
Believing the Resurrection Story

DAVE BAST

There is plenty of talk today about our actions matching what we say. Usually, our words do reflect our beliefs and values – who we believe in and why. The Bible also gives us many commands on how to live. So, what does the Bible say is more important, our actions or our beliefs? Stay tuned.

BOB HEERSPINK

From ReFrame Media and Words of Hope, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. You know, Bob, you often hear people today talk about how the way you live is really what counts. That is what is key; not so much what you believe; but if you are a pretty decent person, you can kind of believe in anything – believe in God or not believe in God. Nobody is really going to be condemned for what they believe, just for what they do.

BOB HEERSPINK

Beliefs are not considered all that important in our world today. I heard someone say a while back: you know, really, faith is believing what you know isn't true. As though...

DAVE BAST

As though truth doesn't really matter; it is just your opinion.

BOB HEERSPINK

Truth doesn't matter, right.

DAVE BAST

But you know, scripture is pretty clear that belief can make all the difference in the world; literally, the difference between life and death; and especially what a person believes about Jesus Christ. I think that is really hard for many in our society today to grasp, really to buy into; that what you believe about Christ could have an eternal difference.

BOB HEERSPINK

We've been talking about the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, and it is very clear when you go to scripture that the resurrection is put front and center as the key belief, the key truth as to what really defines us as Christians.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I mean, there wouldn't be any Christianity if the first disciples did not believe that it was true that Jesus Christ literally rose from the dead.

BOB HEERSPINK

And yet, what an audacious claim this is. This is not something you can prove by scientific experimentation; and yet, Christians have staked their lives on the fact that Christ is bodily risen from the grave.

DAVE BAST

And the reason for that is because of the testimony of the first eyewitnesses, his disciples themselves. We have been looking, as Bob mentioned, at the resurrection appearances. Some of the stories in the New Testament of the appearances of the risen Christ with his disciples; and the longest of those stories comes in the 21st chapter of the Gospel of John. Now, in our last program, we saw how Peter encountered Jesus by the shore of the Sea of Galilee and was questioned by Jesus about his love for Jesus, and then commissioned again to lead; but there was another disciple in that story, and he appears at the very end of the chapter. Let me just read from John 21, beginning at verse 20:

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”²² Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”²³ Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die; but Jesus did not say that he would not die, he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”²⁴ This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.²⁵ Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, Dave, that disciple isn't named by name, and yet we know quite a bit about him. We know that he is the disciple who leans close to Jesus at the Lord's Supper; we know that he is the disciple who is identified as the one who Jesus loved.

DAVE BAST

Yes, the beloved disciple, he is known as.

BOB HEERSPINK

The beloved disciple.

DAVE BAST

And Christian tradition has always identified him, and I believe correctly, with John, the brother of James, one of the inner circle along with Peter: Peter, James and John; John the son of Zebedee; and in fact, in the early Church those traditions also said that John settled in the city of Ephesus at the end of his life, along with Mary, Jesus' mother, to whom the Lord had entrusted John; and you can even see the grave of John – what is called the grave of John – in the ruins of a great church just outside the ancient city of Ephesus.

BOB HEERSPINK

And John is one of the key witnesses to the resurrection, along with Peter. He is the disciple that with Peter runs to the tomb. He discovers this empty grave, and I really love the way in which John becomes, really, the first believer in the resurrection. We are told in scripture that even though he hasn't seen the body of Christ, even though he hasn't fully understood all the scripture, he sees and he believes.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you may remember that story. It is told in John 20. They hear this unbelievable report from the women that the grave of Jesus is empty. So Peter and John set out, and as they enter, John sees the grave clothes – the shroud – of Jesus lying there on the slab that had held his body, but the body is gone; and John is the first one to really figure out what must have happened. If someone had stolen Jesus' body, why would they strip off the grave clothes first? That doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

So what must have happened is that Jesus' body simply disappeared from the tomb. It was transformed. If we could have seen the resurrection, we wouldn't have seen sort of a corpse sitting up, reviving. There would have been maybe a blinding flash like a nuclear explosion, and the body simply would have been gone. So the stone was rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to let the witnesses in to see that the tomb was really empty.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly; and John becomes now this witness. He gives testimony to the resurrection; and I think it is worth looking at that word *testimony*, because we as Christians often talk about the fact that we give our testimony about our personal relationship to Jesus Christ. John is a witness. He gives testimony of the resurrection, but it is not just a personal statement of what he thinks is true. He is really giving a witness like someone in a court of law.

DAVE BAST

Right; and his testimony is to two things; it is to the fact of the empty tomb, and also to the fact that he laid eyes physically on the body of Jesus Christ alive once more – glorified – risen from the dead – but the same Jesus who rose.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly. John not only believes without seeing the body, but he is one of the privileged few that actually witnesses the resurrected Christ and is going to give testimony now to...well, to us today, as to the fact that these things are true.

DAVE BAST

The question, though, is whether we can accept his testimony or not. Can we, too, at this far removed in time – this distance in history – can we believe that they were telling the truth?

