

Trusting the Resurrection Story

DAVE BAST

There is still a lot of debate today about the historical accuracy of the Bible; in particular, of the Gospels. Can we accept the stories they tell as true or do we have to accept only some and reject others? In particular, what about the story of Jesus' resurrection? Does it really matter whether that is true, historical fact or not? 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.

BOB HEERSPINK

Dave, on *Groundwork* we often invite conversation with the listeners, and we ask questions online, and we invite their responses. One of the questions we asked recently was: What about the historicity of the resurrection? Did Jesus really rise physically from the grave?

DAVE BAST

Yes, and one of the listeners suggested that, you know, there are a lot of parables in the Gospels; maybe the resurrection story is a parable, too. It is not a historical fact; it did not literally happen physically, but it is sort of getting at the idea that although we may die physically, we can come alive spiritually.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, when I read her quote, I was really struck by the fact that she struggled with whether she could even ask the question.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

BOB HEERSPINK

She wrote this; she said she was raised in a family where she was told she was never to question anything; and if you start to think for yourself, she said, it is Satan, and you just have to believe that the Bible is exact faith and truth. In fact, she said, being in the family that I am in, if my family knew that I had thought what I have shared here, they would disown me or drag me to the altar and pour olive oil on me and try to cast the demons out of me just because I wanted to explore a thought.

DAVE BAST

Well, that is not our tradition; and I hope she is exaggerating here; but seriously, we have to be willing to think, you know; and even ask hard questions...

BOB HEERSPINK

That is right.

DAVE BAST

That is not necessarily satanic or demonic. You know, we have a sister website related to our program called *Think Christian*; that is a command, too: Think, Christian. So, go ahead; ask the question: Is it true?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, the Bible invites us to ask the hard questions. The hard questions were being asked already on Easter Sunday...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. I mean, just read the story. There is nothing new about this. They were skeptical at first.

BOB HEERSPINK

The women come back and see the disciples and tell them what is going on, and they say this sounds like nonsense to us.

DAVE BAST

Yes; the women who were the first to see him, incidentally, and who were disallowed as witnesses in the ancient world because they were women; but Jesus appears to them first; and the disciples said that when they heard that, Luke says in his Gospel, it seemed like nonsense to them.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that is why you don't simply have the message that Jesus is risen; you have these accounts of Jesus' resurrection appearances, because the Bible wants to establish the fact of the resurrection.

DAVE BAST

So one of those appearances, and the one we want to look at today...we want to invite you to sort of live your way into this story of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Here is the scene. It is sometime Easter day – maybe midday or so; there are two disciples, one of them is called Cleopas, the other one is not named, although it is tempting to think that it may have been Cleopas' wife, Mary, who was a witness at the cross, according to the Gospels. They are walking back to their home in this village of Emmaus; it is about seven miles to the west of Jerusalem; and as they are going, you know, they are filled with confusion, with grief; they have seen Jesus die. Now there are stories starting to circulate. They have been in Jerusalem; they have heard from the women; and suddenly a third figure appears.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, and that stranger that comes up to them, of course, is Jesus; but it is very interesting to see how the scripture says they were prevented from identifying who he really was; and I believe that it was really God who put that veil over their eyes so that they could experience what Jesus had to teach them and what Jesus had to show them about...

DAVE BAST

So, you don't think was just a natural confusion or that there was something about Jesus' appearance that was different? You think something else?

BOB HEERSPINK

There was a difference in Jesus' appearance. I mean, he is the risen Christ. This is Christ glorified; but it does say that they were kept from recognizing him.

DAVE BAST

So the three of them are walking along the road, and Jesus asks a question of Cleopas and his companion: What are you discussing together, as you walk along?

BOB HEERSPINK

Now, that question blew them away.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; they come back: What, are you the only person who hasn't heard what happened?

BOB HEERSPINK

And their response to Jesus really summarizes how they understand Christ. Let me read what they say about Jesus: (Luke 24)^{19b} "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. What is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning, ²³but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

DAVE BAST

So let's unpack that just briefly. He was a prophet, that is what they believed about him. That is an Old Testament understanding of Jesus...

BOB HEERSPINK

That's right.

DAVE BAST

And a common one today, for that matter. "We had hoped that he was the one." In other words, they thought he was the Messiah, but obviously he couldn't have been the Messiah, because the Messiah wasn't going to be crucified.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; he went the way of all prophets. He was killed.

DAVE BAST

And meanwhile, now we have heard all kinds of crazy stories circulating from the women early on Easter day in Jerusalem, and we don't know what to think.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, it seems like what they are saying is the way people think about Jesus today. They see him as a prophet...

DAVE BAST

Many do.

BOB HEERSPINK

Wonderful teaching; ethical instructor; and wouldn't it be wonderful if he was something more; and he seems to be more; and yet, they are perplexed as to what that something more is.

DAVE BAST

Or like our listener who commented earlier, whose remarks we quoted. They know what they are supposed to believe about him, but they are not quite sure if they can or not. They know what other people say: Yes, he rose from the dead. He is the Lord.

