

What Jesus Says about the Bible

DAVE BAST

Some years ago, a number of books and articles were written around what some called the battle for the Bible. Theologians and others were debating what kinds of words we should use to describe scripture. Is it inerrant, infallible, authoritative, trustworthy? The arguments can sometimes seem like hair-splitting, but the basic issue is an important one. Can we believe the Bible? Can we trust what it says? When we listen to it are we actually hearing the word of God? Well, here is an idea; let's go to the source and hear what the Bible says about itself. Better yet, let's start with what Jesus thinks. What does He have to say about the Bible? The answer might surprise you.

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 today, Scott, we are beginning a new series – just a brief one – two parts – on the nature of scripture and what the Bible says about itself, but basically revolving around the question of the trustworthiness of the Bible. Can we believe it? Is it true? Is it really God's word, and what does it say about itself? We are doing this in response to Collette, who asked us this very thing. She said: How do we prove that the Bible is true? So many people today are saying that it is just made up by humans and it is full of fairy tales. How do we respond to that? That is what we want to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and Collette, your question is a good one, and it is one that a lot of us do wonder about. Is it just a human book? Is it just a human artifact right up there with Shakespeare or the writings of Plato or the...

DAVE BAST

Grimm's Fairy Tales, maybe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; or is it a distinctive book, and how do we know? So, in this program and the next, we want to look at that. This program, we want to see what Jesus said about the Bible and the relationship between the Bible and Jesus himself; and then in the second program, we will hear from the Apostles Paul and Peter, in particular, and what they had to say about the trustworthiness and reliability of scripture; so for this one, we want to focus on Jesus, and a really good place to begin would be the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew Chapter 5.

DAVE BAST

You know, Christians – we call ourselves followers of Jesus – and maybe the best and simplest way to approach the Bible is to try to follow him in what he thought about it and what he did about it; and we learn that most clearly from this passage toward the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5: ¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets," Jesus said. "I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill; ¹⁸for truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but

whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So there is a classic statement on Jesus’ part that he is of a peace – Jesus is in continuity with everything God has been saying before. So, when he refers to law and prophets, that is basically shorthand for the whole what we call the Old Testament or the Hebrew Scriptures as some might refer to it. So, you know, Genesis through Malachi, that first part of the Bible; and Jesus is here saying... Okay, there is a sense in which the Son of God incarnate on earth is a new thing; but it is in continuity with all that has come before, and Jesus is not here to say everything that came before is not important. he is here to say everything that has come before is coming together in me, and it is going to continue after me, and the rest of you also had better pay very close attention to everything that God says. So this tells us a lot about what Jesus thought about the Bible – again referring to the Old Testament.

I think, you know, there are several things in this first segment we can just quickly go through four things I think this tells us about Jesus. First off, that he loved the Bible.

DAVE BAST

Yes; “Do not think that I have come to abolish it,” he said. I mean, the most fundamental mistake you can make is to try to set Jesus over against the Bible – the Book. Like you disparage the one – no, that is just old words – that is old stories. We want Jesus. We want this living, breathing human being; and Jesus said: No, no. We are inseparable because you will find me in the book and I find God’s word in the book; and you know, his whole life long that expresses how he felt about it: Just this attitude of love. In fact, if you look at what the Gospels say about Jesus, you will find that his life was saturated in scripture; so, the only story we have from his childhood, Scott, and I know you remember this from Luke Chapter 2*. When he is 12 years old, his parents take him to Jerusalem, and on the way home they discover he is not with them, and panic ensues, and they rush back to the city; and for three days he has been sitting in the Temple talking Bible with the theologians – with the religious leaders – and he says to them, “Did not you know I would be about my Father’s business?”

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, Jesus did not have any written copy of the Bible, right? They did not have books. I mean, scrolls were rare and kept in temples. So Jesus, indeed, as you said, was saturated in scripture – he marinated in scripture – and everything he knew he knew by memory because he loved it; and secondly, we could say, he lived it. We see that especially in the temptation story. So, if you go to Matthew or early Luke, with the temptations of Jesus for 40 days in the desert, and then the devil comes and gives him three different temptations, right? And every single time, Jesus answers the devil by saying – in English it is always: It is written – but in Greek, it is just one word: *Gegraptai*; so every time the devil would tempt him, Jesus would say: Written...

