

New Testament in 50 minutes

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[0 : 00] It's just one, we're one week post-Easter, aren't we? And so I hope, I know that resurrection theme is appropriate.

I'll say that boldly. You can't think about the resurrection too much. I take it Christians agree about that.

But to highlight that, maybe it's, if you're asked to highlight that, maybe we'd have to think about how to do that with theological, biblical appropriateness.

So just by way of example, in a brief introduction here to our look at the New Testament, I like to think of, I chose this just at random.

Think of Paul in thinking of resurrection themes. How it unfolds, what it means. Think of Paul on the road to Damascus. He is convinced, we all know this, and he knows, he knows from scripture.

[1 : 06] Not from his imagination. Paul knows from scripture, of course he wasn't Paul as yet, that the sect of the Nazarenes, so how he would have thought of them, they are deadly, they are a scripture-defying evil, and they must be destroyed.

That's what he thought. And he, or at least they needed to be silenced. He knows that scripture says, as clear as a bell, cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree.

It says in Deuteronomy, as clear as a bell. Well, the sect of the Nazarenes are saying someone's the Messiah. He was put on a tree. That's not the Messiah.

That's someone that God has cursed. So says Holy Scripture. So he wanted to destroy this group. He's on the road to Damascus.

Then we all know the story. He sees, he meets the resurrected one. And in a moment, we would call it an intuitive theological moment, everything changes.

[2 : 18] Everything. Everything. The resurrection, in a sense, in a very real sense, revolutionizes scripture. Paul comes to see that he has met Jesus, the second Adam, you know from Corinthians.

He is, as we sang at Easter, you know, the opening sentences in an Easter service, in a traditional Anglican service, Christ our Passover. Jesus has recapitulated, and he has fulfilled the mystery of Israel.

Paul comes to see this in a blinding moment on the road to Damascus. Just Jesus fulfilling the mystery of Israel. A theme that Matthew, for instance, unfolds in narrative form in his gospel. But now, the curse thing is completely transformed in Paul's mind. Paul would later write, he became a curse for us.

Christ crucified and resurrected is the interpretive fact, the interpretive key to Hebrew scripture. It's always in that, it's in that order.

[3 : 33] The resurrection first, then you understand the scriptures. You don't understand the scriptures and figure out that Jesus was going to rise from the dead. The event, I quote a great scholar, Tom Wright, the event precipitated the exegesis.

Of course. The event precipitated the exegesis. The New Testament is a kind of resurrection song sung over the Hebrew scriptures and as such, again, revolutionizes Hebrew scripture so much that it is renamed as the Old Covenant.

It is not set aside. It is not downgraded. It is now the glorious God revealing himself and the full and complete meaning of that is in and promised in this fact, the fact of Jesus rising from the dead.

So, we want to have a sense, a big sense, if you will, of what this book, the New Testament, is all about, again, and the broadest, very broadest terms of what we want to do today.

The New Testament tells you that you won't understand it unless a number of things are in place and one of them is that you're prayerful.

[5 : 01] You can't, you, there are terms, there are conditions for understanding this book. Let's fulfill one of them right away and just bow our heads and say a word of prayer.

Lord, we're honored to come to your word today and we would ask that you give us hearts and minds and spirits appropriate to hear what it's saying so that we may apprehend what it's saying and become obedient in a living in the presence of what it teaches us as it shows us the mystery of Jesus, the resurrected one and it is in his name that we pray.

Amen. We've all seen, this may get some sort of prize as the least interesting overhead ever displayed at Learn's Exchange.

I was thinking of maybe doing a margin and doing some illumination work around it but I didn't have time plus I can't draw. So I wouldn't, we've all seen this many times, these 27.

The front of every New Testament you see this, don't we? They're listed for us. The faith of the Gospel tells us that in knowing these, knowing these books that this index refers to, we come to know a divine person.

[6 : 30] Nothing less than that is what the New Testament tells you it's about. Know this book, know it appropriately and you will know a divine person.

A divine person and in him you come to know many things including, perhaps the most shocking thing of all you come to know is you come to know yourself. You come to know yourself as a sinner, as alienated, an enemy of goodness and you are in desperate need of reconciliation with the good, with the God revealed in Jesus, the chief subject of these 27.

This is very much a set apart place. God will in his grace meet us here. So again, a survey of this page will be, I hope, good for us, especially at Easter.

Start with some assertions here. I'll say, you can tell me the time after, the discussion time, the resurrection really authored these books.

The resurrection authored these books. As the resurrection we may really say, even in critical, historical terms, the resurrection authored the church.

[7 : 52] The radiant, resurrected one, reconciling us to God, reconciling us to one another, restoring us to ourselves, is here, is knowable by God's grace here.

So let's have a look at what's here. It begins with, in case you've forgotten, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, top left.

There's where it begins. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called, aren't they, the synoptics? because they may be seen as together.

Matthew, Mark, Luke. This is somehow part of the mystery of the spirits putting this book together.

That there are facts to be noted about this big book or this book and good enough in its size.

Many, the majority of professional scholars think that Mark was written first. Luke and Matthew wrote with Mark in their possession.

[9 : 03] That's an old story. Noted variations and agreements in episode order between the three generate conclusions like Mark and priorities.

