

You Asked! (Part 2)

DAVE BAST

Welcome to *Groundwork*. Our tagline for this program is: Where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives; and we like to do that interactively with you, our listeners. So we invite response primarily through our Internet website and our Facebook page; and today we are going to take up some of the questions that we have received, and try to respond from scripture to them. Stay tuned.

From ReFrame Media and Words of Hope, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast, and joining me today are two of our *Groundwork* producers, Adam Navis and Courtney Schutt. Welcome.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

It is good to be here.

ADAM NAVIS

Yes, wonderful.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Adam and I had worked on putting these questions together, so today we are kind of looking at the Bible – specific questions people had about scripture or about God and his characteristics. So the first question a listener asked was about Matthew 26:30, and the verse says:

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. I am assuming a hymn was sung to conclude the Passover meal, but what hymn was sung? Maybe we should give a little more context to this verse first.

ADAM NAVIS

The verse comes at a point that the meal they are talking about is the Last Supper – what we refer to as the Last Supper, but for Jesus and his disciples, they may not have known it as the Last Supper; they knew it as the Passover meal. It was a traditional meal that marked and celebrated the Passover of the ancient Israelites from the book of Exodus when the angel of death passed over the Israelites who had painted the lamb's blood on their doorposts, and this is a meal that remembers that.

DAVE BAST

Right; so tremendous overtones of sacrifice and salvation, and of course Jesus re-invents this supper with his disciples to commemorate his death and the shedding of his blood; but they still would have celebrated it, we assume, in the traditional Jewish way, and that means we actually know what hymns they probably sang; not technically hymns, but psalms, because the Passover liturgy concluded with a reading... or a singing... they would have sung them... a series of the psalms; and we actually know which ones those were.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

And these are from the same book of Psalms that we have in our Bible.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely. The sequence was called the great *hallel* or great praise. Most of us know the word *hallelujah*...

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Hallelujah, yes.

DAVE BAST

Yes, which is praise the Lord; *hallel* is praise; *Yah* is Yahweh or the Lord. So, what were those psalms? Psalm 113 through Psalm 118; and I love this thought that the last song Jesus sang before going off to Gethsemane and the courtyard of the high priest, and Pilate, and ultimately Golgotha, was Psalm 118. Listen to some of these verses:

⁵When hard-pressed, I cried to the Lord; he brought me into a spacious place. ⁶The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can human beings do to me? ⁷The Lord is with me. He is my helper; I look in triumph on my enemies. ¹⁸The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. ²¹I will give thanks, for you answered me. You have become my salvation. ²²The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. ²³This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. Those are the words that Jesus sang with his disciples...

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Wow!

DAVE BAST

Isn't that a great thought?

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Yes!

ADAM NAVIS

You know, when you pair that image of Jesus and his disciples and those words from the Psalms, you cannot help but feel the power of those words. When we look for words for prayer in our own life, there is poignancy there.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Yes; right before he is going to the cross, to say, "My God is with me, I will not be afraid."

DAVE BAST

And what can human beings do to me. And the fact that he himself is the stone that the builders rejected – so many of the authorities of that day, both Roman and Jewish – you know it was a joint deal. We cannot just put the blame on the chief priests or on Pilate or on the crowd; they were all in it together. I think even of one of the great Christian hymns of Jesus' suffering: Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon me? Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone me. Who crucified Christ? I did. We were all in it together. It was our guilt; and so many reject him, but God has made him the cornerstone – the cornerstone of the universe. Our lives need to be built on him.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

I have to say, I am glad this listener asked this question, because I learned something today. I don't think I have ever thought about that before – what hymn was sung; and wow, that was powerful.

ADAM NAVIS

Yes; I hope that answers the question for you, listener, and let's move on to the next question.

In a program we asked: Are there any scriptures that confuse you? And one listener wrote in: 2 Peter 1:5-8.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

⁵For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

DAVE BAST

Sounds a lot like our last program, where we talked about growing in grace and what that means, and the fruit of the Spirit. It really is a series of qualities, many of them overlapping with the famous fruit of the Spirit. Peter is just saying the same thing that we read throughout the New Testament, that our salvation is by faith – we often say by faith alone. You don't do anything in order to be saved; you simply trust in God's grace in Jesus Christ; but then, that is not all you do, as someone has said: Faith alone saves us, but the faith that saves us never stays alone; to it we begin to live in a certain way.

