
Witness to the Risen Jesus Christ

SCOTT HOEZEE

Three of the four Gospels in the New Testament conclude on or very near the day of the resurrection on what we now call Easter; and why not? Talk about your climaxes. Talk about the proverbial big finish. Once Jesus walked alive out of the grave, what more was there to say? Well, the Apostle John thought there was more to say, and so he is about the only Gospel writer who gives us stories that take place one week, and then possibly several weeks after Easter. Today on *Groundwork*, as we finish our series on the last things Jesus ever taught, we will go to the end of John 21, and Jesus' curious conversation with Peter. 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is the end of our seven-part series, in which we talked about the last teachings of Jesus. The first six programs in this series all were the things that Jesus said and did between Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday. Now, for this final program, for Easter, as we celebrate our Lord's resurrection, we are going to jump to the other side of Easter...

DAVE BAST

Christ is risen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is risen indeed; and we are going to jump to John 21, and as we said in the opener, John is the only one who gives us a whole lot of stories, actually...several stories...after Easter. Mark ends right in the middle of Easter; Luke pretty much ends with the road to Emmaus, but that was still Easter evening...

DAVE BAST

Well, there is a little bit in the upper room, which is...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, then a little ascension, but it [the upper room] is still the same night.

DAVE BAST

He has a piece of fish to prove that he is real, and then he sort of sets up Acts, Luke's second volume, with a reference to the coming of the Spirit. In Matthew, of course, we do have the story of the great commission...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Where Jesus appears to a crowd. We are not sure exactly when that was. We kind of presume it was before his ascension, maybe just before, but we do not know; but as you say, John is the Gospel that has a couple of stories that take place post-Easter, and pre-ascension.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so, in John 20 Jesus appears to all of the disciples but Thomas on the day of the resurrection. Thomas was not there...does not believe it...one week later, they are all together again...Thomas with them...Jesus appears...stopped doubting...believe. Then we go to John 21, which is an interesting chapter. We do not know how long after Easter this is, but we are assuming it is three or four weeks or sometime in those forty days; and it is an interesting chapter because it begins so ordinarily. So, here is the beginning of John 21. We are going to be concentrating on the very end, but we want to see what the setup was, and so John 21:

Afterward, Jesus appeared again to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ²Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³“I am going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We will go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is a very interesting story, isn't it? You know, one way there is an overlap with the synoptic Gospels...with the first three Gospels...because Jesus there does tell, or give a message through the women to the disciples: I want you to go to Galilee...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And I will meet you there; but John actually shows them in Galilee, although there are only seven of them there. There are not all eleven...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; we only hear five names...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We do not know how long after Easter it is. We do not know two of the people who are there, but the weird thing is, they look bored. They look like they are still at loose ends. The resurrection has happened. The world has changed, and they do not know what to do, so they are twiddling their thumbs...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They go back to the one thing they know, fishing; and of course, they are not very good fishermen. They always seem to have problems. They catch nothing; and then, of course, we know the story. Jesus appears on the beach; they do not know it is him. He tells them to let down their net on the other side...they catch 153 fish...and then they have breakfast together...

DAVE BAST

Which is interesting in itself, because John is writing this maybe sixty years later...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And he still remembers the exact number.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Somebody counted them.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, who counts fish when Jesus is sitting there; but somebody...

DAVE BAST

They did; I don't know, maybe they sold them. Maybe it was one last haul...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Who knows?

DAVE BAST

But, yes...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is an ordinary scene...and you know...

DAVE BAST

And it has overtones from earlier in the Gospel...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

There is a miracle like this in Luke 5, where Jesus helps them catch a lot of fish; so, yes; very interesting.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I find it comforting, actually, just that setup; and again, we are heading toward the end of this chapter, but you know, it is an ordinary setting. I think it reminds us that, even today, we also live in a world where the resurrection happened. Sometimes we get bored, too, or we feel at loose ends, but that maybe is just when you are going to meet Jesus. It is just breakfast; it is just a walk on the beach; and Jesus is there; even as the old hymn puts it, we encounter Jesus in life's common looks and tones. That is where they find him. They did not expect to find Jesus on the beach with a campfire burning.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a very ordinary setting...

DAVE BAST

Cooking a piece of fish, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and some biscuits...

DAVE BAST

Where did he get that?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, well, who knows? Maybe he went fishing earlier.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But it is an ordinary scene; and we also encounter Jesus in the ordinary even yet today. I find that...the ordinariness of this scene is comforting to me because most of our days are pretty ordinary, too.