BOB HEERSPINK

Does it really make sense? Is this testimony really viable for Christians today? That is what we have to look at next.

Segment 2

BOB HEERSPINK

This is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. We have been talking about John's testimony to the fact that Jesus Christ literally, bodily, rose from the grave; and that John himself witnessed it and saw him; he saw the empty tomb, and he saw the risen Christ. Now the question is, can we accept his testimony as true? He is giving it almost as if he is a witness in a case in court, and he asks to be believed, I think. The question is, can we? And I believe, really, there are three reasons why we can accept that John is telling the truth. For one thing, you have to stop and realize that this is either an extremely elaborate deception of some kind or it is what it purports to be, an honest telling of what someone saw and heard and experienced; and really, the first reason why I think it is the truth is because of the nature of the story of the testimony itself. This really reads to me like it is, an honest account of a first-hand experience. It doesn't read as though it is somehow mythological or that John is describing some purely spiritual experience.

BOB HEERSPINK

There are just so many little points in the story that suggest it is an event that John was really experiencing.

DAVE BAST

Little touches, you are right; like those grave clothes. It is almost as if we are there with them. We are looking through John's eyes, peering over Peter's shoulder into the dimness of that empty tomb, and there sits the shroud of Jesus himself.

BOB HEERSPINK

Or the 153 fish, which are brought in on the shore. You can just see John going through and counting the fish...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. That's a fisherman for you.

BOB HEERSPINK

How many are there? That is a fisherman story.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. This is the greatest catch he has ever had...

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

And he says... Yes, even years later, John must be 80 years old at least now when he is writing, maybe 90, and it is still as fresh and as vivid as the day it happened.

BOB HEERSPINK

But then there is also that very interesting statement that is in John's Gospel about how...well, there is another party. There are some folks who are testifying to the fact that John's words are really credible, in John 21.

DAVE BAST

Yes; listen to this. Let me just read that. It is verse 24: This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. *We* know that his testimony is true. Now, that is very interesting because you have to ask who is speaking there?

BOB HEERSPINK

Right. Who is the *we*?

DAVE BAST

Yes; it is John who has been writing all of this account of how he was interacting with Jesus; there is Peter there. Peter has a question about John himself, and Jesus says: you never mind that. You just follow me. What happens to him is between him and me. And then there is this in-breaking, sort of, of a third voice – a third party – who says: Now, that is the disciple – this beloved disciple – who wrote the Gospel account that you are reading, and we know that his testimony is true. I think this is John's church...speaking...

BOB HEERSPINK

The church at Ephesus.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and they are saying, in effect: you know, John has been our pastor for many years. We want to testify to his character for you. You don't know him, whoever is reading this. Could they have imagined that two thousand years later we would still be reading it all over the world? But we know him and we know that

he is honest.

BOB HEERSPINK

It is like a guest pastor going to preach in a church and he comes with a letter from his congregation, in which the congregation says: We vouch for the truthfulness of this person and for the way in which his life and his character are just a manifestation of truth. You can believe and trust this man because of who he is.

DAVE BAST

If you stop and think for just a moment about this question, how do we know the things that we know, really, about the world, about other people, about life? Most of what we know comes from accepting the testimony of honest people.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

Is it raining outside? Well, if your friend comes in and says: hey, it is raining cats and dogs, do you immediately doubt him or do you go out to see for yourself? If we are told you learn that the sun is 93 million miles from the earth, have you measured it yourself? No, you accept the testimony of people.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that is what we are doing as we hear the words of John and say this is someone who we can really trust. The people around him who knew him best trusted him, and said you can trust him, too.

DAVE BAST

There is a wonderful statement about this role of testimony in a book by a New Testament scholar named Richard Bauckham. He points out that it is of the nature of testimony to ask to be trusted, and that it is not irrational to trust testimony if it is an honest person who is giving it. The rational thing to do is to believe them. So, believing that Jesus rose from the dead is not this wild, illogical, irrational act. It is not this blind, crazy leap of faith. It is something that is impossible. I believe it is a rational response to credible witness.

BOB HEERSPINK

And the very fact that John is speaking truth is borne out, I think, in a third way, and that is the way in which he lives his life even to the end. John ends up on the island of Patmos. He is a prisoner there, we are told, for the sake of the Gospel. This is not someone who crafted a lie, and then as the pressure mounted, decided to dig out and have his life go a different direction. This is someone who really believed his message: Jesus is alive, and he can go even unto death because of who Jesus is, because Jesus is risen from the grave.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. There is a wonderful little verse at the beginning of the book of Revelation, also believed to have come from the pen of John, where he says: I, John, a prisoner – an exile – on the island of Patmos because of the testimony of Jesus Christ; your brother in tribulation because of the testimony of Jesus Christ. He paid for this testimony that he gave. He paid with a life of suffering. In fact, like all the other disciples; all of them were martyred because of their belief that Jesus had risen from the dead. You have to ask, what is it that changed them? And I believe what changed them is that they were telling the truth.