ADAM NAVIS

You know, I like to imagine this letter being written, and the people hearing it and... Oh, to that add that, and that add that, and that add that... You know, it is this grand vision.

DAVE BAST

It is kind of like a recipe, you know, how to bake a cake: First you put in this, and then you put in this; this is a recipe for how to become a Christian in practice. It is how to live the Christian life.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

We have often talked before about the Bible is not a how-to book, but it is like a recipe because there is a deepening. You had talked before, Adam, about deepening; and so it is not... we have our faith and that is what saves us, but we grow deeper in relationship. That is what I see. We don't just have faith; we then grow in our Christian life to goodness and we grow in our knowledge and in our self-control. It is that progress we talked about before in Christian life.

DAVE BAST

Well, one of the really important characteristics that Peter mentions here – and it is also one of the fruits of the Spirit – is endurance or perseverance; both those English words translate the same Greek word, and it means sort of sticking to it, not quitting, not dropping out; and that is another extremely important point: The faith that saves us is faith that goes on to the end. It is not raising your hand at some point when you are a teenager and saying: Oh, I believe in Jesus, and then going off and...

COURTNEY SCHUTT

And that is it...

DAVE BAST

Living your life totally apart. It is faith that you are exercising consciously right up to the last – right up to the end.

ADAM NAVIS

Let's take a short break there and we will be right back with another question.

Segment 2

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, and along with your host, Dave Bast, I am one of your producers, Courtney Schutt, along with Adam Navis, and today we are answering your questions.

ADAM NAVIS

The next question we are going to look at starts with a scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16 is quoted: All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Why then is there so much disagreement about what the Bible means? What methods do you find helpful in talking about the Bible with people who disagree with you?

DAVE BAST

Well, this is a hard one, I will be the first to admit; why so many denominations – why so many divisions – why so many different interpretations? If, as we believe – and we do believe – we are Evangelicals, we are Protestants, we are Reformed Christians, and one of the great principles of our take on the Christian life is that the Bible is our final rule – our authority; that it is clear, that it is sufficient; it has all that we need, and that if we come to it, you know, with reasonable intelligence and good will and a desire to know the truth, we will find the truth in scripture, and it will guide our faith and it will guide our lives; but it doesn't always.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Well, it always guides our lives, but it is not always perfectly clear.

DAVE BAST

It sometimes guides us in different directions – it guides groups of Christians in different ways; and this is actually a really serious critique of all of Evangelicalism; I mean, Catholics would say: Well, there, you see? You can't agree, so you need the Church to tell you how to interpret the Bible.

ADAM NAVIS

Well, and I think that is one way of kind of closing the loophole, saying the Church needs to do that.

DAVE BAST

But, you see, the problem with that is it does not really solve the problem because then there is disagreement about what the Church teaches, and reinterpretation, and there are just as many divisions, really, among Catholics as there are among Protestants.

ADAM NAVIS

Right; this could be one of the most important, if not it has always been the most important issue facing the Church, is how is scripture viewed; but we have so many, in America at least, very public voices talking about scripture – talking about their faith – whether they are politicians or religious leaders – and talking about the Bible and what the Bible says in very concrete, very definite terms that are driving their actions on issues such as voting, ethics, sexuality; and I think you have other Christians who are on the very opposite view, but are trying to be faithful to scripture; and I think you have things like: Well, it is a rulebook – people call it a rulebook; people call it a guidebook, as if like you would take a guidebook to tour another country. People see it as historical fact; people see it as just wisdom literature; and it is all those things, but it is also more.

DAVE BAST

I think there are some principles that we can enunciate that help a little bit on this – just even what we mean as Evangelicals about scripture. For example, when we say that scripture's teaching is clear, we don't mean that everything in the Bible is clear. There are plenty of difficult, obscure passages. There are things that we don't understand. Even Peter... We just mentioned 2 Peter... 2 Peter, a few verses before 3:18, says that there are things in Paul's letters that are hard to understand; so, the Bible itself describes itself as difficult in part. What we mean by saying it is clear is that the central message is clear. That anyone can come to it and understand the facts about Jesus, for example. He died and he rose again, and that really happened, and what that means. The way of salvation is clear. What it teaches about the most fundamentally important things – that is clear.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

I think that is a really good distinction.