A lot of other considerations as well. every word of these books has been studied. Cultural, linguistic, political, social, rhetorical, background issues have been studied and studied and studied and the word continues to gain a sense, further and further sense, of what these words might say and mean.

What they say, that is, I think, formerly called exegesis. What they mean, that's called hermeneutics. In case you wanted to know, take a course someday.

A remarkable project when we think about how these books, these 27, have been studied. Do we dare to say especially the Gospels?

Maybe so, but they've all come in for so much study. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and of course John.

John is, do you agree, a kind of different Gospel in some measure.

[10 : 26] John is different. There's a structure of signs and discourses in John, quite different in its form, therefore, from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The setting is in Judea, largely, and Jerusalem. Galilee becomes background in John. It feels different sometimes, John, even a bit strange.

This can be overstated, probably is in the tradition a bit. There are many similarities between the synoptics and John, but there is a difference here, something a bit strange.

Ben Witherington, one of my favorite professional New Testament scholars, makes a case that this writing is, I made a point of going back to Witherington to make sure I wasn't misrepresenting him

here.

This is his word. This writing is sourced, that's his word. This writing, he argues with many subtle and not so subtle arguments.

[11:28] He believes that the Gospel of John is sourced in Lazarus. Lazarus. Lazarus, he believes, is the beloved disciple mentioned in John's Gospel.

I love this theory. John, if you will, the writing that we call John, sees Jesus from the other side, in a sense, as Lazarus had been to the other side before his friend called him back.

There you, there's just a touch of John's stuff. Isn't John's Gospel magnificent? Likened to an eagle, isn't it? John's Gospel. So the Gospels.

Matthew begins, you'll remember, the book of the genealogy. That's the opening words of the New Testament of East 27. The book of the genealogy.

The book of the genealogy. John's Gospel ends with, I quote this from memory, but it says this, doesn't it? You'll recall, if all the deeds of Jesus were recorded, the world itself could not contain the books that might be written.

[12:43] Belief might see this, I do, belief might see this as a quiet little note of canonicity, as it's called. These four, in other words, belong together.

They're not an accident. The Spirit means them to be together. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are meant to be together. And they belong in a larger group.

The canon, the canon itself, ends with a warning. Remember, at the end of the Apocalypse of St. John, almost always referred to as Revelation, it begins, it ends, excuse me, by saying, don't add to this book.

It's a warning. Do not add to this book. Are these book references, brackets, or as the scholars might call them, inclusios, around books, about books, meant, tells us that these books are meant to be together?

Again, belief, only belief, again, might believe so. I do, for what it's worth. I think the spirit has planted little notes of canonicity right in the text, hidden there, just beneath the surface.

[14:03] Luke, of course, on this kind of note, Luke belongs with Acts, everyone knows. Luke wrote that third gospel, and he also wrote this fifth book called Acts, Acts of the Apostles.

Luke belongs with Acts, that is to say, in historical, critical, common sense, Luke belongs with Acts, but the canon says it is one of four, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

There you go, they belong together, the gospels. By the middle of the second century, they've been known as a group of these four gospels, different references from early church writers.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. So begins the New Testament, showing us Jesus, the spirit, as Jesus promised, bringing to remembrance.

remembrance. So the canon of the New Testament begins Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And then, of course, as we all know, we plow on here, we have the Acts of the Apostles, don't we?

[15:06] The Acts of the Apostles. This, it seems to me, may be seen as a kind of bridge, a bridge to somewhere.

people read the Gospels at first, people read and read the Gospels in communities founded in apostolic preaching and witness.

People read the Gospels in communities founded in apostolic preaching and witness. By the way, in case you've forgotten, we're one of them. We're one of them.

The people who read these Gospels to begin with, and all of these books, were founded by apostolic preaching and witness, and that's why we're here.

The Anglican Church claims to be a church founded in apostolic preaching and witness. Nothing else. Not the opinions of bishops gathered and, you know, pronouncing on the issues of the day.

[16:08] No, we're a community founded in this preaching and witness. And these communities need to know something about these apostles, these apostolic people, and their work.

Hence, we have this next book after the Gospels called the Acts. Luke tells us, Luke tells us in this book of two big realities, doesn't he?

He tells of Peter and he tells of Paul. This is interesting stuff, at least I find it so. there are two dynamics set up in the Acts of the Apostles, this first book which follows the four Gospels.

You, I know, many of you at Learners Exchange are Hegelians and students of New Testament critical study history. You know what's coming here. It will be brief, I promise.

Peter, so the story goes, are you used to this kind of thing? I wish I could, maybe I'm too used to it. Peter, of course, is early Catholic hierarchy and institutionalism in its earliest form.

[17:19] That's the trajectory of the Petrine. And Paul, of course, is the more fluid, charismatic Christ mysticism, open therefore to Gentile inclusion in this early Jewish movement.

necessarily therefore in conflict with people like James and Peter and Jerusalem, the church there. That's the way, that's the framework in which the whole New Testament was studied in the 19th century.

And it is still massively important or still massively influential in even as New Testament study is carried out today. If you don't believe me, I'll show you the book by Marcus Balkbiel, which shows how powerful it is at work.

