

Easter: The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

DAVE BAST

One of the things I most appreciate about the Gospel writers is their honesty. Matthew, along with all the other apostles, witnesses to the fact that three days after Jesus was crucified, his tomb was empty; and it was empty because he rose from the dead; but Matthew also reports, matter-of-factly, that when Jesus' followers saw him alive after his resurrection, some of them couldn't believe their own eyes. Let's think about that today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and we say happy Easter—this is an Easter program. Christ is risen, Scott!

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is risen indeed.

DAVE BAST

So, let's listen, right away, to the Easter story as it is recorded in Matthew 28. All four Gospels record the story of the empty tomb. They do so in different ways, at somewhat different length, and some of the details vary, which is interesting in itself. I mentioned in the introduction the honesty of the Gospel writers, and part of their honesty is they don't try to cram everything together and make one uniform account.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; it is sort of like, even today...I mean, some people use that to cast doubt on the whole Gospel, but it is sort of like today. If four people witness a traffic crash in downtown Holland, Michigan, you are going to get four different accounts, and they are going to vary just a little bit. They are going to agree on all the big things; but, so right, somebody could have tried to iron out all the wrinkles among the four Gospels, but they left them there because this is just an honest accounting of what happened as it was told to them.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, we pick up the story at the beginning of Matthew 28, and we will condense it a little bit in the interest of time, but here is what happened: After the Sabbath...(so now, this is Sunday morning, the Sabbath being Saturday...Friday evening to Saturday evening) After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.²There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.³His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow.⁴The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁵The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.⁶ He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay;⁷ and then go quickly and tell his disciples he has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee; there you will see him,

and now I have told you.”

DAVE BAST

⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid, yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly, Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet, and worshipped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, then they do that, and closer to the end, now, of Matthew 28; ¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. (And that is an interesting detail.)

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is, isn't it? Easter doubt. They worshipped him, but some doubted. So, let's think a little bit about that, and the implications of that for us—for our lives. Maybe you are like that today; kind of worshipping Jesus. It is Easter Sunday...it is the day when a lot of people who don't otherwise go to church kind of show up to worship Jesus, but maybe doubting as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I recently got to meet the New York Times columnist, Nicholas Kristof, and for quite a few years now, right around Christmas, Nicholas Kristof has a column in the New York Times, where he engages with a pastor or a Christian. So, one year it was President Jimmy Carter; another year it was Reverend Tim Keller; and the column is titled: *Am I a Christian?* One thing Kristof often comes back to is, can I be a Christian even if I don't believe in the virgin birth? Can I be a Christian even if I don't think Jesus literally rose from the dead? Kristof has his doubts about the resurrection; and he is not the only one. Some of the disciples did from day one, interestingly.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and here is another little element of Matthew's honesty—of the Gospel writers' honesty. They do not gloss over the fact that there was this issue, and it says to me, again, along with the other details, that this is not a story that somebody made up...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That they invented...that they put their heads together and created some kind of giant conspiracy to say: Hey, you know what? We are in trouble here, because Jesus, our master, has been crucified, and that is kind of the end of this thing that we have going as disciples; so, let's concoct a story that says he rose from the dead, and then we can go out and proclaim that to the world and keep going. That is not the report the Gospels give us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, they are much more honest. It reminds you of what Peter wrote in his second letter: ^{1:16}We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty...

And that is also Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, when he says: Look, lawless men killed Jesus, but God raised him up, and we are witnesses. We are telling you what we saw.

DAVE BAST

They didn't ever gloss over this, or shy away from proclaiming the resurrection. This was the very heart of their message. They said it really happened...it really happened: We saw it; we saw him. You know, this is not some mythological, symbolic event that we are talking about...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It is not something that happened in our imagination. It really did happen!

SCOTT HOEZEE

The other thing that is really authentic, Dave, I think about all four Gospels is no...other than possibly the Roman guards...no human being and none of the disciples, and none of the women...nobody witnessed the moment when Jesus walked out of the tomb; and they don't pretend they did. They all come to the tomb and it is already empty. Now, again, if you are going to make something up, you would embellish it. You would say: Yes, I was there that morning. I couldn't sleep, and I saw him at 6:15 a.m.

DAVE BAST

All of a sudden, he started breathing again!

SCOTT HOEZEE

They didn't see it, and so they didn't pretend otherwise. That is honesty.

DAVE BAST

You just reminded me of one of my old professors in seminary. George Eldon Ladd used to say: If you could have witnessed it, what would you have seen? You wouldn't have seen a corpse suddenly stir and sit up. You might have seen a brilliant flash of light, like a nuclear explosion, and then nothing. So, his body simply disappeared.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He was translated into a new mode of existence.