ADAM NAVIS

And I think we all, speaking of clarity, we don't want to confuse the things that are unclear as most important. We can get easily hung up on the unimportant and unclear things in the Bible.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; I mean, there is an old saying, it goes way back at least to the Reformation: In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity. It is a beautiful idea that on the bedrock basics we hang together; on those other matters, I know you like the word *adiaphora*, Courtney...

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Yes, one of my favorite theological words...

DAVE BAST

You learned that seminary, didn't you? Tell us what it means.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Adiaphora are the things that are outside; so, in the quote that you just used, in essentials we are united, but then there are these issues or ideas that are not central or core to the Gospel. They may help us live out our faith with integrity, so they are okay and important to think about and talk about, but they should not divide us.

ADAM NAVIS

Okay, but how do you decide, because I think there is even disagreement about what those essentials are?

DAVE BAST

Okay, thanks, Adam; way to throw water on the party. Yes, it is hard to decide which are which, but you know, most of us, I think, would say something like maybe the form of your church government is one of those *adiaphora*; maybe the style of your worship would be that way as opposed to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

ADAM NAVIS

Sure; I think most people are going to find those very essential and central when it comes to Christ and Christ's role in our lives.

DAVE BAST

I think a third principle, though, that we have to at least mention is some interpretations of scripture are wrong. That is all there is to it. Not everybody is right; so some of the differences of opinion are because people are misusing scripture or twisting scripture. On the other hand, some of them... maybe it is a both/and... maybe it is a matter of emphasis. Does the Bible promote capitalism or does it promote kind of socialism and care for the poor? You could make a case on both sides.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

The listener wants to know what methods do you find helpful when you talk to people who disagree with you; so, yes; we talked about this third option that some are just wrong, but am I going to go up to my neighbor and say: You're wrong. My way is right. That is not going to win anybody to the Gospel.

DAVE BAST

Well, my response to that is: What method do you find helpful in talking about the Bible with people who disagree with you? Focus on Christ; that is my response. It is always helpful to focus on Christ because he is the central message of the Bible. We do, I think, sometimes make a mistake by trying to turn the Bible into a

handbook: How to have a happy marriage; how to run your finances according to the Bible; it really was not written for that. It does have practical wisdom, don't get me wrong, in living of life; but it was written to show us Christ, and the best thing we can do is, let's agree to find Christ here in the scripture – let's narrow our vision to look for him wherever we may be reading because that is going to be the heart of the message.

ADAM NAVIS

I think you just named something that is very simple but very hard to do. I hope I can do that; I hope all our listeners can do that. Let's take a short break and we will be right back with some more questions.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Welcome back. This is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am your host, Dave Bast, and joining me again are two of our staff, Adam Navis and Courtney Schutt.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Today we have been talking about questions that listeners have sent to us. This one in particular actually is not a question, but I was touched when this woman left this prayer request on our website. I think it is something we have dealt with in programs before, but it really put words to it, so let me read her prayer request. She said: I have been very under-employed for a long time, and I am confused as to what I can do to fix this. I have gotten an education that was supposed to get me somewhere, but I am still barely making enough to keep food in my fridge. I have asked, applied, and sought out help from a variety of services, and I always seem to come up flat. I really do not appreciate this cycle of poverty. I am a single mother, and instead of staying home with my daughter, I have worked. I look around and I see other single moms who are much younger than me and have no previous training get good-paying jobs. I know of functioning addicts living in their own homes and going on yearly tropical vacations. I go to work and come home. I don't drink or do drugs; I stopped going to nightclubs a long time ago; I am active in my community and helpful to my neighbors. I am a great mother and a good employee and a faithful friend. I just don't understand why life is such a struggle for me. I have been praying for years for God to open my eyes and my ears, and I am still not hearing anything.