DAVE BAST

Which is great; and it is a lovely scene; but what we really want to look at is a bit of teaching that Jesus does, specifically with Peter, and that is going to come later in John 21; but first, we need to back up and just remind ourselves of what happened during the passion of Jesus, and Peter's role in that. So, we go back to Chapter 18—John 18—and pick up the reading at verse 12:

So the detachment of soldiers with its commander, and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus... ¹⁵Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus, because this disciple was known to the high priest (this is John himself, of course), he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, ¹⁶but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple who was known to the high priest came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there, and brought Peter in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹⁷"You are not one of this man's disciples, too, are you?" she asked Peter. He replied, "I am not." It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself. ²⁵So they asked him, "You are not one of his disciples, too, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not!" ²⁶One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with Jesus in the garden?" ²⁷Again Peter denied it; and at that moment, a rooster began to crow.

DAVE BAST

There it is. So, Peter denies Jesus three times, just as he had been warned; and the rooster crows; and John actually ends there, but in Matthew we have this haunting detail, really, that Peter goes out and weeps bitterly; and actually, in Bach's St. John Passion, he sets this scene to music, and at this point he imports a little bit of Matthew, and has Peter weeping in response. So, Peter knows what he has done. He has denied...he failed...he was so confident. I think one of the reasons he was confident is that he thought he had passed the test in the garden when he pulled out his sword and he was ready to die; but he could not resist the embarrassment of admitting before this servant girl: Yes, I was one of them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus has been arrested. Things have gotten very, very serious. It is possible that up until the garden, the disciples still were thinking: No, no, no. Jesus is the military strong one. Jesus is going to go take out King Herod and Pontius Pilate; and then ultimately would go to Rome and get rid of the Caesar. Until the moment of his arrest, Peter might still have been thinking: Jesus is our guy. But now he is arrested, and they are led to this rather, you know, very official looking place, and he is scared. He is scared. He did not think this would happen to Jesus. Now it did; and could it happen to me, [Peter] too? And so: Aren't you one of them? No. Come on, you were with him. No. I saw you in the garden. NO! And another Gospel says he even cursed, he even...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He even called down an oath to try to beef up his lie. He denied Jesus three times.

DAVE BAST

Obviously Peter has seen Jesus now risen from the dead. He knows much more of the story—the victory that Jesus won on the cross. It was vindicated by the empty tomb; but there is still this matter of the denial maybe hanging between them a little bit. Maybe it is a little awkward. You know, if you have hurt another person you have a tendency to avoid them, don't you?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

You really do not want to meet their eye. It is uncomfortable to talk to them; and it is interesting that Peter does not talk to Jesus in John...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; not up until the end.

DAVE BAST

Until this scene; so, we will look at how that relationship is restored by Jesus in just a moment.
Segment 2

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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you were just saying, Dave, that in John's Gospel, this is the third appearance of Jesus to the disciples now, but we do not have recorded any conversations with Peter; and Peter denied him three times...again, that number is significant for what we will read in just a sec...has he been kind of looking at his feet when Jesus is around? Does he not dare meet Jesus' eyes? Does he kind of hide behind the curtains in that room when he appeared to Thomas? He denied him, and he is so embarrassed about it. We do not know if they have talked, and so, Jesus is going to take the initiative.

DAVE BAST

And here is this beautiful story of how he does that. So again, we are reading from John 21, now verse 15: When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "You know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶Again Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷The third time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

SCOTT HOEZEE

^{17b}Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" And he said, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you." And Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹Jesus said this to

indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” So, there is the scene. This is often called the reinstatement of Peter; and again, three denials in John 18, three affirmations of love in John 21.

DAVE BAST

That is certainly no accident.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is closure...that is closing the loop here; and Jesus is really hitting the reset button, because in the end he says to Peter here the first thing he ever said to Peter, “Follow me.” We are starting over again, Peter.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Let’s put the past behind us. You are forgiven. I love you, you love me. Follow me.