BOB HEERSPINK

Is it really credible?

DAVE BAST

Yes; so... Interesting question: Where are you in this story? Are you with the two? Are you confused; are you sure? Read yourself into it.

BOB HEERSPINK

And when you do, then you can listen to what Jesus has to say because he says the Bible really has some answers to who he is and what all has happened.

DAVE BAST

Yes; he is going to lead Cleopas and his companion into the scriptures, and he will do the same for us in just a moment.

Segment 2

BOB HEERSPINK

This is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. With Dave Bast, I am Bob Heerspink. Dave, we have been talking about the journey of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. They encounter Jesus, and as they talk with Christ, they really define who they think he is. They call him a prophet, and it is the same kind of view of Jesus that you find in Matthew 16, when Jesus said: Who do people say I am? And Peter responds: Well, Jeremiah or one of the prophets; but it doesn't seem like defining Jesus as a prophet is enough. There has to be more.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; and they thought more, too. They said: We had hoped he was to be the one, but now he has been crucified, so maybe he is not the Messiah, except there are all these crazy stories flying around that people have seen him. So, they didn't know what to think.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, Jesus himself really calls them back to scripture to define his ministry.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and this is how he starts out. Let me just read on the next section of the story: (Luke 24) ²⁵And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." (So, it starts out with a rebuke, and what he says in effect is: Why don't you believe the Bible? Look; you've got the Bible...he's talking, of course, about the Old Testament; and he said: That should have been enough to make you understand.) ²⁶"Was it not necessary that the Messiah (the Christ) should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. So, there is his rebuke, in a sense: you should have known. Everything in the Old Testament points to me, and what it points to is this trajectory that the Messiah will first have to suffer and then he will be glorified.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, now that is the shocking thing – that is the new thing; the statement that the Christ must first suffer and then come into glory.

DAVE BAST

Yes, but he says it was already all there in the Old Testament: you should have known. So, new yes; new to them, but somehow they didn't get it; and the question is why? Why did no one understand it?

BOB HEERSPINK

The people of Jesus' day were so fixated on a Messiah that would throw out the Romans and establish a throne again in Jerusalem, that they missed the message that the way to glory was going to come through suffering.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so they got the glory part, but they wanted to ignore the hard, suffering part; but wouldn't it have been nice to be a fly on the wall...well, there wasn't a wall, it was outdoors... Okay, anyway, to overhear that conversation and know what scriptures he talked about...

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes...

DAVE BAST

What do you think?

BOB HEERSPINK

I think that Psalm 22 might actually have been one of the passages that Jesus talked about, because that Psalm was so fresh in Jesus' mind, just think of it; he spoke the words of Psalm 22 from the cross.

DAVE BAST

Yes: my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; and that passage talks about the righteous sufferer, and there is language in that psalm that really describes exactly what happened during Christ's crucifixion. There is the mockery: All who see me mock me... they hurl insults, shaking their heads. There is the absolute physical exhaustion of crucifixion that is described in that psalm; but Dave, very often when we read Psalm 22 we only read the first part of the psalm. We focus on the suffering...

DAVE BAST

Which reads like a description of Golgotha – of Good Friday.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; but if you go on in that psalm and look at the last verses, you discover that it moves beyond suffering to glory. The psalm ends this way:

^{23a} You who fear the Lord praise him... ²⁴For he has not despised or distained the suffering of the afflicted one. He has not hidden his face from him, but has listened to his cry for help.

DAVE BAST

So, Psalm 22 is a clear candidate in the Old Testament as a prophecy. Suffering is the way the Messiah will follow to glory. We could also mention Isaiah 53: ⁵He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities...with his stripes we are healed.

BOB HEERSPINK

That passage, too, has that same movement from suffering to glory. Again we tend to focus on the first part of the passage, but we miss where the passage ends up. Isaiah 53 in verse 11 says: After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many.

DAVE BAST

He will see the light of life...

BOB HEERSPINK

That's right.

DAVE BAST

Resurrection?

BOB HEERSPINK

Resurrection.

DAVE BAST

So there it is. In fact, later in Luke 24 on Easter night, just to jump ahead a little bit to where the story is going to go, the two disciples hurry back from Emmaus to Jerusalem. They rejoin the others in the upper room, and then Jesus appears to all of them; and he says essentially the same thing to them: ⁴⁴These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled; (and then this) ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead."

BOB HEERSPINK

There it is.

DAVE BAST

So, why do some believe and some don't? Well, in a sense, you need to have your mind opened.

BOB HEERSPINK

It is there, but you need something more, because the disciples here on the way to Emmaus yet don't believe. Later they will say: Our hearts burned within us...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Since we heard the scriptures being expounded...

DAVE BAST

They started thumping like jackhammers, right.

BOB HEERSPINK

But they don't believe yet. Something else has to happen for them to say: Christ is risen; he is risen indeed.