ADAM NAVIS

Ooh, that is heavy; but I feel the challenge has been thrown down, and if the Good News cannot speak to her, it is not going to be able to speak to anybody. The question as we see it is: Why is life such a struggle; and I think that is something that everyone can relate to; perhaps not to the extent of this writer, but everyone questions: Why aren't things happening? Why isn't life unfolding based on my efforts? Why isn't it following the path I think it should take?

DAVE BAST

Yes, and not only why is life such a struggle, but why is it such a struggle when you are doing all the right things? You are doing... as far as you can tell, you are doing everything right: You are praying, you are trusting God, you are asking him for help; you are not just sitting back, you are going out and doing everything you can, and nothing seems to happen – nothing seems to get better.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Yes.

DAVE BAST

So, what is the deal?

COURTNEY SCHUTT

I don't know, but here is what struck me about what she wrote, too. She does not say: I have been praying for a job, or I have been praying for something specific. She says: I have been praying for years for God to open my eyes and my ears; and I am struck to say: Wow, her heart is in the right place. In many ways, she is

praying what I would think would be a really good prayer.

ADAM NAVIS

She is kind of saying: I am willing to do whatever, just show me what I am supposed to be doing?

COURTNEY SCHUTT

Yes; well, and she is willing to change, you know: Lord, open my eyes and my ears so I might see... I am going to put in the words, Your will.

DAVE BAST

If I were speaking to her face to face, I think I might want to ask the question: What are you going to do now? What will you do next? What are your options? I cannot answer why life is such a struggle; I don't know. I don't think anyone can answer that. Why do some people prosper and other people suffer? I don't know. Nobody knows. But the question is: What are you going to do now? And you have two choices, really. You can either give up on the whole deal and conclude: There is no God, or he doesn't care, or it is just not for me, and go off and do your thing; or you can say what Peter said when Jesus asked his disciples... you know that time at the end of John 6 – this is one of my favorite stories in the whole Bible because it is just this situation when we are tempted to despair or give up. Jesus said: Are you going to leave me, too? Because everybody started leaving him, you know. It was not working for them. They didn't like what he was saying – what he was getting into; and he said to the twelve: Are you going to leave me, too? And Peter spoke for all of them: Lord, where else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. I mean, what else am I going to do? No matter what I am experiencing – no matter what I am suffering – am I going to turn away? I can't; I have nowhere else to go. So, I am just going to keep on keeping on.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

You know, I am really thankful for this woman's prayer request and the trust she had in us to share it with us, and I am glad that we are able to pray with her. Her words remind me a lot of the psalms, and the psalmist often asks: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? But just like we have been talking about, the psalmist always come back to that faith: But I affirm, Lord, that I believe, and that you are faithful, God; and when people ask us for words to pray, we did a series, even, about the Psalms and how the Psalms often give us words to pray; so that kind of brings us to our final question.

DAVE BAST

What book of the Bible other than the Psalms do you turn to when you most need words to pray?

ADAM SCHUTT

Well, this is a question that when it came up I was very interested in how we would handle it, because as someone who is not that great at prayer – not that I cannot find the time – but I am often overwhelmed by just the presence of God and saying: Well, you know. Why do I pray? And I am actually curious to hear what you would say to this.

COURTNEY SCHUTT

I go to maybe a cliché passage: Ecclesiastes 3; it is: There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven; and sometimes I find myself praying those words of a time to be born, a time to die, as much as a prayer to God of: Help me understand what time this is; and as a reminder to myself.

DAVE BAST

Well, and then there is always the Lord's Prayer, which is a very helpful pattern, really; not just to repeat the words, but to let each of those things expand outward in our own mind. You know: Hallowed be your name – God, may you be known – acknowledged – recognized throughout the world; and you can go on through each of those. I mean, that is what Jesus gave it for.

The scriptures are full of prayers. Almost every epistle has a prayer near the beginning, and to be able to pray those back to God has a special power I think; and even if we cannot find the words, we fall back on Romans

8, where Paul says that the Spirit helps us with sighs and groans too deep for words; so God knows even when we don't have it all together.

ADAM NAVIS

That is all the time we have for today. 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. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/you-asked-part-2>

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