DAVE BAST

Exactly. The resurrection was absolutely unique. It wasn't like a resuscitation, the way Jesus had raised people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; you know, on the previous program, Dave, when we were in Matthew 27, we took note of the line from Pilate, when the religious authorities were afraid the disciples were going to steal the body, Pilate says: Well, go make the tomb as secure as you can. You know, just do your best and seal it up. But of course, the power of God was in that tomb. There was nothing that was going to keep Jesus in there; and so, you know, the disciples didn't see the moment of the resurrection. Today, we have not encountered the risen Jesus the way they did, so that can contribute to our doubt. If even the people who saw Jesus doubted at the end of Matthew's Gospel, small wonder that some of us today who didn't get to physically lay eyes on him after the resurrection can struggle with this, too. You know, sometimes people think: Well, if I could see Jesus, I would believe. But, I am not sure that is true.

DAVE BAST

One thing that is not going to overcome your doubt is personal experience, because there is always another way to explain personal experience. I remember reading C. S. Lewis once talked about he had only ever met one person who said they had seen a ghost, and this was somebody who didn't believe in life after death before he saw the ghost, and he didn't believe it afterwards either; because you can always say: Well, that wasn't real. I was just seeing something; I was hallucinating; or it was in my imagination. So, even if you could...you know, if you say if God would only prove himself to me...if he would only show himself to me, then I would believe. You are really kind of kidding yourself, because that is not necessarily the case.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; and what you need to believe is actually what even the disciples who did physically see Jesus in his new, resurrection body...they needed the same thing we need, and that is the gift of faith; and so, when we say, you know, you ask me how I know he lives, he lives within my heart, we sing; to unbelievers that sounds like, yeah, right. I mean, people can fool themselves into believing anything, so that doesn't cut any ice with me; but we really mean that. He lives within my heart, because we have been granted the gift of faith, which lets us see Jesus in a deeper way...not physically, but we see him, and that is what we need...

DAVE BAST

See him with the eyes of faith...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

You know, there is another way we sometimes attempt to deal with our doubts, and we will talk about that in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this Easter themed program, where we are looking at Matthew's particular account of the resurrection from Matthew Chapter 28; and Dave, we noted earlier just before we get to the great commission that closes Matthew's Gospel, when the disciples first see Jesus on the mountain in Galilee, they worshipped him; and then, the honest admission: But some of them doubted; and so, Easter doubt...we are thinking about that; and we were saying, you know, some people doubt because they haven't physically seen Jesus, and we just said even if you did, it might not work. It reminds you of the end of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where the rich man says to Father Abraham: Send Lazarus back to life. If somebody is risen from the dead, my brothers will believe; and Abraham says: No, they wouldn't.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Even if somebody rose from the dead, if they don't believe, then they won't buy that either.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; which is very telling when you come to the end of the Gospel and the story of Jesus' resurrection; but another way that sometimes people will try to...you know, maybe you are dealing with a friend who has their doubts, and you present the evidence for Jesus' resurrection logically. You might try to argue...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Look at these facts. I know I have done that myself; and sometimes that encourages me in my faith, to go through these different pieces of evidence. In fact, basically you can lay it out with four things that are undoubtedly true, and the first is that Jesus' tomb was empty. So, what happened to his body? The second is that people saw him. His followers claim that they saw *him*...not a vision, but him. They actually touched him; they ate with him; it was real...it was physical; and then, there is the third argument or piece of evidence, which is the disciples' own transformation. I mean, I am always impressed with the fact that on the

night before Jesus was crucified, Peter denied he even knew him; and about seven weeks later, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter stands up and says to the very people who crucified him: You killed him, God raised him; we are witnesses of that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

What made that change...that u-turn...in Peter? And finally, what gave rise to the birth of the Christian Church, and the fact that it grew?

SCOTT HOEZEE

It's growth, yes. You know, in Reformed apologetics, right, where we talk about the faith to skeptics and doubters, we don't ever say we can prove the faith to you, but we can defend it...we can mount a defense; and this is sort of a defense of the faith: One of the things that witnesses to the truth of the resurrection is the fact that, yes, as you just said, the disciples were changed and the Church was founded, and many came to faith; and they stuck with it. I always remember years ago, Charles Colson, who was the Watergate co-conspirator who went to jail. He worked for Nixon...President Nixon...in the 1970s; and Colson always said: All of us who were co-conspirators in Watergate, we put our heads together and we came up with a cover story; and we said: We are not going to break this, right? We are going to stick to this story...we are going to stick to it... And he said: One person after the next, all a prosecutor had to say was: I am going to send you to jail for five years instead of three; and every one of them crumpled like a cheap suit. It wasn't worth going to jail for an extra two years to prop up this lie about the Watergate conspiracy. Well, Colson said, the disciples were threatened with death, and they all *did* die rather than recant; and Colson said: That has always convinced me that they believed this down to their toenails...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because who would die for a lie?