There is some truth here, of course, in this big theory, but there's a lot of fantasy too. But I find it completely absorbing. Galatians, one of the letters that we're going to get to in a few minutes after all, does evidence fiery dispute, which was the earliest church's first great divisive issue.

Peter and Paul, we know from the New Testament, it clearly tells us this, they did confront. Who's in? Who's out of our community?

[18:38] How does one get in? How does one stay in? Issues like that were furiously discussed, even within the apostolic band, for sure.

So the church with the gospel spreads, it disputes, and it makes its way. And Luke, here in the book of Acts, Acts of the Apostles, he remembers and he records.

He does show us certainly a great trajectory, doesn't he? It's from Jerusalem to Rome, as Luke tells us the story here in this fifth book, in our index of the 27.

The Lord born in Bethlehem is confessed as Lord in Rome, where counterfeit Lords abound. They still do in today's world, don't they?

Counterfeit Lords everywhere, a kind of, Tom Wright calls it an anti, I think it's a nice little phrase, an anti-imperial polemic. You often find it in the New Testament.

[19:43] So, therefore, the first letter in the, what is to now follow, what is called a letter collection in the New Testament, the first letter in the letter collection which follows is Paul to the Romans, in case you needed to be reminded.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, these four Gospels, then a little bridge, Luke tells the story from Acts, in Acts, about the mystery of Jesus in Bethlehem, and how the spirit fell on the church and the Gospel ends up being proclaimed in Rome of all places.

So, perhaps it's important to see that the first letter in the letter collection, which now follows, again, what it's called, is Paul to a group of Christians at Rome.

Now into, again, a letters collection. Paul's letters right through to the end of the past goes up there at Philemon, forth down from the top there.

There's some other letters we're going to talk about, and then one last book. This book, Romans, of course, changes people, doesn't it?

[21:00] Just a word about Romans. It has changed history, hasn't it? This is a difficult book. Has anybody in the room found Romans easy? I zipped through it once and I wish it had been a bit more difficult, really.

It's a difficult book. I think, what if Paul even meant it to be difficult? I'm going to give them some substantial issues to think about here. It's a great book.

It generates a range of readings, of course. Not any old reading will do, but it is rich in meaning and rich in power. Just think of people like Augustine and Luther and Karl Barth.

Had their lives changed by this book. Anglican reformers, someone once told me, large parts of it in their memory. book. It's a book loved by people at different times in church history.

It revolutionizes their understanding of the mystery of where we are in the world, who we are, what the problem of the world is, how God is acting to heal it.

[22:04] Bach, of course, famously has put key verses of it to music. You are not of the flesh, but of the spirit. Have you heard that passage of Paul to the Romans in Bach?

It's so glorious. One shouldn't go through life without knowing Romans 7 and 8, should you? They will tell you who you are and how God wants to save you.

Romans 7 and 8 alone. They will change your life. But we must move on in 50 minutes. 1 and 2 Corinthians are letters to a bad dysfunctional church.

It's funny, right away, the first letter tells us the whole gospel in a sense. The next letter shows that there are troubled churches. But there are glories here in these two letters, 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 Corinthians 15.

Who can forget these passages? The very heart of the witness to the resurrection is here. The New Testament, these 27 books, were written in the wake of some kind of event.

[23 : 17] This community happened because of that event. These writings, again, happened because of that event. The resurrection is the strange and unique generating mystery behind the churches and Paul makes that so clear in 1 Corinthians 15.

And just in passing, 1 Corinthians 11 records the Lord's supper, remembering the act of remembering, remembered in the Gospels.

We're well into the letters, but they reflect so clearly the heart of the four Gospels, remembering in 1 Corinthians 11 the Lord's supper.

It was because of the kind of people one might meet in Corinth that some people associated with Jerusalem were suspicious of letting Gentiles, people like ourselves, into the church at all.

Certainly not letting them into the church on Paul's terms. So, Galatians, as we know, was written. Key questions are at the center of the disputes recorded in Galatians, aren't they?

[24 : 31] Key questions. Again, questions like who's in this new community called the church? Who's out? Who's kept out and why? How does one stay in once one gets in?

How does one, how indeed does one stay in or get in? These are perennial institutional questions. And these kinds of issues arose amidst our earliest sisters and brothers in Christ.

And they settled these issues for us. They were resolved, weren't they, on Paul's terms. That's why this book is in the New Testament. It wouldn't be there if they hadn't been resolved in Paul's terms. You get in by faith and you stay in by faith, Paul says. Galatians has been called the great charter of Christian freedom. In Christ is freedom.

So, the letter to the Galatians is there in the canon. Are we racing through them quick enough, do you think? Ephesians is next, you will have noticed.

[25 : 40] Ephesians, I know all of you have these 27 memorized from church school days or since then. I hardly have to mention what's coming next. Ephesians is not, as we have it, you know, addressed to an identifiable church address, so to speak.

So the scholars are convinced, it seems, that it is a circular letter. That is, it was in the sense of read this and pass it on. It is the story of this letter.

The opening words are next to impossible to exegete, aren't they? Do you love the letter to the Ephesians? At some point, lovers of the New Testament, at some point, would just fall in love with Ephesians.

