

I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body

DAVE BAST

I do not want to go to heaven when I die. I want to live on Earth. Okay, actually I do want to go to heaven, too; but that is not my ultimate hope for my personal future. My ultimate hope is centered in what will happen to my body when Jesus comes again. That is why when we Christians confess our faith, we say: I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. But, what does that really mean? Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast, and joining me today as guest host is Meg Jenista. Meg, welcome back. It is good to have you on *Groundwork*.

MEG JENISTA

Hello; it is good to be back.

DAVE BAST

So we are talking in this series of programs about the four last things. The great events that build up to the climax of the Bible, and we believe as Christians, the climax of world history: Christ's return in glory; the resurrection of the dead; the last judgment; and the new creation, the new heavens and the new Earth. Today, we are focusing on resurrection; but, what a word that our culture here in North America needs to hear.

MEG JENISTA

Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

I think of a bumper sticker I saw years ago that has stayed with me the whole time. It said: Eat right; stay fit; die anyway. Around us we see a desperate attempt to stay young...

MEG JENISTA

Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

And it all ends in failure.

MEG JENISTA

Botox and gym memberships and all kinds of crazy diets; not only to stay alive, but to stay young and vibrant.

DAVE BAST

Yes; what am I worth when my body fails me? Then what? When people look at me and no longer think I am attractive. I don't know if I should tell this story, but I was speaking recently to a lady's convention – a mission gathering, which was a great thing – and average age, perhaps, near 80. I asked them, "How many of you looked in the mirror this morning and put on makeup?" Every hand went up.

MEG JENISTA

Oh, yes; you bet!

DAVE BAST

No matter where we get in life, we are still concerned about our youth, our appearance: Am I attractive?

MEG JENISTA

Right; and we are also – as Christians, I think there is tension there; should we feel that way about our bodies or are our bodies something that we should deny and reject our flesh in order to be present with God on a more spiritual level? As Christians, we do not always know what to do with our bodies.

DAVE BAST

Yes; well, in the end, we bury them, don't we; because all of our efforts end in failure. It is especially poignant for us at *Groundwork* because we just lost a great friend and a great part of this program, Bob Heerspink. We did a tribute program and not everyone may have heard that, but I urge you to go online and listen to that program. Bob was taken from us too soon by a really terrible illness that we have all faced or confronted in the form of cancer. It is hard to see that happen when you want so much to live and for him to live and to continue to work together. There is a lot left to do. You pray hard and God says, "No." So, what a struggle; and what do we say? What do we think in response to this great fact that we try to deny. Our culture spends most of its time pretending it is not there. You know, the elephant in the room, as the saying goes. There is death out there.

MEG JENISTA

You know what is interesting is when I was in seminary I did an internship in the national parks; and so, most of my colleagues were other employees who really wanted nothing to do with our church services or Christianity. I remember coming home from a camping trip once and one of my greatest detractors made a beeline for me in the cafeteria, came straight up to me and said: So-and-so (who was one of our colleagues and an employee in the national park) died. You need to do something. And I thought to myself, this is it. He is right. He is right; if I do not have anything to say as a Christian in the face of death, then I do not have anything to say full-stop; which, of course, was terrifying because I was still in seminary and I was not exactly sure what to say.

DAVE BAST

Yes, what to do; what to say: Well, here I go.

MEG JENISTA

That is right. Trial by fire.

DAVE BAST

I am a representative of the Gospel. But how interesting, too, that this person who had no use for God, for the Lord, suddenly they are confronted with death and they have nothing to say, so they are reaching out to you like to a lifeline. "You had better say something."

It reminds me of the way I have sometimes described our culture with respect to death. It is ignorance punctuated by presumption. Most of the time you just ignore it or do not pay attention to it, but then when you are confronted with it, you presume, "Well, everybody must be in heaven. Somehow they are up there looking down with the Big Guy in the sky."

MEG JENISTA

Right; and their legacy lives on and their spirit is here, which is true, but they do not resonate quite as deeply, to my mind, as the Gospel does.

DAVE BAST

Which clears away to mists of ignorance for us and gives us something to hang on that is better than presumption or assuming that we are all right in the end; and it is the Gospel of the resurrection, which is the glory and crown of our faith. So, let's take a look at that after a short break.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*. I am Dave Bast, and my co-host today is Meg Jenista, and we are talking about the Christian hope of the resurrection in the face of the reality of death; a reality most of us spend our lives trying to avoid or not think about, but that we are inevitably confronted with; first in the death of friends and loved ones, and ultimately in our own end.

There is a curious thing going on in our culture, isn't there, about death? Even the way we do funerals – it always strikes me if I am reading the paper and someone wants no funeral whatsoever. To me, that is a bad sign about that person's spiritual state.

MEG JENISTA

The decisions that you make of what to do with a body when it has died and how you relate to that body – whether you want the casket open or closed – obviously there are a ton of reasons to decide in either case. We believe in a God who valued bodies enough to take one on for himself.

DAVE BAST

To grab one of his own.