BOB HEERSPINK

And as Christians, though, now we receive this testimony, and the testimony is creditable, it is believable, but the Lord still has to work in our hearts to open us to faith in Jesus. You know, Jesus said to Thomas: you have seen, blessed are you for believing, but blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

DAVE BAST

Yes; we asked a question on our website about whether you can believe that the Gospels are true, that Jesus is alive, and I love this comment that came in from a person called Raquel. She said: Yes, we can trust those stories because I know Jesus and he knows me. He is the truth. The simple thing is head knowledge, but what we need is heart knowledge; and how true that is. You can believe intellectually that he rose from the dead, but until you know him personally, until you meet him, and in effect see him for yourself, it just remains a story.

BOB HEERSPINK

But now, here is the issue, Dave: So we believe in the resurrection, what difference does it make? Why does this trust in Jesus as the risen savior turn life upside down? John really talks about the difference that the resurrection makes in our lives; and I want to talk about that, but first of all I would like to invite our listeners to join the conversation. Our website, groundworkonline.com, is another way that we work to join you as you dig deeper into the scriptures. There, we continue to reflect on today's discussion about our world and the Bible, as well as many other conversations that listeners have begun about scripture and how it interacts with their lives. We would also like you to help us think about upcoming programs. One of the topics we are going to talk about in the future is compassion and justice. How do they unite? How do we exercise both as Christians? Share your thoughts on these upcoming questions. Finding us is easy. Just visit our website, groundworkonline.com.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Bob, let's go back to the question with which we opened this program. Isn't it enough just to live a good life? Why does it really matter what I believe; I mean, as long as I sort of believe in God in a general sense, isn't the important thing my actions – my words – how I speak – what I do? Why do I have to believe in Jesus, specifically – Jesus Christ risen from the dead? John addresses that. I think we would do well to listen to what he says about how he wrote this book and why. There are actually two conclusions to the Gospel; one at the very end of the book in Chapter 21:25: Jesus did many other things as well (John writes). If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

So, in other words, he tells us something about his method. He is selective in what he writes. He chooses.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right, yes. If you go to the book of John, there are only seven miracles recorded there, but they are called *signs* because they reveal something of Jesus. He was very careful about what he wrote in order to convey his message.

DAVE BAST

And, you know, even the books...even the world could not contain the books if I wrote everything, he says.

BOB HEERSPINK

If John wrote down every word that Jesus said, there would still be a limited number of books...there would be a finite number...

DAVE BAST

Or everything that Jesus did.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly; but I think John is getting at the fact that what Jesus did really blew the world apart; this old world that lives under the curse of death. Jesus in his ministry was pouring new wine into an old wine skin. The world just couldn't contain it. The Gospel – the Good News of what Jesus said and did – bursts apart the old world in which we find ourselves today.

DAVE BAST

So, here is the other conclusion, and it actually comes in the previous chapter, Chapter 20:30, 31: ³⁰Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book; (so there is what you were just referencing) ³¹but these are written (and here is the purpose statement) so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ – or Messiah – the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

BOB HEERSPINK

And right there John is saying: Look, I am not an historian, although I am writing history. I am really a preacher. I am delivering a message to convince you about who Jesus is and what shape your life should take.

DAVE BAST

An historian writes to inform, simply to instruct. A preacher preaches to convince, and that is the difference. He wants to convict us; he wants us to believe what he is saying in a life-transforming way. There is a double purpose there, notice: That you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah – the promised One – the Savior. That one-word *Messiah* sort of sums up everything that he was and did in order to deliver people from sin; and the Son of God; that he is more than just a man, he is God in the flesh.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; but beyond that, John is saying believing this, you have eternal life; and today people are looking for life, they really are. We began this program talking about some of the good things that people will pursue in terms of defining what a Christian is all about. Christians do good things, and so, we are into family, we are into a career that we take seriously; but John is saying that all those good things that we do won't really deliver the life that we really crave.

DAVE BAST

That is to be found only in God.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

Eternal life is the life of God; and belief in Jesus is the key to finding that life. I mean, this is what John says: If you accept the rest of his testimony, if you accept the fact that Christ is alive – Christ is risen – then you have to accept this, too: That only by believing in him will we share in his risen life.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that is why the resurrection is so front and center for a Christian, because this resurrection life of Jesus is eternal life breaking into the world today, that Jesus shares with all who trust in him by his Spirit.

DAVE BAST

I had somebody write me an e-mail once after hearing a sermon that I preached, kind of challenging me and saying: you know, some of us don't believe that Christianity is the only way to God; and I replied to them: I don't think I would put it that way, but I would say Christ is the only way to God; and God is the only way to life, so believe in his name.

BOB HEERSPINK

Dave, you are exactly right. It is like Raquel said on our website. She said: I know him and he knows me. It is a heart relationship.

DAVE BAST

And that is the kind of belief that leads to eternal life; belief not just that Christ rose, but belief in the risen savior, Jesus Christ.

BOB HEERSPINK

Christ is the way to God, and God is the way to life.

DAVE BAST

Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation, and don't forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, tell us what you think about what you are hearing, and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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