They are like a sunrise in words. They conflate resurrection and ascension and triumph in Christ. They show that the church and the individual Christian lives on.

Just heard this letter, this language last night and reading Tom Wright. You live on resurrection ground. That's good rhetoric from Mr. Wright. That's what Ephesians says.

[26 : 47] But we must plow on as we run through the mall. If I was alone on a desert island with one gospel, I suppose I choose John, maybe Luke, I don't know.

I really wouldn't want to be stuck with just one of them. But we sort of gravitate in directions, don't we, when we have 27 different books in front of us. If I was allowed one Pauline on that island, I'd go with Philippians, the next book.

Philippians. This is a, why? Because it's a happy letter, isn't it? Do you know Philippians at all? When you say these words, does some little snippet from them all come to you?

I hope so. That's what I'm trying to do today. Philippians. It's such a happy letter. There's some biography in it, some singing, rejoice in the Lord always, the bell anthem as it's called now.

Some most profound theology, chapter 3, the Lord's mysterious incarnation and his rising up for us. He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.

[27 : 54] Philippians is a glorious letter to know, isn't it? Colossians, near the bottom left there, is one of the Christian churches in the New Testament in receipt of a letter from Paul, even though you'll know they had never met him in the flesh, to use Paul's language in the sarks.

I think it was, again, Mr. Wright who calls it this little masterpiece. A few years ago now, since I read Tom Wright's commentary on Colossians, he calls it a little masterpiece, words to that effect.

Paul's great teaching is emphasized here, Christ in you, Christ in you, the hope of glory. Such a lovely, lovely little, again, masterpiece of a letter, a letter to the Colossians, it's lovely to read. And when this letter has been read among you, Paul says to the Colossians, have it read in Laodicea. And the letter I wrote to them, make sure you read it as well.

Even the New Testament witnesses to these letters in existence and the fact that they're moving between churches. The churches probably never kept it, they copied it.

[29 : 09] I don't know how many times a scribe would want to copy, but a professional scribe probably took these letters and made sure they circulated to other Christians. And pretty soon, little collections of them would start to take hold.

We'll see, there's a mention of them in the New Testament. One and two Thessalonians, bottom left there, are strangely, do you find, I would call them the underplayed letters of Paul.

They're not cool. They're, even on my own horizon, I've been reading Paul all my life, but they're the last of his letters to come to my mind for some reason. They're underplayed, but I don't know why that is.

They're lovely letters, lovely epistles. They do read, always when I read them, they read as early, but I don't think there's any consensus about scholars that they come early, that goodness knows where they came in Paul's ministry.

They read as early. There is some strange end of the world stuff, isn't there, in them. Some stuff about something holds back the Antichrist.

[30 : 12] Some people think, well, what holds back the Antichrist is Paul's preaching. The gospel being preached in the world holds back the mystery of iniquity in its final form. That kind of apocalyptic stuff, let me call it that, is there.

This is where you find Paul saying, this is the will of God for you, he says to the Thessalonians. This is the will of God. People say, what's God's will for my life? It's this, your sanctification, he says to the Thessalonians.

You can't forget that once you've read it. This is God's will for you, church at Thessalonica. God wants you to be a set-apart holy people.

You turn to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead. Whom he raised from the dead.

Always the resurrection theme comes into Paul's epistles. there why he was doing his work, because God had raised his son from the dead. Might just pause here a while.

[31 : 21] How astonishing is Paul's ministry? Could be reminded of this more often than we are, I take it. What travels he undertook. What a teacher he was.

What a rhetorician he was. What a gift he had for making the gospel shine in front of people. What caused all of this? I'm repeating myself without apology.

From within a dogmatic framework of belief, the answer is simply the resurrection caused all of this to happen. Real, concrete, historical fact resurrection.

Something they haven't heard at the cathedral as yet. Real, concrete, historical fact. That's what the resurrection is. It can't be anything other than that.

From within the dogmatic framework of unbelief, on the other hand, we have something that is close to the truth, I would think, that some kind of mutation in Second Temple Judaism spawned a global world historical religion called Christianity.

[32 : 24] But they don't know why it happened. The church knew because Jesus had been raised from the dead. What thinkest thou this morning? I know what you think because you're here.

God has raised Jesus up out of death. Carl Barton used to say, what had Paul seen that made him able to write these magnificent epistles?

Paul had seen something. And we know what he had seen. He had seen and met the resurrected one. That's why these epistles are here. Why these gospels are here.

It was caused by the resurrection. The Paul line, as they're called, of course, ends with, of course, again, the pastorals.

Paul Wright. 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon. The pastorals. 1 and 2 Timothy, famously, don't they, give a young pastor advice about many things.

[33 : 23] And along the way, we get insights into Paul's mind and his spirit. Many people, of course, challenge that Paul Wright wrote these. Nothing comes of it, really.

It comes out of a Pauline community. And it reflects more and more. You look at it, Paul's mind, and therefore you should conclude that Paul wrote them. But some scholars don't want to conclude that because they don't want to.

But does it matter? The Pauline ends with all this rich pastoral advice to the church about, again, many things. And it shows us Paul's mind.

Many Christians have not appreciated the pastoral enough, probably. You might remember something like his advice to Timothy that he could take a little wine for his stomach's sake.