DAVE BAST

Written.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then he would quote a text to counteract the devil and to counteract the temptation of the devil. So Jesus had scripture on the tip of his tongue. He had scripture that he lived by every single day; so he loved scripture; he lived by scripture...

DAVE BAST

And the third thing, yes...

SCOTT HOEZEE

He obeyed.

DAVE BAST

Yes, he obeyed it, right; he kept it – he kept the commandments. You know, Jesus was accused of a number of things during the course of his life. He was accused of being a rabble-rouser, being kind of an incendiary, being anti-Roman; that did not really have any justice to it. He was accused more truthfully of being the companion of tax collectors and sinners; you know, he kept disreputable company; but no one ever accused him of breaking the commandments. Maybe he broke some of their traditions or some of their interpretations. He shocked people at times by what he said and did, but he once said to his opponents, “Which of you convicts me of sin?” And not one of them could because he was completely and entirely obedient to the will of God as revealed in the scriptures.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He was all of that. So, he loved it; he lived it; he obeyed it, because he also had a sense for something that we are going to want to talk more about in the next segment. He had this very firm sense that he was himself the fulfillment of scripture. So the reason he loved it and lived it and obeyed it so well and so perfectly is because he had a very firm sense that it was all coming together in him; which is a remarkable thing to believe; you had better be the Son of God if you are going to believe that; but Jesus did believe that somehow he was the living fulfillment of everything that had come before in what we would again call the Old Testament, and what does that mean? We will want to talk about that next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork, where today we are digging into what Jesus said about the Bible, what he believed about the Bible, how he acted toward it and with it and about it. We are trying to take our cue from him in what we think and do with the Bible as well; and we have just been talking about this wonderful passage from Matthew, where Jesus says: I have not come to abolish scripture, I have come to fulfill it. Not one single iota – he literally says the smallest of the Greek letters in the old version – the King James, it is a jot or a tittle...

SCOTT HOEZEE

A jot and a tittle...

DAVE BAST

Even a stroke, a part of a letter – none of that will pass away until it has all been fulfilled; and the idea that we really want to focus on now is the idea that he himself was that fulfillment; that he dotted every I and he crossed every T with his life. He fulfilled it in the sense of obeying it – of keeping the Law perfectly. That is one of the most profound ideas that Christians have, that Jesus is the one who obeys the Law on our behalf when we could not do it; but he also fulfilled it in the sense that he filled it up full. He believed that it was all really about him in one way or another, it was pointing to his life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And every once in a while, he said this directly – he did not say it all the time – but particularly he would be forced to say it when he was being criticized. So, in the Gospel of John the Pharisees and scribes and others think that he has broken the law of the Sabbath, and so they accuse him...

DAVE BAST

Right; by healing somebody, which he often did.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, by doing a wonderful ministry. And so, they object and they say: Boy, if you knew the law, you know, you would know not to do that. And then Jesus says this, in John 5:39 and 45 through 46, Jesus says: ³⁹“You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. ⁴⁵Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father – your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.” He says, I am

the point, right? I am the point. Again, a breathtaking claim, but one on which we Christians have really set our hope that that is the truth; that everything from creation on – from “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” on through, it all somehow comes together in Christ – Jesus is the point of it all. He is the creator and he is now the Redeemer and he is the one who will bring us into the kingdom and into the new creation. It is all about him.

DAVE BAST

Astonishing, really; and even more astonishing is that countless millions have sort of listened to that and said: Uh huh, yes, that makes sense. We believe that. They are called Christians. Christians are people who believe that the Bible is about Jesus; that he is the living word to which the written word points, and in whom the written word is fulfilled; and not just this verse or that verse. We do not just try to cherry-pick a few prophetic texts out of the Old Testament and say: See? Those point to Jesus. Scott, as you well know, it is a story. It is not a series of propositions. It is not a theology textbook. It is a story. It is a story of the purposes of God as they unfold – a missionary God who is on a mission, who will send his Son into the world on that same mission – and all the story is recapitulated in the life of this one man.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It was a new perspective for people in Jesus’ day; and again, every once in a while you would see it overtly, and the one that I think of the most – so, you talk about a recapitulation – it is also in that sense a recasting of the entire story, and the passage I always think of is in Luke 24, the road to Emmaus; so these two people who believe Jesus is dead and has not risen again – they are very sad, and then Jesus does this Bible study with them on the road to Emmaus, and what Luke tells us is that Jesus retells the whole story. What an amazing walk that must have been that afternoon! Jesus retells the whole story of the Old Testament and makes it all point to him – it all points to him; and this is a new way to read the Old Testament. It has retrospectively changed. You might have read the whole thing a hundred times, but once you meet Jesus, you have to go back and read it again through the Jesus lens, as my colleague, Michael Williams says, and it turns out, yes, the call of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph and King David and the psalms and...

