

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

Ch. 20

Since 1890 Margaret Fox, Spiritualism's co-founder, has rested at Cypress Hills in Brooklyn. Bahai founder Baha'u'llah is buried in Bahj, Israel. Zionism patriarch Theodor Herzl's remains are at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, is entombed at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Mass. Nation of Islam founder Elijah Muhammad is interred in Mount Glenwood Cemetery near Chicago. In 1997 the Church of Satan Anton LaVey died. His ashes are who-knows-where.

India's Hinduism has no beginning, no founder; its scriptures have no origin. All who practice the Dharma code of life may call themselves a Hindu, cycling through reincarnation, or Karma, with most believing that all religions lead to the same end.

Shintoism is 3,000 years old. Each of its 13 sects has its own founder who lived and died. Many Shintoists are also Buddhists.

Islam's father is Muhammad, born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 570 A.D. and died in 632. "To become a Muslim one has to simply declare, 'There's no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.'" Muslims believe in heaven and hell, and that Moses and Jesus are Muslim prophets, but that Jesus is *not* the Son of God.

Lao-Tse starts Taoism (aka Daoism), died in 531 BC. Confucianism founder K'ung Fu Tzu (aka Confucius) died in 479 B.C. Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha (aka Buddha) who died in 483 B.C. after eating wild mushrooms, reaching Parinirvana (having no perception or sensation). His ashes are in pagodas in New Delhi and Sri Lanka.

In 1969 I interviewed Peggy Lee who's current hit went, *"When that final moment comes, and I'm breathing my last breath, I'll be saying to myself... 'Is that all there is, is that all there is? If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball. If that's all there is..."*

Only Jesus, God's Son, overcame death. Christianity rests on authenticating that He was buried Friday, and His body lay in the grave until He rose on Sunday. **Let's read John 20:1-31.**

Rock 'n' Roll

Resurrection Sunday's events, detailed in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24 and John 20, document that before sun-up an earthquake loosened the half-ton stone sealing Joseph of Arimathea's tomb.

That's where he and Nicodemus had laid Jesus' body two days earlier. An angel descends, and Jesus' body comes to life, slipping out of His wrappings unassisted.

Some women friends came to visit the tomb before dawn. Mary Magdalene wants to anoint Jesus' body, but it's gone! Two angels announce that "He is risen" and recall that He had predicted His betrayal, crucifixion and resurrection. (Luke 24:5-7) Distraught, Mary dashes to tell Peter and returns to the tomb and bumps into the gardener, but wait -- *it's Jesus!*

Why didn't she recognize Him at first? God often chooses an unlikely sort to carry His message. Here He taps a woman from whom He had exorcised seven demons. He tells her to "go tell" His *brothers* that He's alive. Once He'd called them *servants*, then *friends*, now *brothers*, signaling a new relationship. All six billion of us are *not* His children, but we *are* all His *creation*. The Bible says we only enter into His *family* when we come by faith through Jesus.

DISCUSS:

The Doors

After meeting Mary, Jesus appears to some women at the tomb and dispatches them to the believers up in Galilee. About 4 p.m. He confronts His comrade Peter. Next, Jesus drops in on two followers who are walking to nearby Emmaus. About 8 p.m. He slips through locked doors to see the other disciples and friends who'd bolted themselves in, fearing what the government might do to them.

Huddled like rats, Jesus' friends are clueless, numb. They'd been with God for three years *up close!* Now they cower behind locked doors, fearing reprisal lest others think *they'd* hijacked the body!

Just then Jesus digitizes Himself into the room, calming their terrified hearts, shows them His wounds and eats with them. "It's really the Master!" (Luke 24:42)

He leaves for a week, then reappears through barred doors. Despite this, and eyewitness reports from friends, Thomas is still a "faith hold-out." Christ invites skeptical Tom to touch His wounds, to "stop doubting and believe." So he does. For 20 centuries millions have believed Jesus is alive. He tells Thomas that these millions will be *especially* blessed for having believed *without* seeing and touching.

DISCUSS:

Only His actual presence made His disciples accept the resurrection. Paul writes that the faith to believe is purely a gift from God. (Ephesians 2:8-9). Has He given it to you? Have you acted on it?

John couldn't include *everything* Christ said and did. But he forever benchmarks the incontrovertible proof that the rock indeed had rolled. He did this so that his first-hand account would lead you and me to place our full faith and confidence in his dear Friend.

DISCUSS:

Open Tomb, Open Mind, Open Heart

Archeologists have discovered the very bones of Caiaphas, the high priest who expedited Christ's death. And 2nd century Roman historian Tacitus writes that Christianity was founded by Christus who was "put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius."

People rarely risk their lives to cover a lie. 500 of Christ's followers were eyewitnesses to His post-burial visits. Like many of them who were beaten, stoned, martyred and turned the world upside down, you can stake your life on the fact that Jesus lives!

Belief in the risen Christ is still inspiring and emboldening His people who are imprisoned, tortured, even killed for their faith.

The Bible says, "It's appointed unto man once to die, and after death, the judgment." For those *in Christ*, death is not to be feared. (1 Corinthians 15:56-58) **Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, though he dies, yet shall he live; and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."** (John 11:25-26)

Creature comforts can make it hard to see how desperate we are, like happy tourists on a train speeding toward a washed-out bridge.

The Bible says we've all sinned, so we all need a Savior. (Romans 3:23) We won't make it past heaven's bouncers because we're nice or because we got dunked or doused at church. God won't *send* anyone to the place the Bible calls hell. Nope, He's done everything to *keep* us from going there. And it's our choice.

After Jesus returned to heaven, Peter and John were preaching in Jerusalem. The chief priests, temple police and Sadducees were irked that they were claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. They arrested Peter and John on the same day that *thousands* of people believed their message and were saved! What had Peter told them? **"There is salvation in no one else! Under all heaven there is no other name for men to call upon to save them."** (Acts 4:12)

DISCUSS:

God has set things right between us and Him based solely on the life, death and resurrection of His Son Jesus, and **He no longer holds our sin against us.** (2 Corinthians 5:17-20) Are you ready for eternity? If not, whisper a prayer like this:

"God, I believe that Your Son Jesus took my place on the cross for all my sin. Please take the reins of my life. I'm ready at last. Thank You. I'm taking You, Jesus, to be my Savior. Amen."

His Deal

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