But that's not the most profound moment in the pastoral. But there you go. It shows an earthy, concrete concern for another Christian. So it's an important verse in the Bible.

[34 : 20] I've quoted it often, many contexts. In the pastoral, we see early creeds taking shape, don't we? Great is the mystery of our religion, Paul says to Timothy.

You can just hear the early Christians as they gathered and more and more form and shape took over as they gathered. Little credo moments inevitably would come in. That's common sense in historical, sociological terms.

We see that in the pastoral epistles. They're quite lovely. In Titus, of course, the gospel takes such a pungent rhetorical form. Do you like Titus?

It's a beautiful little book. When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared.

What a lovely description of the gospel. God's action. When the goodness and loving kindness and the unsparing blood truth about the human condition and about human nature so wonderfully stated in Titus.

How do we spend our days? I always remember Harry giving a New Year's Eve speech, a sermon, excuse me, here at St. John's about what to expect in the new year.

[35 : 33] He quoted this verse. I'll never forget that. You know, here's how you'll spend a new year. Hating and being hated. Because that's what Paul says the human condition is like. We spend our days hating and being hated.

Paul says to Titus. But God rescued such a world. Came into the world to rescue it. People don't like that truth about themselves. And usually those kind of people don't like Paul or the New Testament either.

Finally from Paul in the canonical order. You're getting tired of Paul? I understand. Is little, famous little Philemon. What is the gospel about?

Well, how about setting slaves free? So the canon, as it closes Paul's contribution, talks about setting slaves free.

In a certain sense, within the canon, you go with Paul from Romans to Philemon. This is on my authority. I know, don't quote this. But I think it's quite obvious.

[36 : 37] From Romans to Philemon. In Romans, we have God in Christ giving righteousness. And how does it all end? In giving freedom. Give Philemon his freedom.

The gospel will do that. So, nine books remain. Only nine. Two-thirds of the way through. Hebrews and James will do them quickly. Hebrews and James are decidedly Jewish, aren't they?

Church did begin in Jerusalem and it grew and took some root there. And it's still there. It's strongly reflected in the New Testament. Sometimes it becomes invisible to us. Decidedly Jewish, these books like Hebrews and James.

They feel like they belong in Jerusalem or a Palestinian Christianity. Some might call it, some do call it the Stephen Circle or the James Circle of the church.

Great leaders of the church in Jerusalem. In this kind of witness, it seems to me there's a sense of theological profundity and great sanctity as well.

[37 : 42] There's something, these people were close to the place where the spirits fell. It is hidden there, yet it remains, I think. Maybe it's indicated by a detail back in the book of Acts.

I like to think so. Remember that the face of Stephen at his martyrdom shone with some angelic, an angelic glory. I love that little detail.

You feel that? I do. In Hebrews and James, there's something about a powerful Palestinian Christianity that was so close to Jesus, so very close to him.

Next, 1 and 2, Peter. In the battle, the dispute, the issue between Paul and Peter referred to earlier, again, was there a winner in that battle?

Well, the answer of the New Testament is yes and no. The inclusion of Petrine epistles is significant here. Peter and Paul and James and John and the author of Hebrews and others, they know and

they agree upon an apostolic certainty.

[38 : 52] Peter's witness to Jesus raised from the dead was powerfully present and it's reflected in the canon. Remember in this regard, always, again, 1 Corinthians 15.

Remember Paul says to the Corinthians, I gave to you what I received. And then there's a litany of witnesses, which ranges over undoubtedly different tones and colors of first New Testament Christianity.

It wasn't monochrome. There were differences amongst the first Christians, but they are one in a common shared faith. You know, early heretics, the learned ones will tell us about this, they sometimes wanted only one witness.

The Marcionites were famous for this, but they did not stand the test of time. The Marcionites wanted Luke's gospel and some of Paul's epistles, nothing else.

Close, but no cigar. I'm not quoting anybody, that's me. The church receives Paul and receives Peter. They're in the canon.

[39 : 59] So that book of Galatians could be overread to say, oh, Paul won and Peter lost. No, they both won. They're both in the canon. The church again receives them. 1 and 2 Peter are beautiful in resurrection hope.

That's where it begins. Born anew, says Peter. You can hear Paul saying amen. Born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

That's how Peter preached. It would be great to hear Peter preach. This man knew Jesus and those around him had a living memory of this Jesus.

For sure. And that's why we, of course, are followed by John, our next New Testament witness. Another one of those big names in the early church.

That which we have seen and heard is the opening of John's first epistle. The immediacy of witness that's here is glorious.

[41 : 02] You should know those words. Immediacy of witness and knowledge is just palpable in 1 John. That which we have seen and heard. We've touched him.

We've touched him. That author knew from direct experience or from a direct witness experience of the time when Doubting Thomas touched Jesus after he had doubted.

He knew him. And Jude, following the great Johannine epistles, 2 and 3 John are so short, aren't they?

Little touches of words to apostolic communities. Jude, of course, famously sits there, second last book of the 27. Jude is a solid warning that a real witness is present in the apostolic witness.

And outside that witness is darkness and judgment. It's funny that such a, it's interesting that such a severe word comes right near the end of the canon.