DAVE BAST

They all point to him, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They all go to Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Well, here is that verse that you alluded to. This is Jesus on the road to Emmaus with these two on the afternoon of Easter. So it is the risen Christ now walking with them. He appears to them. He opens their eyes. They recognize him. They rush back to the upper room, and then Jesus suddenly is there in the upper room. So, here they are, more than just the eleven, it is a larger group of disciples; and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself. Wouldn’t you have loved to be part of that Bible study; led by the risen Lord himself; going from Genesis to Malachi, all the scriptures beginning with Moses. So, beginning with those early books, you think of the Exodus and the ceremonies; Jesus is the Passover lamb; Jesus is the scapegoat on whose head the sins of the people are laid; Jesus is the bronze serpent lifted in the wilderness, and when you look at him you will live – all of that. The first Christians learned from Jesus himself to read the Old Testament – the technical word is *Christologically* – focused on Christ – and to see in him the fulfillment of everything.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, sometimes it is a shame, in some churches and in some church traditions, the Old Testament is not preached on much. People gravitate toward the Gospels or maybe to the letters of Paul. There are people in churches – I have heard them say it to me when I have been a guest pastor and I have preached an Old Testament sermon – some people will say: We have not heard the Old Testament in a long time. What a shame, because Jesus at least would say, well of course you have to look at all of that; it is all about me, so if

you are a follower of me, if you are a disciple, then you do as Jesus does, and the first thing Jesus did... the moment he was risen from the dead, what was the first thing he did? Bible study, and Bible study meaning the Hebrew scriptures in this case because the New Testament did not exist yet, right? So, he is referring to Malachi; he is referring to Proverbs; he is referring to Leviticus. It is all about him, and we miss a lot in our Christian lives if we ourselves also are not steeped in the Old Testament.

DAVE BAST

Well, you can see it if you read the New Testament carefully. You know, if you are one of those people who tends to ignore the Old Testament and just read the New Testament, well read more closely and more carefully and you will find that often what you are reading in the New Testament is the Old Testament being quoted. So, in Acts 2 for example, the story of Pentecost and Peter's sermon, most of what Peter said was simply quoting from the prophecy of Joel; he quotes from Psalm 16; he quotes from Psalm 110. I have a friend who was talking recently about the book of Revelation, and I forget the exact numbers, but he said there is something like 470 verses in the book of Revelation – this strange, mysterious book at the end of the New Testament – but over 600 Old Testament quotes or allusions. So, even that, it is all filled with scripture and coming out of scripture; but I think there is a cautionary note here, too. It is possible, Jesus seems to be saying to his critics, that you could be a thorough-going Bible student, searching them carefully and reading them backwards and forwards and still miss the point. So he says to these people: You know, you study the scriptures because you think that in them you find eternal life. It is they that testify of me. Do not read the Bible and miss Jesus because he is the main point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that has a lot of implications that we want to think about just a little bit more in our final segment, and we will take that up next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

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

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. So, how is this relevant for us? We have been talking about what Jesus thought about the Bible, what he said and taught about the Bible; how he loved it; how he obeyed it himself; how he believed that he was its fulfillment and its true and deepest meaning. What does this suggest to us? We want to be followers of Jesus, right?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And if that is going to be our goal, then our goal has to be to want to be as steeped in, or as we said in the first segment of this show, Dave, to be as marinated in the scriptures as Jesus himself was; and not just cherry-picking it or treating scripture like a buffet where you can take just a little bit of this and skip... No, the Bible is not meant to be a buffet where we just sort of go to favorite passages and ignore the rest. We want to know the whole thing because, as we just said, the whole thing does lead to Jesus; and so, sometimes evangelical Christians in particular – we get accused of a certain bibliolatry – we just put way too much importance on a book. Hey, we want a living relationship with Jesus...