MEG JENISTA

That is right; I will take one of those. I will have what they are having. It was not a promotion – let me tell you – for God to do that; but to embody human flesh gives it value from the start; and then, after his death he did not appear in some metaphysical, strange, amorphous way, but he appeared again in a body.

DAVE BAST

Yes; it was not a ghost story – that whole post-resurrection thing. It was not like those reality shows where they go ghost hunting with Geiger counters or whatever it is to see Jesus. No; he ate a piece of meat; he ate a piece of fish. He said, "Go ahead, touch me. It is really me."

To be me means I need my body, not just my spirit; not just my soul. That is why Christians historically have treated the bodies of their dead with reverence and with care; and they have planted them in the ground as if they are seeds that are going to sprout and be seen again. Wow. It is still not easy; I just think back to Bob's funeral, and to see him; it is not right; it is ugly, but that is still Bob and that will be Bob again someday; and so, we bury our dead; we do not just throw them away.

One of the really disturbing trends that I have read about in modern Western culture is the tendency to treat dead people as garbage to be flushed down somehow; you dissolve them or you burn them or you throw them out; but that is not the Christian way because we believe in the resurrection.

MEG JENISTA

Right; I think it is interesting when I go to visitations, how frequently I hear the comment: Doesn't he look good? Or doesn't she look good?

DAVE BAST

Not to me.

MEG JENISTA

No, no, they look dead, and that is the reality, and it is tragic and it is sad; but I also make it a point when I am at those visitations to reach out my hand and touch the hand of the loved one in that casket, because more and more, this is someone whose hand I have held in a hospital bed or have shaken hands with in church; this

is someone whom I have known and loved and I cannot know and love them in some amorphous, transcendental way. I have loved them as the embodied person. Those are the arms that hugged me. That is the mouth that smiled at me. I do not think it is possible for us to know how to love someone without loving them as they are, which is as embodied people.

DAVE BAST

Which is not to say that they are there. Grandpa is gone; yes, that is true; and in heaven with the Lord. We believe, as the Apostle says, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. So, yes; there is a separation, but he also goes on to say we do not want to be unclothed. We do not want to be a naked spirit. We want to be further clothed – this is all from 2 Corinthians 5.

MEG JENISTA

That reminds me of a quotation that I brought along from the Fourth Century Church father, Augustine. Augustine said the souls of the departed saints are not troubled by the death by which they are separated from their bodies. Rather, they remember the promise given them by the One who always keeps his word and who has given them the assurance of the preservation of the hairs on their head. For this reason, they look forward with patient yearning to the resurrection of the bodies in which they endured many hardships, but in which they will never again feel any pain. What I love about this quotation is the way Augustine manages to hold the tension between the hope that exists that our souls will be with God in heaven when we die, but that that is not yet the final story, and that God has made a promise to care for us, not just as souls, but as souls and bodies; and eventually we will be in those bodies again, but far more glorious than we could ever imagine.

DAVE BAST

Which is why we have been taught to confess in our Creed, not I believe in going to heaven in my soul when I die, but we believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.

Here it is in the classic passage from the end of 1 Corinthians Chapter 15:

⁵⁰I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (That is what we were talking about, right? Eat right; stay fit; die anyway; we are perishing.) ⁵¹But listen; I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – ⁵²in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed. ⁵³For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God; he gives us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ. Listen especially to what he says: *Then* will be brought to pass the saying: Death has been swallowed up in victory. Right now, it looks like death wins; and we do not claim in some Pollyannaish way, oh, death does not matter; it does not hurt; it is... No, death is a defeat. It is a defeat to the plan and purposes of God; a temporary check or setback.

MEG JENISTA

Death is still the enemy.

DAVE BAST

It is the enemy, yes; and it is bad, and it should not be, as we should not go through that grief, but we do because sin has a grip on our world; but then – *then* – death will be swallowed up in victory when the Lord returns and He raises the dead.

MEG JENISTA

One of the greatest honors I have as a pastor is to preside at gravesides. That service is usually short, but it is always beautiful and meaningful and there is eternity present there; and it is not to the detriment of the body in the casket. Usually when I am presiding at graveside, I have a hand on the casket if it has not been lowered

yet because Christians do not pretend that death does not exist. Sometimes we overshoot scripture; it says we are not supposed to grieve as those who have no hope, and we overshoot it and we do not grieve at all.

DAVE BAST

Or try not to or pretend not to.

MEG JENISTA

Right; but there is something powerful about having a hand on the casket; a hand on the reality of death and still saying with the Apostle Paul that I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor anything in all of creation will be able to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, my Lord. That moment is why I am a pastor.

DAVE BAST

Which is not to say we do not wonder about stuff. As Paul himself in 1 Corinthians 15 says: But some will say, “How can this be? How does this happen?” You mean to tell me that every body that has ever died is going to be raised again? Think about that on the atomic level. The stuff we know that he did not know, but he did know because he says it is like planting a seed. It does not work in a straightforward, naturalistic way. There is a deep mystery to how this can be. So what? The big question, right? Anytime we read the Bible or hear the Gospel? So what?

MEG JENISTA

So, I think we need to investigate the way we live our lives as embodied people in God’s good creation. Let’s come back to address that.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Hi; welcome back to *Groundwork*. I am Dave Bast, along with Meg Jenista.