[42 : 07] But it's just a warning. Scripture talks about God confronting the world in judgment. He promises he's going to do that. Do not disbelieve that.

It is real. There's that solemn word. All the joy and happiness of the New Testament is never denied. But it's a sobering message nevertheless. God will confront the evil that's in the world. We wouldn't want to believe in a God who doesn't confront evil. It would be horrible to believe that there is such a God. There isn't. Our God will confront evil. Therefore, Jude, as the canon closes, so to speak, in its canonical order, gives us that severe warning and tells us that God is able to make you stand on the day of judgment as he made his son stand before the world in resurrection glory.

Revelation, the last book of the Bible, what could be easier than this book? After all these letters, we draw to a close here, after all these letters, these theological letters, we might expect something different to round off the New Testament.

And we sure get it, don't we? But it's interesting to know, but that not right away. The apostolic letters are followed by seven more letters. These letters purport to be written from heaven, right from heaven.

[43 : 29] The Lord gave messages to seven churches. The vision revealed Son of Man. He has his own letters collection right at the last. And then, of course, the apocalyptic ending of this book of 27, showing the church heaven's plan for the ending or fulfilling of all things.

What if I saw heaven opened? What if in heaven there was an open door? Jesus opens heaven. Jesus is the open door that shows us the way to heaven.

The canon, I take it, tells us something by ending this way. Is it to be humble, to be lowly wise, as the poet puts it? I suppose so.

This is a book for the whole church to ponder, be very humble about it, and to discuss it in godly conversation. It is a mysterious book opening up realms of great mystery that teach us great things. We are made for such great things, this book seems to say. But we're not quite ready for it yet. We await our resurrected bodies. Before we have them, we're not ready for that eternal realm, the new heavens and the new earth.

[44 : 51] I've raced through them, haven't I, this kind of survey. So I'll just say one more footnote, repeating what I've already said.

At Easter 1, here we are, the first Sunday after Easter. No resurrection and there would be no New Testament. Quote him before us, I'll quote him one more time.

The bishop of Durham insists that we get, he's wise on this, I'm sure, that we get resurrection, the idea of, into some real theological precision.

And here's his theological precision. Resurrection means this. Resurrection equals life after life after death.

Got that? Resurrection equals life after life after death. They're two different things. Life after death isn't resurrection.

[45 : 52] Pagans believed in life after death. Everybody usually, but even atheists end up sort of believing in it. Resurrection equals life after life after death.

At the end of all things, as Israel came to believe, all would be bodily raised up from death. And before the end, the dead live on in an interim place, variously named Hades or Paradise.

Paul calls it just being with the Lord. Jesus went to this place, so the New Testament tells us. Then he was raised up.

He had life given to him after his life after death. Jesus was raised up into, with, an eternal, glorious body.

And that will be our story after our life after death. Because of this life, this resurrection life, which came after life after death, again, the New Testament was written.

[47 : 00] Paul calls this body a spiritual body. Descriptions of this body, I think this is consistent with this good theology.

At least there are tentative descriptions of it at the end of all four Gospels. You know, Jesus was with the guys on the road to Emmaus. And then he disappeared. His body had a kind of freedom in the creation that we can't imagine.

But it was real. He ate food. He drank with them. He said, touch me. I'm not a ghost. You're not having a mystical experience. The Dean of the Cathedral is in error.

It isn't a mystical experience. Jesus was there. In a body. Spiritual body. It had new powers that we can't imagine. But it was there.

He ate food. As Michael Green liked to say, when he ate that fish in front of them, and Luke's God, he was saying to them, I'm not a ghost. Ghosts don't eat fish. They don't eat even bran muffins.

[48 : 02] They eat. There they were. Real. There's our destiny. And again, more importantly for today, I think, there's why the New Testament was written.

Jesus is the first resurrected one. And the New Testament is God's God-breathed witness to this mystery.

This is our future. To be raised up out of our corruptibility. We're all corruptible. You all seem good-looking. It's hard to remember this fact. Even you will get old and start to wither.

Look at me. You know. Times are passing. But this corruptibility, God is going to say, enough of that. I'll make you a resurrected body.

Forever. And I don't know. Will we read the New Testament in heaven? What is it? Do we see what it's about in heaven? We don't need the written word anymore.

[49 : 05] But we'll always remember it, won't we? What a book. What a book. Can you know this book too well? It will tell you what the big overall Bible means.

It's the great divine song which comes out of the whole Bible. Genesis to the apocalypse. It's great stuff. And I think, I hope that reviewing it all on Resurrection Sunday, number one, is worth our time.

And we do have time for conversation, rebuttal and whatever. But before we get to that again, we should do our brackets around this talk and pray one more time.

Shall we? Lord, we thank you for this book. We thank you for its mystery. Help us to absorb it, to read it, to mark it, to learn it, to inwardly digest it. That it may always sing in our hearts. Helping us to sing your praises. Better and better always. We pray in the name of the resurrected one.

[50 : 11] Our Lord, our Savior. Amen. I've never tried that before.

I've never tried a survey. A sort of look at it all time. So, you were guinea pigs today. And thank you for your patience.

But now, please let me have it. Don't be shy. You count to me my many errors. Sheila. Harvey, I just love your Coles Notes kind of talk about the New Testament.