DAVE BAST

Worship the book, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Don't worship the book; worship Jesus. I think Jesus himself would say: There is kind of no difference because the book is how you find out about me. The book is all about me. It is not an either/or. It is a both/and. Of course, the living Jesus is more important than a book; but if the book is the living word of God that brings us to Jesus, well then, that is why we want to steep ourselves in it. That is why we do bible

studies. That is why we try to preach on the whole of scripture if we are pastors, because it all will feed our faith in Christ.

DAVE BAST

We would be the last people to suggest that this is easy to just take everything in the Bible at face value and believe it all and obey it all. I mean, this is a very complex question, and it takes a lifetime of study. The reason we do this radio program is because we want to dig deep into scripture. There are certain things in the Old Testament that Jesus' coming has fulfilled, and in a sense, done away with; many of the ceremonial laws and rules; certainly the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament is no longer operating for Christians because Jesus himself is the true sacrifice, of which all those old animal offerings were foreshadowing. So, yes, it takes hard study and a great deal of thought and care and attention. There are hard passages; but the main thing is, we want to take the whole thing as God's word. We do not want to cut and paste or pick and choose. It is not like a cafeteria where you line up and you pick a couple of dishes that look nice and appetizing and you just ignore the rest. We take the whole of the scripture as the word of God because Jesus did.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, and he said that in the passage we read from Matthew 5 in the first segment. He also said something which sometimes can sound a little scary. So, Jesus says: Look, I did not come to get rid of the Bible. I did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I came to fulfill them; and he says to his followers: I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Well, that can sound very daunting because it would mean who could be better than those people? These morally pure people who spent all of their time, you know, kind of producing spirituality and being perfectly obedient. We have to exceed their righteousness? That sounds like bad news until you realize that because all of scripture and the whole old sacrificial system and all of it leads to Jesus, Jesus himself is our righteousness, right? How could we exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? We cannot, but Jesus could because he fulfilled perfectly within himself; and once we gain union with Christ through our baptism, then Jesus is all our righteousness. His righteousness becomes our righteousness, and that, therefore, is good Gospel news. So this is not daunting, but it still gets to the point of this program, Dave. The whole of scripture is important.

DAVE BAST

Right; and then it is important for us to begin to practice as well. This is the whole Gospel in a sense, as you said; and it is good news. The Good News is Jesus has done for us what we could not do for ourselves; but then the Gospel also liberates us – sets us free – and we know promises us the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable us to begin to internalize all these commands of scripture, all of which can be boiled down into one, according to Jesus – a kind of double command: Just love God and love your neighbor. Part of the problem with the scribes and Pharisees is that for all of their righteousness, it was largely external. God wants us to internalize this and begin to actually be what we profess and to begin to live from the inside out as the love that he pours into us through faith in Christ flows outward to others. That is how you begin to actually experience and practice the kind of righteousness that he is getting at.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the only way it can be done. You know, there is a sense in which the story of the Old Testament can be a little depressing. Abraham, Moses, David, the people of Israel, they fail again and again and again; but that is why Jeremiah says at one point God is going to give us a new heart someday. The Holy Spirit itself is going to be internalized in us; and when that happens, then the living word of God is in us; and as you just said, Dave, it flows out of us. It is not something on the outside we need to try to bring in. It is something that is already in there, because God has given us new hearts. He has given us of his Spirit.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and you know what? If I could just loop back to the way we began this program, it was with Collette's question: How do we prove that the Bible is true? How do we prove it is the word of God? There are all these

books out there, you know, of other religions; and the best answer is: As we begin to live the life of Jesus, as that love flows out of us, it will prove itself. It will prove itself in our lives. Not through our arguments, not through our controversies, but through the righteousness that comes from Christ and is shared with the world through us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we would like to know how we can help you to continue digging deeper into the scriptures. So visit our website, groundworkonline.com, and suggest topics and passages you would like us to dig into next on Groundwork.

***Correction:** The audio of this program misstates the biblical reference for this story as Luke Chapter 3, when in fact the story of the boy Jesus at the Temple is found at the end of Luke Chapter 2.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/what-jesus-says-about-the-bible>

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