

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

Ch. 18

Jesus Christ, claiming to be God's Son, knits the Bible into one seamless whole, giving us wisdom to cope with today, while inviting us to become personally related to Him now.

We're examining the earthbound exploits of Jesus, as recorded by His last living disciple in the late 1st century, an ex-fisherman named John. We saw Jesus' family tree -- a racial mix of bluebloods and bullies, heroes and harlots. With such an eclectic pedigree, this God-Man can identify with every race, creed and color.

History Channel

No subject, it's said, is ever studied thoroughly 'til it's studied historically. In 586 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar seizes Jerusalem and deports its 20,000 citizens to Babylon (Iraq). Persian King Cyrus allows a few Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. Jehovah worship, tainted by Persia's "salvation by good works," is restored in Palestine, and the high priest shop opens in 359 B.C., pooling all religio-political power in one man.

Alexander the Great leads 35,000 troops through Jerusalem, and in 332 B.C. conquers Egypt and builds Alexandria. For two centuries Jews are dominated by Egypt and Syria. Syria's King Antiochus Epihanes fails to capture Alexandria. Fuming, he decimates Jerusalem, bans Jewish worship, and mandates pagan sacrifices.

Beginning in 167 B.C. Jewish patriots oust Syrian rule and bask in twenty years of independence as the Pharisee and Sadducee sects become prominent.

Rome invades Jerusalem in 63 B.C. and installs local puppet leaders like cruel Herod who slays his own family and tries to murder the baby Jesus. One of his successors, Pontius Pilate, rules 25-36 A.D.

History writes, "In its 38 centuries Jerusalem has been destroyed at least 17 times, its name changed on many of these occasions. While it's the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, it's probably the least stable city that's ever existed, having been ruled by 25 different peoples."

Into this paranoia pit God the Father sends His Son, not as conquering King with an army of angels, but as a baby born to a tradesman and his teen-aged bride.

Jesus canvasses Palestine for three years, teaching, doing miracles to validate His Messiahship and mentoring twelve men. He's been saying, "My time has not yet come." Life's like a Mariano Rivera splitter; you *know* somethin's coming, but it's so *sudden*! Using prophets and Scripture, God often previews His deeds *in advance*.

In 1000 B.C. God tells *where* Christ will be born (Micah 5:2), and *who'd* come to *worship* Him (Psalms 72:10). In 800 B.C. He tells into whose *family* He'd be born (Jeremiah 33:15). In 700 B.C. He says *how* He'd be born (Isaiah 7:14). 300 ancient prophecies spell out His birth, death and resurrection. What are the odds of *one* of those coming true when, how and where they did? Here's one scenario. Cover Texas with silver dollars a foot deep. Paint a red "X" on just one. Fly over the state, drop a parachutist, and if he lands on that X, that's how likely it is for *one* of those prophecies to be right.

Jesus and His boys are near Jerusalem in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asks His mates to wait as He pours out His heart to His Father, agonizing over the inevitable, but He submits to His Father's will because He loves Him -- and us! **Let's read John 18:1-40.**

DISCUSS:

Garden Party

Jesus is in the Garden with HIS BFF's. armed gatecrashers show up. Conspiring to finger His Rabbi for 30 pieces of silver blood money, after midnight Judas leads some 50 soldiers and officials into the olive grove where he'd often encamped with the Lord. He does his dastardly deed, planting a kiss on God's cheek (Luke 22:47)!

Prepared to die for his Boss, Peter whips out a dagger and lops off an ear of one of the troopers. Jesus picks up the lone lobe, puts it back on Malchus' head, and it's good as new. The disciples scatter as Peter had sworn he'd never do.

Judas' Priest, It's Annas: A Name Only A Mother Could Love

Out of public view, Jesus is hustled to ex-high priest Annas who funnels soft money to his Roman superiors from his twin rackets of money-changing and selling animals to sacrifice at the Temple.

Annas wants to know how big Jesus' fan club is. But under Jewish law the accused is not required to testify against himself, but Jesus counters, "I speak openly. Call witnesses; they'll tell you." Our Lord "turns the other cheek, standing up for His rights non-violently.

Annas remands the prisoner to the current high priest, Caiaphas, and to the Sanhedrin for more grilling. Earlier Caiaphas had challenged the Pharisees and high priests to do away with Jesus, in case His following grew too large, prompting an undesirable response from Rome's stormtroopers (John 11:49-50).