DAVE BAST

Yes; the other piece of evidence that moves me greatly is just the rise of the Church in the New Testament. Everybody has to recognize that is a historical fact. I recently read a book by Larry Hurtado, where he talks about the growth of the Christian Church in the early centuries, despite harassment, ridicule, public opposition, even persecution; and its growth was exponential, and Hurtado asks the question in this book: Why would anyone have become a Christian in those early centuries, when the price was so high? Not only thousands, but eventually millions did; and the only answer I can come up with is because it was true; because Jesus was alive, and his Spirit was unleashed in the world; and people came to know him and believe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And remember, too, that this went on. Jesus was around on earth for forty days, right? So, a month and a half—six weeks almost. That is a long time; and he wasn't totally around the way he had used to be around. His new body could do things like pass through walls and pop in and out. He was in a resurrection mode of existence, although it was a real body. I mean, other gospels report that he would eat a piece of fish just to prove it to them, right?

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But he was around for almost six weeks, and so many people saw him. One of the gospels says up to five hundred saw him at some point in that intervening period between Easter and the ascension. Interestingly, the Bible tells us almost nothing about those six weeks...I mean, almost nothing. I mean, you are kind of curious; but I do think that that was the Gospel's way of saying, look, everything you needed to know about Jesus was already written down in the first part of the Gospel. There was nothing new to add...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus had already taught everything we need to know for life and salvation; now we just have to believe that, indeed, by the power of God he was raised from the dead, and that undoes our greatest foe, death itself.

DAVE BAST

Yes; as you said, Scott. Very little is told us about those mysterious weeks after the resurrection and before the ascension; but Luke does add one little note at the outset of Acts, his second volume. He says that he appeared to them with many convincing proofs of his resurrection...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Which says to me, they needed some convincing; and that ultimately the proofs were successful; they did come to believe, but they were initially skeptical...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That brings us right back to Matthew 28: They worshipped him, but some doubted...skeptical...can we really believe this?

SCOTT HOEZEE

This was a fabulous, divine miracle of an event. It defied imagination. I always liked what the German scholar, Michael Welker, wrote once. He said: You know...again, this is part of the honesty of the Gospels...at no point in the Gospels do you read that after the resurrection that Jesus walked up to somebody and they just said: Oh, hi, Jesus. Good to see you again. How have you been? They are all shocked to see him. They are all startled to see him. They saw him die. They saw blood and water flow from his side. He was dead. They knew what dead was, and he was dead. So, they don't hide the fact that they almost cannot believe their eyes, because this doesn't happen normally; and that is one of the reasons some people are skeptics today. Dead people don't rise. It is like, we know. We Christians have never denied that. Of course, dead people don't rise, but Jesus did.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so will we all.

DAVE BAST

You mentioned skeptics, and again, often people will scoff at this and they say: Well, yes, Jesus alive...Jesus risen...that is like having an imaginary friend. So, dealing with doubt, yes, there are good evidences for the

fact of the resurrection; there are things that need to be explained, like his empty tomb and the rise of the Church, and the transformation of the disciples; but, the problem with argument, nobody is ever argued into the faith; nobody is ever...well, at least very rarely, convinced by some logical laying out of the facts, because you can always counter-argue. Generally speaking, the evidence for the resurrection is encouraging to people who already believe. If they don't believe, they are rarely convinced by it. So, that brings us again to the question: How can we deal with our doubt?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; the overcoming of doubt is faith, and that is itself a kind of miracle; and so, we will close the program wondering a little bit more about all of that.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we have been thinking about the resurrection...the grand event in the whole Christian story...the Easter celebrations we have in our churches are the grandest celebrations we have, and rightly so; and yet, there has been doubt right from the beginning, as we saw in Matthew 28; but we have also said, you know, that for many of them, when they saw him, they worshipped him; and I think that is what has to happen to all of us. You know, we are in Matthew's Gospel, but I am reminded of the end of John's Gospel, when Jesus says to Thomas: You believe because you have seen me—I am standing right in front of you. There are going to be a lot of people who will never see me this way, and yet, they will believe; and Jesus means us. That is sort of the miracle of faith.