Because it just pulls it together. But I guess my question is, if there was one book that we could do without, which one would it be? Did you listen to that stuff about the end of the apocalypse?

I've never heard the question before, so I don't know how to answer that. Well, does each one of them give us something quite unique to learn in the universe?

[51 : 29] Or is there one that is repeating what others have said? Or what others have written? Is there... I mean, we do not need to pay attention to all of the books.

In sermons or lessons or whatever in the church. I think the whole church pays attention to it all. Would you agree about that? Because we want to attend to the whole witness of God written.

So, I'm taking... As always, you have a pungent question then. Is there... We can all think of a book that we don't turn to that often, I guess. Maybe that book's a Jude.

Like, it's pungent. And I was wondering, what is this called mine? And it was a blank. Yeah. But then you realize that if you don't like Jude, you're not going to get away from it for long because you're going to come across something in Peter that almost repeats it, big chunks of it, word for word.

So you can tell, maybe by that, that... And this is one of my poorly made points. That the canon speaks to itself strangely.

[52 : 37] And it says, well, if you don't like that stuff in the book of Jude, remember that the whole... The church had such discourses in it. And the church thinks that such discourses, on occasion, at least, are important.

I didn't think I'd mention one... Remember, in 2 Peter, you got a reference to Paul's epistles. Or at least to some, probably some short collection of them. So within the canon, get a direct reference to something outside that book about, yes, we're in a community that knows about Paul.

Outside of that discourse in Peter, there's a reference to that guy Paul. So the canon sort of witnesses to itself that we are a united community. There is an apostolic witness. You can't just believe whatever you want.

The canon witnesses to itself that it's supposed to be here. I'm really leaning a lot. He would, meaning Wentz, if I say a lot, Marcus Bocquio writes a lot about canon issues.

And he writes what seems to me very intelligently. An Oxford scholar who used to teach at Learns Exchange. He's a brilliant man, Marcus. And anyway, these canon issues seem to be very interesting and important.

[53 : 44] But thank you. Thank you for that. I don't know how to answer your question. Well, I thought it was a good answer. Well, thank you. Jude ends beautifully, doesn't it?

That, that, that, now to him who's able to keep you from falling. It just ends with glory. I wouldn't want to do it ever. Has anybody done a survey course of the New Testament at some theological place?

Or at a church? Have you ever, some churches do surveys. And I think they're really worth, they're really worth your while if you get a chance to do one. I mean, that was just an awkward attempt at a survey.

Okay, here's the whole book. Here's the whole of the 27. Here's how, here's how it goes. And, you know. But survey courses are, can be very interesting.

You get a sense of the mountain range. Oh, this is how it works, eh? I see, you know. There's stuff going on here. Yes, Lism. Hi. Colleen. Yeah.

[54 : 49] It was a wonderful talk, as you said. I was really intrigued by having this whole gloss.

Really wonderful. And I was also thinking about something you said to me years ago about the first books of the Bible, Genesis and such, being wisdom literature.

And being understood by intellectuals for quite some time. And I was thinking about, what do you call Revelation used in literature? Because I was thinking about the swirl of mystery and imagery in, you know, the first five books of the Bible.

And then the very end of the Bible also sort of swirling in these mysterious and beautiful and on-site images. Yes, yes. We don't know a lot about what happens before birth.

And we have promises about what happens after death. But to really know, you know, it just seems to me to be, you know, from a literary point of view, it's quite brilliant.

And I just wondered if you would speak to that. Yeah, I don't know too much about, I mean, I've read the book, of course, and read commentaries. But it's small W, wisdom literature. But it's genre, obviously, it's apocalyptic.

[55 : 57] That was a definite set-apart, apparently, way of talking and speaking and writing amongst the Jews. Especially in the second and third, the two centuries preceding the century of our Lord.

Those kind of books, like Daniel, took over in their imaginations. And they're imagining the nations of the world that surround Israel in terms of monstrous entities.

As horrifying, bringing horrifying pressure upon the people of God. And it looks for strangely described liberators showing up to save them.

So they had that kind of apocalyptic, serve some sort of purpose. But that's the best answer I'd give you. Tom Wright's first book, *The New Testament People of God*, has good stuff about how apocalyptic language worked as he understands it.

And his thesis director at Oxford, I believe, G.B. She wrote a book about how the metaphors work and stuff. But the best popular book I've ever read, have you read it, Colleen?

[57 : 06] There's Eugene Peterson's book, *The Reverse Thunder*. It gives you a beautiful feel for how to read such a book. At the level, I think, of small W, wisdom. Sorry, that's not, you're being kind.

That wasn't much of an answer, right? Apocalypse. There is, of course, a little apocalypse in God. Mark has a little apocalypse. Mark 13. So there's a part that apocalyptic language takes over.

Can I give an example of what I learned from Tom? In Jeremiah, this is pure. In Jeremiah, you get things like, in all the prophets, things like, on that great and terrible day, says the prophet, the sun will go dark, the moon will turn to blood.

That kind of language. Now, that's apocalyptic and classic, as I understand it. So what is the prophet saying there? Well, the prophet is saying something very ordinary, in a sense.

