power in our life, admitting that "*Nothing comes from me because everything comes from God!*"

How dare this upstart, Galilean carpetbagger say to the local religious and political mafia that His Father has given Him the power to bestow eternal life on whomever He chooses!

Jesus says He wants ALL people to accept His payment on the cross for their sins and to follow Him in repentance and faith. As Ray Stedman says, "If Jesus' claim to be the Lord of Life is true, then He is clearly the most important Person in anyone's life. If your very physical existence has come from Him and your spiritual destiny is in His hands, then He is the most important Person you will ever have to deal with. More than that, He is the most important Person in the whole world, the central figure in all the universe." Your relationship to Christ determines both your present and future.

The most crucial question we'll ever answer is, how we'll respond to Jesus' statement: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." Just think -- *we* get to choose Jesus to be either our Savior or our Judge!

With one three-letter word, Jesus refutes the notion that we cannot know 'til we die if we'll spend eternity with God. He said, "... whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me HAS eternal life and will NOT be condemned...."

You ask some folks if they're sure they'd be in heaven tonight if they died driving home this afternoon, and they'll answer, "I HOPE so." **Let's read 3:36.**

DISCUSS:

Show Me Some ID!

Jesus had made tall claims, saying He's God's Son. In spite of His miracles, even with the voice of God Himself piercing the skies and declaring that "This is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased" --- the Pharisees blew it off. So Jesus shows His ID.

Even then many refused to believe. That's a tragic choice, when opening their hearts to Jesus would've assured them of receiving God's indescribable, free gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

Why do people reject Jesus' irresistible offer? He says, in verse 40, "yet you refuse to come to Me to have life."

If you've never come to Him, please take a moment now to tell Him, "God, I finally get it. I can't ever be good enough to earn heaven on my own. So, I accept Your offer to trade my sins in for the fresh start You've promised to give me when I put my faith in You. I do that right now. Thank You, God. I'm swapping my pride, fear and doubt for the hope I have based on what I see in the Bible. It's You and me, Father. In Jesus' name, amen."

His Deal

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