MEG JENISTA

We have been talking about the resurrection of the dead and what a unique and glorious hope it is for Christian people. While it is a unique and glorious hope, I wonder, Dave, have you ever thought about how it is going to really work?

DAVE BAST

It is still a mystery, isn’t it? In fact, Paul says – he uses an analogy of it is like planting a seed, which is kind of what we are doing when we bury our dead. It is transformed. It is not a straightforward, physical progression. There is a beautiful quote from one of John Dunn’s sermons – you know, the great 17th Century preacher – where he says this: All dies and all dries and molders into dust, and that dust is blown into the river and that puddled water tumbled into the sea and that ebbs and flows in infinite revolutions.

It is like: Yes, I know. Bodies disappear. They turn to dust and maybe the dust is lost; so how can that body be raised? And then Dunn goes on: And still, still God knows in what part of the world every grain of every man’s dust lies, and he whispers; he hisses; he beckons – you know, it is not the last trump; that happens externally, but it is like he is saying: Psst, hey, Meg, come here. I am going to raise you. And he beckons for the bodies of his saints and in the twinkling of an eye that body that was scattered over all the elements is sat down at the right hand of God in glorious resurrection. Boy, that is what I am looking forward to. Amen?

MEG JENISTA

Amen!

DAVE BAST

Can I get a witness, Meg?

MEG JENISTA

You got a witness right here; that is amazing.

DAVE BAST

That is what we are looking for. That is what we are promised.

MEG JENISTA

It is so obvious to me that God is faithful to us and that his faithfulness extends beyond our life on this Earth, and that he is faithful to us even in our death. But I want to back up a second and acknowledge the fact that even though we have this hope of the glorious resurrection, we still walk through the valley of the shadow of death; and I wonder how God is faithful to us in those days and weeks and months when our bodies do not do what they used to be able to do for us; and how do we maintain Christian faithfulness?

DAVE BAST

That is tough. I suppose almost all of us struggle all of our lives with our bodies, and the fact that God values them and gave them to us – while they are messed up in various ways – again, because of sin; we know that – sometimes very directly our own sins; but in the end they fail; they weaken; they wear out; they wrinkle; they are not quite so attractive; none of us; But God is still faithful even then, so I guess we just put our futures in his hands and believe that just as it is hard for us to imagine, maybe, what we will be like when we are purged of all of sin and pride and selfishness; when our bodies are perfect and glorious like the risen body of Jesus; powerful beyond imagining.

MEG JENISTA

I notice this especially when I do visits with some of the elderly because in every other stage of life we have someone who has done that before us who can give us advice; like the young moms in my congregation have older moms they can ask; or if you start off in a new job, you have a mentor; but for people who are in that last chapter of life...

DAVE BAST

There is no mentor for aging and dying, is there?

MEG JENISTA

There is not, except for the faithfulness of God walking alongside you. There are books and literature written, but I often find that those people who are in that last chapter are such profound mentors to me in the way I live my life because there is continuity between this life and the next for them. Oftentimes, they are ready for it.

DAVE BAST

We can also listen to how the Apostle concludes the great chapter on the resurrection that we have been looking at, 1 Corinthians 15. He says: ⁵⁸Therefore, (because we have a future; because our bodies will be raised) be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

To me, that is just so profoundly encouraging – that last phrase: In the Lord your labor is not in vain. We have not wasted our lives. We get to the end and it is not all there is. Whatever regrets we may have had, we can know that everything we have ever done for good – the smallest thing – every word we have spoken; every prayer we have said; every simple act is not lost. It is not forgotten. It is not meaningless, but God takes all those things, somehow, and he is going to give those back to us, too.

MEG JENISTA

There is a popular song out right now and it talks about how we should live as though we are dying, and I wonder about that. It broadens the field beyond what we have scope to talk about together, I think, today; but what that speaks into the Christian ethics of physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia, and those last decisions that we have to make. How do we categorize a good death? What is a good death?

DAVE BAST

I think a not-good death would be bailing out or saying life is not worth living or I have no meaning or purpose anymore or I can leave on my terms if I decide that this is no good. As Christians, we submit in our dying to the Lord, as well as in our living, and as you say, those are big, big questions. If someone wants to write in, maybe we will do a program on one of those things.

When you referenced that song, I immediately thought of flipping it. We should die as if we are living.

MEG JENISTA

Hmmm; that works.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it does, doesn't it? Because we go right through to the end in the belief that we step into the Lord's hands; we are never out of them at any moment.

MEG JENISTA

So what you are saying is that our only comfort in life and in death...

DAVE BAST

Oh, I like that.

MEG JENISTA

Is that we belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to our faithful savior, Jesus Christ.

DAVE BAST

That is very good, Meg. Is that one of yours?

MEG JENISTA

I heard it somewhere once in the Heidelberg Catechism.

DAVE BAST

Right; those of us in the Reformed tradition treasure those words and they are true.

MEG JENISTA

Amen. Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation, and don't forget that it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So, tell us what you think about what you are hearing. Suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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