DAVE BAST

And that something is the next act of this little drama of the road to Emmaus. We will look at it in a moment.

BOB HEERSPINK

But first, we want to talk about how you could join us in this conversation on our website.

DAVE BAST

Listeners like you make *Groundwork* what it is. Our website, groundworkonline.com, is another way that we work to join you as you dig deeper into the scriptures.

BOB HEERSPINK

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 thing we would like to know is what place do you think social justice should have in the Church?

DAVE BAST

So share your thoughts on that upcoming question. Finding us is easy; just visit our website, groundworkonline.com.

Segment 3

BOB HEERSPINK

So, Dave, the disciples meet Jesus on the road. He unpacks scripture, and they have these burning hearts; but they don't yet have open eyes.

DAVE BAST

Yes; the Bible should have been enough, Jesus says, for them to believe about the Messiah, who would die and rise again; but they still need something more to really believe.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, that is the rest of the story. Luke writes: ^{24:28}So they drew near the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going further, ²⁹but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them; ³¹and their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he vanished from their sight.

DAVE BAST

That is just a beautiful story, and it is masterfully told; and frankly, to allude back to the comment at the beginning, it doesn't really sound like a parable to me; it doesn't read that way. For one thing, parables don't usually have named individuals in them, and here we are told the name Cleopas; and the question is, if you are really digging into the historicity of the Gospels, why...why is Cleopas named?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, Cleopas was probably a well-known figure in the Jerusalem church.

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

And when people said: Well, what about the historicity of the resurrection? Did it really happen? I am convinced that the disciples would say: Talk to Cleopas.

DAVE BAST

Yes, bingo! Go ask Cleopas.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; knock on his door.

DAVE BAST

Ask him what he saw and what he experienced.

BOB HEERSPINK

And he told this story probably over and over and over again.

DAVE BAST

I mean, just think this through for a moment. If the story of Jesus' resurrection is a parable of some kind or sort of a myth, that means it was invented by the disciples. So, their faith created the resurrection. In fact, if you read straight forwardly the New Testament accounts, it is the other way around.

BOB HEERSPINK

It is the other way around.

DAVE BAST

The resurrection is what created their faith...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

And specifically this moment when their eyes were opened – that wonderful phrase.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that is why I am thankful that at first they said: It must be nonsense; because it meant that their eyes were veiled, too; and now their eyes, too, are opened to the truth of the resurrection.

DAVE BAST

And something about sitting at the table is what made it happen; again, as you listen to that narrative, what just jumps out at you is that they ask him, please stay, you know, it's late. Now that might not have literally meant that it was sundown, because that was a customary thing for a host to do. Any time past noon they would urge their guest to stay: The day is drawing to a close. So, they are sitting down, probably for a late lunch of some kind...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

And it says: When he broke the bread, their eyes were opened. What do you think was going on there?

BOB HEERSPINK

I don't think any early Christian could hear those words without thinking of the breaking of the bread that we call communion; and I think the way that is described is to give us an understanding of how we meet the risen Christ today.

DAVE BAST

Yes; in fact, I mean, Luke just hammers it home, because what does he say? He took the bread and blessed it and broke it. I mean, what more do you want? That is almost an exact quote of Jesus' actions in the upper room.

BOB HEERSPINK

And Dave, that really helps us understand how this passage speaks to us today as we wrestle with the fact of the resurrection.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I mean, the scene at home in Emmaus, sitting around that table, is not just a nice dinner. It is clearly meant by Luke, and really by Jesus, who shapes the action there, to point us to a worship setting. The context is worship. Their eyes were opened and they met the risen Christ; they came to faith in Christ in the context of worship with him.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, if you think about the whole Emmaus story, you have the word and you have the sacraments.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; he opens their minds to the scriptures, and then their eyes are opened when he breaks the bread at the table.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, this underscores to me how important it is to be part of a worshipping community; and programs like this can nurture our faith...

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

But I hope everyone who is listening, if they can possibly gather with the body of Christ on Sunday and worship, that is where we really need to be, because that is where we meet Jesus from Sunday to Sunday.

DAVE BAST

Yes, you know, the old name for these actions of preaching and the sacraments is to call them the Means of Grace.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

And that means that they are the way that God comes to meet us and give us himself, because God's grace is really his self-giving love. So, if you are struggling, you know, with doubt and with perplexity, and you are reading the Bible and you are wondering: Well, can I believe it? Can I accept it? Do resurrections really happen? Don't just leave it there. You need to pray – you need to pray for *illumination* is the old word – that your minds are opened by the Spirit of this same Christ so that you understand what the Bible is saying; but then you need to go gather with his people; go to worship.

BOB HEERSPINK

Gather in worship, and as you worship with God's people, you will experience that Christ is present with his body – the Church is called the body of Christ.

DAVE BAST

Yes; where is he? Where two or three are gathered together, there am I; he promised. And he is still made known to us today, especially in the breaking of the bread.

BOB HEERSPINK

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.

DAVE BAST

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.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/trusting-the-resurrection-story>

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