DAVE BAST

The thing is, faith and doubt not only can coexist in the same mind, in the same heart, they usually do. If you think at all, you are liable to have doubts and questions that remain unanswered. It is probably pretty rare, at least certainly in my experience, of one hundred percent ironclad certainty. I mean, there are days when I have that, but there are other days when I am filled with questions, you know, what if it isn't true? So, it is possible...it is not at all something to be avoided.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

To engage with doubt, to wonder, to have your questions...but you can still worship. That is the thing...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

They worshipped him, but some doubted at the same time...one and the same time, they bend the knee...that is what the word worship means here; and they submit to Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what we often forget... So, here is the great commission with which Matthew concludes: ^{28:18}Then Jesus said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you; and surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

So we know that great commission really well, but what we forget is, Jesus was also giving that commission to the doubters. He didn't say: Okay, you who believe, come over here. I have something for you to do. You doubters, go away. No, all of them are there together. This is only one verse later, after we read that some doubted. So, the great commission came to doubters, too; and that should be encouraging to all of us who sometimes say: Is it true? Is it true?

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And often...you know, Dave, what often makes the difference between faith and doubt, or you know, faith winning out over doubt is the witness of others who encourage us.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; it is a corporate thing. So, if I am struggling with my doubts or my questions today, the answer is not to stay home, it is to show up...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Go to church, especially on Easter Sunday. I remember reading years ago in a book by Michael Green, a British writer, of a wonderful story that happened in the Soviet Union during the days of communism; and the story is, there was a gathering where a professor was delivering a lecture on atheism, and he went on and on and on and on...and a Russian Orthodox priest got up at the end and said: May I please respond to this; and the man said: Well, I will give you five minutes; and he said: Oh, I only need a few seconds; and he turned to the crowd and said: *Christos Anesti!* In Greek, Christ is risen; and the crowd roared back after listening to all this atheist stuff: *Alithos anesti!*—he has truly risen!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Risen indeed. It also reminds me, Dave, of the story Tom Long told of a pastor whose wife became very, very ill on Good Friday evening; she got worse all day Saturday, and by Saturday evening she was dead. Well, he couldn't preach on Easter, and somebody else stepped in for him, but he went to church on Easter, and he wrote later: I couldn't believe the resurrection *that* day. I couldn't sing the hymns *that* day, they stuck in my throat, but it was okay; the congregation was believing for me until I could come back to faith myself. That is that encouraging witness of the community; but you know, Dave, the fact that doubt persists, the fact that there are still skeptics, it makes some sense, because at the end of Matthew 28, we have two commissions. We have the great commission, but just before that, we have the soldiers from the tomb being bribed to go out and tell the counter-story that the disciples stole his body and this whole resurrection thing is a myth. Frederick Dale Bruner calls that the great counter-commission. So, you've got the great counter-commission: Ah, he didn't rise; and the great commission: He *did* rise. They run side by side, and all anybody on either side can do is witness to what they know and believe...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is all the disciples could do. Jesus didn't give them a bag of tricks in the great commission, to convince people. He said just go and tell them what you know, and that is what we have been doing ever since.

DAVE BAST

Yes; that is the thing about arguing over these issues. There are always counter arguments, and you know, it just becomes an endless round; but there is one way, I think, one sure and certain way to overcome your doubt. That is to simply follow Jesus. Start doing what he says. C. S. Lewis has a book called *Till We Have Faces*, and the central image of that book is you put a mask on, even if you don't feel it, even if you are not a hundred percent sure, and eventually you find that your face has conformed to that image; and that is really what following Jesus is all about, I think, the life of faith.

Some years ago, I was in a busy airport, and I was looking out, and I saw all these planes kind of taxiing around, and it looked like a chaotic scene; and then there is this little truck that goes flashing along a taxiway that said *follow me* on the back; and I thought that is exactly what faith is—that is exactly how we can come to worship Jesus this day and every day. Just start following him and we will find that faith will come.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is where all of us find ourselves in the great commission. All we can do is witness to what we know by the miracle of faith that has been granted to us by the Holy Spirit. We believe that Christ is risen; he is risen indeed. We follow Jesus, and then we invite others to do the same thing, as we continue to live out our Easter faith, thanks be to God.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we hope that you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

We have a website, it is groundworkonline.com. Connect with us there; share what you like about *Groundwork*, or what you would like to hear us talk about next on *Groundwork*.

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Printed on February 23, 2025