DAVE BAST

You know, there is one other detail here that kind of points back to the night when Peter betrayed him. There is the threefold questioning matching the threefold denial, but Jesus starts out by saying, “Peter, do you love me more than these?” which is a little bit ambiguous. More than what? More than the fishing boat; or more than these other disciples who are here; which is a reminder that Peter was the boastful one on that night, wasn’t he? He said: All of those guys may run away, but I will never leave you—I will never desert you. So, pride kind of went before the fall there for Peter; and Jesus might be just a little bit of a reminder to him there to be careful, Peter; be careful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DAVE BAST

But the question is, do you love me?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Curious thing, in the Greek...the Greek language here...now we believe they were speaking Aramaic at the time, but the New Testament is written in Greek; and in the Greek of this, there is a little alteration between the verb *to love*. So, Jesus says, “Simon, son of John, do you *agape* me? He uses the word *agape*; and Peter replies: Well, Lord, I *philos* you. He uses the word *phileo*, which is also a word for love, but different. The second time Jesus says: Do you *agape* me? Peter says: Sure, I *philos* you; and the third time Jesus says: All right; do you *philos* me? And then we are told Peter was sad because Jesus said: Do you *philos* me, and he said: Yes, I *philos* you. And so, the question is, is this just two synonyms that John is just using for the sake of variety, or does Peter feel a little gun shy here? Is Jesus calling him to a higher form of *agape*, and after his failure, Peter does not quite dare use that high-end verb for love, so he uses a lesser word, and then Jesus just kind of comes down to his level? A lot of scholars say we used to think there was a lot to this. Modern-day word studies suggest that it isn’t. I do not know. I find it hard to believe that that direct interchange and switching out those words do not mean anything; but it does not really matter. The point is, wherever Peter is at, it is enough for Jesus to tell him: Feed my lambs, tend my sheep; I love you and you love me, so let’s get going; follow me.

DAVE BAST

You know, this is such a wonderful test, really, because the only test that is put to Peter for his reinstatement is the test of love...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Do you love Jesus or not? And I think in the end a lot of other things will not matter as long as we can say yes to that. You know, Paul puts it negatively at the very end of I Corinthians when he says: If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus, let him be accursed—let him be anathema; but you could flip that around, as Jesus does here, and say: If anyone *does* love the Lord Jesus, an awful lot can be forgiven of them. You may have denied Christ, or you thought you did, or you did something that constituted a rejection of him, really, a denial of him; and in the end he is only going to ask you one thing, and that is: Do you love me?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes...

DAVE BAST

It is a beautiful thing, really, to think about.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Peter does love Jesus; he is forgiven—three times forgiven for his threefold denial; and now the news is, there is work to do—because you love me, there is work to do. There are sheep that need food; there are lambs that need tending and nourishing; you have a job to do: Preach the Gospel, and there is so much to tell. So, if we jump ahead to the very last line in the last verse of John 21, the last verse of John's Gospel, John writes this in verse 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.

Now, as the preacher Fred Craddock said in a sermon on that, that is ridiculous. You know, there are five thousand miles of running shelf space in the Library of Congress. I bet you if you wrote down everything Jesus said, we could squeeze the books in there. This is one of Jesus' favorite techniques—or John here also—of hyperbole—exaggeration.

DAVE BAST

Right; but the point is, Jesus really is bigger than the whole world...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, he is.

DAVE BAST

And we know enough. John has been very careful, and here he is reiterating that he has selected what he has told us about Jesus. He has edited ruthlessly. He has cut out a lot of great stuff that we would love to know—we would love to be able to read—but he has put just enough in to make us see who Jesus is, and why it is crucially important...if we want to find life, we are going to find it in Jesus...we are going to find it through Jesus...and that is the key thing...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

So focus in on what John has said.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that means there is a lot to do, Peter; there is a lot to tell. The Gospel is bigger than the world; the world cannot contain the Gospel; it cannot contain Jesus; the Gospel *names* the real world for us; and people are always living in false worlds. The Gospel calls us back to the true world of God; so that is Peter's

assignment: Follow me; get busy telling that story, which is bigger than the whole world; and you would think, having been reinstated by Jesus, and now commissioned by... Peter gets his own great commission right here... You would think nothing could distract him from that from going forward now, right? Well, there is one little other detail we just skipped over in John 21 that we want to look at in conclusion because it will give us pause to wonder: hmmm, maybe you can actually get distracted from the great commission, and we will wonder about that next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and today we are looking at the last of Jesus' final teachings, in a sense, from the Gospel of John; the encounter of Jesus and Peter after the resurrection, where Jesus reinstates Peter by asking about his love, and commissions him to "feed my sheep,"—to the ministry of the Word—to the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world; and then there is, as you said, Scott, a very strange little incident that happens next. So, let me pick it up and read this:

²⁰Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (Jesus has just said to Peter, "Follow me," so he turns around and, oh wait, there is John; he is following, too.) This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?" ²¹When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

SCOTT HOEZEE

²²Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." ²³ Now, because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. Jesus did not say he would not die, he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

So, this is interesting. Peter has just received, like we said, his own private great commission. Thanks be to God, he has been restored to Jesus after his triple denial, now he has a triple affirmation of love; and Jesus gives him his assignment. You would think nothing else in the world could possibly enter Peter's head with all that goodness going on, and yet, something does.

