

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

Ch. 19

Let's say you're God, you want to tell your creation who you are, how much you love them, and what life can be like in a trusting relationship with you. C.S. Lewis, Oxford scholar-broadcaster-novelist, describes how God went about this: "Among the Jews there suddenly turns up a Man who goes about talking as if He were God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time.

"Among Pantheists, like Hindus in India, anyone might say that he was *part* of God, or *one* with God: There would be nothing very odd about it. But this Man, since He was a Jew, could not mean that *kind* of god. God, in their language, meant the Being outside the world who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else. When you grasp that concept, you will see that what this Man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing uttered by human lips."

How could a merely great moral *teacher* say the outrageous things Jesus said if they weren't true? He did not claim to be a *prophet* speaking *for* God; He equated Himself *with* God! God with skin on!

Earlier in this fourth book of the New Testament, written by Jesus' last living member of His twelve disciples, we heard John's eyewitness testimony:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:1, 14) This is God's single, most astounding feat!

Turning all His cards face up, Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." (John 8:58) "I and My Father are one." (John 10:30) "If you'd known Me, you'd have known My Father; from now on you know Him and have seen Him." (John 14:7)

Jewish leaders "got" His claim to be Yahweh, God Almighty, and took Him seriously by plotting to have this "revolutionary" executed.

They saw their long-awaited Messiah change water to wine; feed thousands from a boy's lunch; walk on water; hush a storm; heal the sick, raise the dead. Yet the elite failed to embrace, says Lewis, "that what is beyond all space and time, what is *uncreated*, eternal, came ... descended into His own universe, and rose again ..."

God the Father texted us, saying, "I love you so much that I'll send My only Son to live and die among you, to be the Sacrifice for your sin, fully satisfying my demand to pay the debt you could never pay." (John 3:16) God came to us so that we can come to Him.

Blame Game

Over the past 2,000 years charges have volleyed back and forth about who sent Jesus to the cross. Some say "the Jews." Others, the Romans or Judas the traitor. The apostle Paul sets the record straight. **Let's read Romans 3:23-26.**

DISCUSS:

Jesus was hustled illegally through a long night of kangaroo courts before Jewish and Roman authorities. **Let's read John 19:1-42.**

Who Didn't Get These Memo?

Fomented by the priests, the mob assembles outside Pilate's palace, follows Christ up the Via Dolorosa to Golgotha (Place of the Skull) to watch God hang between two crooks. (Isaiah 53:12) Jewish law sentenced those *claiming* to be God to die. But this Carpenter from up in Nazareth was no pretender.

Soldiers are swarming with thieves, rabbis, judges, scholars and the commoners. No discrimination *this* day, no racial-social barriers. All are against the God who loved them enough to die for them, whose first words from the cross were "Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing." Who loves you like *this*!

Who's Got The Juice?

Back in the praetorium Pilate tries to impress God's Son with his political clout. But Christ pricks Pilate's pipe dream, saying no one has any power unless God wills or allows it. Faced with life's unanswerables like injustice, pain, disease, war and death, we can remember that God still reigns, although until Christ returns, He's temporarily ceded earth's control to satan.

Caesar Undressing

The vultures circle as the priests blackmail Pilate, saying he's no friend of Caesar if he releases this self-styled King of the Jews. Have you noticed that Christ is somehow always positioned as a threat to government, although the Bible says He sets governments in place, puts kings on thrones and removes them.

Pilate's cowardice is revealed, and the priests' phony righteousness is unmasked by their murderous scheme, with John implying that the closer we get to the cross, the harder it is to take cover in hypocrisy and procrastination.

Jesus promises that "nothing that's hidden shall remain hidden, but *everything* shall be revealed..." All pretense will be unwrapped, and each of us will be left standing clearly identified as *with* or *against* God. No if's, and's or but's.

Read It 'n' Weep

Jesus is forced to carry His own cross, an excruciating ordeal since His body has already been tenderized by a Roman whip and punctured by thorns. For you and me He trudges each painful step to this knob of a hill outside Jerusalem's Damascus gate, willing to take on Himself the curse of our sin, actually *becoming* sin for us.

The inscription atop the cross was intended as an insult to the Jewish leaders, since what it accused Jesus of contained *no* crime since He was *indeed* King of the Jews. Written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, the world's three best known languages then, it was read by thousands who were in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, recalling the Jews' miraculous deliverance from slavery under Pharaoh.

Consummating David's centuries-old prophecy, the soldiers divide three of Christ's garments among them and cast lots for the fourth, a seamless robe. (Psalm 22) Each element of this climactic episode is carried out minutely as God had predicted. God has a track record of telling us what's coming. And it comes, by God.

Parting Words

In reading the four Gospel accounts we see Jesus making seven statements from the cross. John includes only three; the first was spoken to His mother who, with three other courageous women, come to mourn, pray for and lend comfort to their Son and Friend.

Scholars believe that Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, was already dead. Knowing He could no longer care for His mother, and aware that His brothers would all be martyred before John dies, Jesus assigns His Mother's care to His friend John, the author of this book.

Jesus says, "I'm thirsty," not to gain sympathy, but to fulfill Psalm 69:21.

The last of the three dying words John mentions is "It is finished," Greek for *tetelestai*, signifying the completion of a transaction, a debt paid in full.

What was finished? (1) The Jewish leaders' dastardly mission. (2) Jesus' date with the cross. (3) His sufferings. (4) Each of hundreds of detail-rich Old Testament prophecies pointing to the sufferings and death of the Messiah. (5) The religious tradition of animal sacrifices to atone for sin had ended (Leviticus 16:29-17:1, 11; Hebrews 10:19-20). These ceremonies looked ahead to the Lamb of God who'd be slain to deal with our sins once for all. And (6) God had, upon Christ's death, forgiven all sin for all people for all time. Providing a way for us to be "reborn" was now complete, dealing a fatal blow to Satan's power to lure us into a real place the Bible calls hell -- endless torment and darkness apart from God.

DISCUSS:

The Crux of the Matter

Jesus died sooner than other crucifixion victims because He *voluntarily* laid down His life; death had not conquered Him! His enemies verified that He was dead, belying the scam that Jesus had not really expired, but merely "swooned" in a deep sleep. Satan is always hoping he can prove there was no death, so there'd be *no resurrection*. That both water and blood flowed separately from Christ's pierced side, separating into plasma and hemoglobin, occurring only when circulation has stopped, means He's officially dead. (Zechariah 12:10)

Underground Admirers

Joseph of Arimathea followed Christ, but not publicly 'til now. A man of wealth and influence, he has access to Pilate, and owns his own tomb, unlike the bourgeois. He fears what his fellow Jews might think of his worship of the Messiah, but he throws caution to the wind to gain permission to bury Christ's body.

Joe's joined by Nicodemus, another closet Christ-follower. You'll remember Nick from John chapter 3 as the chap who came to Jesus after sundown and asked, "Teacher, how can I be saved?" Jesus gave His iconic reply, "You must be born again."

On history's bleakest day, a few steps from the cross, lay a new tomb, a new beginning, new hope for each of us. Perhaps God is whispering to you that you need to come to this cross. Jesus paid a terrible price so that you and I can have a clean slate with God, assured that we'll spend eternity *with Him*.

DISCUSS:

If you haven't made life's most important decision, silently tell God, "I'm so humbled You'd let Your only Son die for me. Thank You, Jesus, for carrying my cross to Calvary, for taking those nails, for handling the shame, hanging naked and being beaten for me. I give you my life. Amen."

His Deal

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