Terrible, but ordinary, saying that when God judges Israel for her covenant declension and sends her into exile, it will be so horrible that you will think that the creator is undoing his creation.

[58 : 18] You're never going to look up and see a red moon or the sun going dark. That's painful literalness. Nothing like that will happen. But something worse will happen. An invading army will come, kill a whole bunch of you, turn you into slaves, and take you off to Babylon.

What could be worse? Again, the creator is undoing his, he's not faithful to his creation anymore. He's not being faithful, you'll feel, to his covenant anymore. How can Israel be faithful to the covenant when she's in Babylon?

When she's enslaved? So that's how that language works. It's pungent, overwhelming language about overwhelming events. But they're very, and in Thessalonians, there's some of that apocalyptic stuff.

There's touches of it, isn't it, Paul? But holding back the evil, that kind of stuff. It's interpretation, I'm sure, is disputed by people.

Anybody? It's ominous silence. There was silence in heaven for half an hour. Is that what it says? It's an apocalypse. Do you know that moment in the apocalypse?

[59 : 34] There was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And then Eugene Peters' comment on that is unforgettable. He says, Hush, hush, whisper who dares.

Christopher Robin is saying his prayers. When we pray, heaven listens. God commands silence in heaven because you're praying. There's a...

There's a... I love that kind of... There's wisdom, it seems to me. Bill, Bill. It's an amazing thing that...

What your talk has illuminated is the part of the gift of grace to the converted that illuminates it.

You know, that the... Part of the gift of grace that we get illuminates a measure of what we were looking at up there. I know it also works for the Old Testament, but...

[60 : 35] The most amazing thing I read in the past few hours... I haven't read it all yet. It was a book written by a Jewish scholar... Who is trying to explain away the Messiahship of Jesus.

And I suddenly realised that this man is talking from behind the veil, I would call it. The title of his book is The Real Messiah.

But he's talking from behind the veil, where there's no illumination of what the New Testament is all about.

That's the most amazing thing I've ever read. How the scriptures are manipulated to take away the Messiahship from Jesus by this Jewish scholar.

So he's in the dark. Deeply in the dark. And how the gift of grace that we have, the illumination that we have, draws that line.

[61 : 43] So firmly drawing the line from seeing and not seeing. And the idea that we can cope with 27 books, the way you've missed it, is truly a great reminder of that gift of grace that we have.

and maybe we're a little bit blasé about it. And... But to really confront the ideas from behind the veil, which hasn't been lifted in certain lives, reveals that gift of grace that we have, that we can begin to deal with what it means.

And I think this morning, for me, is a great, great reminder of what this legacy is, this group of books from the witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.

And it's very humbling, actually, to think of it in that way. But the shock to see what this Jewish scholar was doing with the New Testament scriptures from behind the veil is a very good experience.

because suddenly we see what grace has done for us to be able to help us through shins that scholars can't cope with.

[63 : 16] It's talked too long there, but... No. But it's... No, the idea of event preceding exegesis is dynamite.

And I don't think we should accept it too easily, I mean, but I think it's just true. So, I mean, your Jewish scholar friend and others, Jacob News and others, will just tell you, well, we're shocked at what you Christians do with our scriptures.

That's what they'll say to us. Richard Hayes, Richard Hayes has a section... I read this idea of event precedes from a guy named Hayes that Tom Wright is a great admirer of as well.

He'll do exegesis. He'll show you what Paul's doing in his argument to the Galatians. And Paul clearly believes that an event has occurred which tells us what scripture means.

And it's shocking what scripture, what the event does to scripture. So Paul will talk about how, to put it in the simplest terms, here we have amongst the Galatians in that region or in those churches, Jew and Gentile gathered together worshipping the God of Israel and confessing that Jesus is Lord.

[64 : 37] And what does Paul say? He says, well, this was predicted. And where does he go? He goes to the story of Abraham. And he says, through you I'm going to bless the nations. So Paul says, that fact is what that scripture meant.

Now how could you know that that's what that scripture meant before the event? You couldn't. Through you I'll bless the nations. That means, Paul says, we now understand because God has done it that Jew and Gentile are worshipping together the Messiah Jesus raised from the dead. Event, that's not just a casual statement. Event drives the exegesis. You can't start up with a Jew going through the Old Testament saying, see, see, see, this proves Jesus.

No, you've got to have the event of Jesus first. Then, the Old Testament falls into place, so to speak, if I may put it that way. It's amazing stuff.

It's amazing stuff. Isn't it? It's rich. Next week, I've been asked to do two in a row.

[65 : 55] You people are the most patient people in the world. I'm going to do a parable of Jesus. I won't talk about this in the introduction. Jesus does this kind of stuff. He tells a parable which evidently is about the whole history of Israel.

You know? Here, I'll tell you the whole story. And next week is the tenant, the vineyard owner sending his agents to get the crop, profit from.

And it's sort of one parable, and in a sense, it tells the whole story of Israel. So I want to go through another survey, but this time from a higher source. He did that kind of thing.

He did surveys. Let's talk about the whole story, Jesus says, this first. He told it right between the eyes. Thank you for your...

No more questions, no more... outrageous add expectations. Thank you very much for your...

Thank you. Thank you.

[67 : 04] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.