The city sleeps as Jesus faces Caiaphas and Palestine's supreme court. Their phony charge of treason is justified, they surmise, because Jesus admits to being God's Son. But since only Rome can legally execute, they foisted Jesus onto Pilate.

In The Dock, In Denial

An unnamed disciple (probably John) joins Peter but leaves him at the courtyard gate as John slips inside for the trial. Away from Jesus and his pals, Pete is still smarting after Jesus came to the hearing aid of Peter's stab at protecting his Fiend. So when Caiaphas' servant girl recognizes him as one of Jesus' inner circle, Peter counters, "Not me."

Only hours ago Jesus predicted that three times before the rooster crows Peter would deny knowing Him (Matthew 26:30-35). In Mark's gospel this pesky servant girl follows Peter to the fire and tells the boys there, "Here's one of those Messiah maniacs" (John 11:49-50). Again Peter huffs, "No way!" Soon another servant who, unluckily for Peter, just *happens* to be related to Malchus, chips in, "Didn't I see you at "Olive Garden" with Jesus? Now a *third* time, punctured by profanity, Peter denies knowing Christ, barking, "I dunno what you're talkin' about" (Mark 14:71)! Cue the rooster! **Let's read Luke 22:59-62.**

DISCUSS:

Judas and Peter both fail Jesus. Judas hangs himself. Peter is a leader in the early Christian faith, proving that God isn't expecting perfection, just a heart for Him.

“Take Me To The Pilate”

Under Jewish law, capital case acquittals may not be reversed. Cases must be tried and verdicts reached *during daylight*. Convictions must be handed down the day *after* the trial. This farce broke all the rules.

Jesus knows this kangaroo court will end at the cross. He's briefed His disciples on *how* He'll die. Tomorrow's the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so they can't enter Pilate's palace (he's a Gentile) because leaven, a symbol for sin, will bar them from the Feast.

1,000 years earlier God spoke through David in Psalm 22, spelling out *exactly* how Jesus would die. It may *appear* that this Jewish cabal is a loose cannon, but God knew what was coming.

Pilate presses Jesus to identify Himself, so Jesus recites His mission statement (Matt. 1:21), and it wasn't to dump Rome. He came to deal once and for all with mankind's sin problem.

God is holy; heaven is sin-free. The Bible says our sin causes EVERY problem we have, and that it sentences us to be forever barred from God's presence. Before the cross only an *unblemished* animal could be sacrificed to atone for sin. So we can't save ourselves; we need a "perfect" substitute. Only ONE qualifies.

"What is Truth," Pilate asks the One who declared Himself to *be* Truth (John 14:6). Pilate was *this* close to an eternal relationship with God, but he couldn't get the bat off his shoulder. History says he was "banished to Gaul and there committed suicide."

Now Pilate turns to tell the mob that Jesus is no threat to anybody. But instead of acting with integrity by releasing Him, he tries to score points. "Will it be Barabbas, the convicted terrorist/murderer, or do we string up this innocent carpenter who's healed our blind and lame, fed thousands of hungry folks, even raised the dead? Barabbas or Jesus, you choose."

Elton John ruled 1970 with....."If you feel that it's real, I'm on trial, and I'm here in your prison. Like a coin in your mint, I am dented, and I'm spent with high treason. Through a glass eye, your throne is the one danger zone. Take me to the pilot for control, take me to the pilot of your soul. Take me to the pilot. lead me through the chamber. Take me to the pilot; I am but a stranger."

Jesus endured the cross to be the pilot of *yoursoul*. A day of final accounting is foretold in the Bible. Like Rivera's splitter, it's coming, and the signs from the Bible over there in the third base coach's box say it'll be *sudden* (I Thess. 4:13-18).

DISCUSS:

Let's be honest, we all need the Lord. People can fail us. Our health can. So can government, employers, friends, even loved ones. But Jesus promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

We can cash in on that promise, not by *doing* good or *being* good, but by *believing* His words and *receiving* His free gift of forgiveness. Has God given you enough faith to take that next step? Then right now, tell Him something like..."Dear God, how can I *not* accept Your gracious offer of total forgiveness for my sin, and a free passport to spend eternity with You, instead of in a place the Bible calls hell. I'm signing on to Your team right now. Thank You for giving me eternal life, for sending your Holy Spirit to come live in me. Amen."

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