Bible commentator, Frederick Dale Bruner, likes to have a little fun with the fact that in John there is this subtle competition between the "beloved disciple," who we think is John himself, and Peter. They hear a rumor that the tomb is empty, so John and Peter have a foot race to get to the tomb, and John makes it clear he got there first, and then Peter caught up, and so forth. So, a little competition here; and so, Peter has been given this great assignment, and maybe he kind of wants to be all to himself, you know...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am the most important disciple...so, then he sees John and says: Hey, what about him?

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, there is a little something else going on here, too, Scott, because not only did Jesus give Peter this great assignment of "feeding my sheep," which I take to mean preaching and teaching the Bible—the Word of God—that is how sheep are fed—that is how God's people are fed, but he also gives a rather strange prediction about how Peter is going to die. He says: Right now you go wherever you want to go; which is, I hope, to follow me; but someday your hands are going to be tied and they are going to lead you to a place you do not want to go; and of course, tradition says that happened in Rome, and it was in the Amphitheater, and Peter was crucified; and then he turns and says to the Lord: Well, what about him? What about John? Is he going to die, too? It makes me think of the great line of Aslan in the Narnia stories, where he says: No, no; I am only telling you your story. I am not going to tell you anyone else's story. You only get your own story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and yet, Peter is distracted; and Jesus has to repeat: Follow me. I just told you what you need to do. Do not worry about John. Do not worry about how he is going to live or die. You have your marching orders. I told you to follow me.

I even think Jesus response is a little bit...maybe Jesus was just a little irritated. He exaggerates a little: Hey, if I want John to stay alive forever, what is that to you? Now, he did not really mean that, and John goes on to say that. Jesus was exaggerating to get Peter's attention to say: Hey, look, buddy. I just told you; follow me. You know, you read this story...and we are doing this program in celebration of Easter...and you think: The Lord is risen; he is risen indeed; and he has told us to preach his Gospel. What could ever get in the way of our enthusiasm for doing that, even today? But like Peter, sometimes we get distracted, too.

DAVE BAST

Yes, the temptation to distraction, I guess. It is always present in our lives; it is present in our churches, really. You can get caught up in doing a million and one things and forget the most important thing—the central thing—the basic thing—which is to bear witness to Jesus...to be sure we are following him. Do not worry about anyone else. Do not compare yourself to anyone else. What is that to you, Jesus says, what I am going to deal with with John? And John, incidentally, has to quash the rumor that he was going to live until the Lord's return. That is not necessarily what Jesus was saying, John said. It is a different story.

So, the temptation...the tendency to lose focus and forget that the main thing is that, as we follow Jesus we bear witness to him in life and in language, with our words and with our actions. He is the Lord of love. We love him. He came to give life to the world. He died and rose again. That is the Gospel; we are celebrating it again today...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That is the message.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, some years ago a fairly liberal preacher...he did not really believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus...he denied that...and he was interviewed in the newspaper, and he said at one point: You know one of the reasons I don't really believe Jesus rose again? If all those Christians—those conservative Christians—really believe Jesus rose again, why aren't they just telling the world about 24/7? Shouldn't they be out proclaiming the Gospel? Well, he kind of had a little bit of a point. Do we have too many days where we do not live as though we are living in a world where a resurrection took place? We do. We live in a world where a resurrection took place; and although we have lots to do and many tasks to do, we should never lose our focus—we should never be looking over our shoulder at anybody or anything else and saying to Jesus: Hey, what about him? What about this? What about that? Jesus will always say the same thing: Hey, I already told you; follow me.

DAVE BAST

Follow me...right. You know, I love that phrase you used. You used it a couple of times just now, Scott. My pastor, at the end of every service just before he pronounces the benediction...he almost always says: Remember we live in a world where a resurrection happened. It happened. It is true. It changes everything. It gives us life. It gives us a message; and we ought to be living that way. We ought to be filled with the joy and the excitement that this provides. Death is not the end. Death does not have the last word. Sin is not going to win. God has won. Jesus... You remember we said at the beginning of the show: Christ is risen. Not just that he rose; he *is* risen!

SCOTT HOEZEE

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

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com, and there you can give us some suggestions for topics and passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/witness-to-the-risen-jesus-christ>

Printed on January 2, 2025