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#143 The bedrock facts of the resurrection - NT Wright & Justin Bass

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Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

Justin Brierley and Tom Wright are joined by New Testament scholar Justin Bass, author of 'The Bedrock of Christianity: The unalterable facts of Jesus' death and resurrection'. They discuss why the appearances of Jesus and the rise of Christianity count as historical evidence for the truth of the resurrection

For 'The Bedrock of Christianity': <https://justinwbass.com/>

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Transcript

[MUSIC] The Ask NTY anything podcast.

[MUSIC] Hello and welcome back to the show. Really glad to say we've got a fresh conversation with Tom for you today on the program.

I'm going to be introducing him along with another New Testament scholar Justin Bass for today's show. But just a reminder, you can find out more about the show. Get past archive of the programs, our newsletter, and much more at premierunbelievable.com.

When you register for the newsletter there, that's when you'll also get the opportunity to ask Tom a question for yourself.

And don't forget, while I've got your attention, we've got an exciting webinar coming up just next week. Tuesday 15th of November, Sean McDowell will be joining me. Culture War questions with Sean McDowell.

You can register, again, just go to unbelievable.live to register. It's absolutely free. But we'd love to see you there.

You can ask questions. Sean is a great apologist, thinker, speaker, and will be taking your questions on all manner of subjects. It's a live show, again, unbelievable.live to register for your free place.

For now, let's get into today's show.

[MUSIC] Well, hello and welcome back to the Ask NTY write anything show. I'm Justin Braley.

And today, Tom and I are joined by a special guest, Justin Bass, who I will introduce in just a moment's time. But first, a warm hello to Tom, coming to us as usual from his house in Oxford. Tom, it's been a little while since we recorded together because you've not been very well recently.

Do you want to tell us what the status is at the moment? Yeah, well, just briefly, and it's public knowledge, I picked up COVID while Maggie and I were on holiday eight weeks ago. And I thought it would last maybe a week or so, and the main symptoms did last a week and then declined. But I've been left with this elongated version of it, which is general tiredness and slight feeling of fluidness.

And just needing to rest a great deal. And then it's had an annoying corollary that I've heard people say this, that COVID apparently attacks weak places in your system. One of which seems to me to be my wrists and hands, and I've got arthritis quite badly in wrists and hands now, which is very painful.

And so I'm on various medications and so on. The doctors assure me that this too will pass and that more rest would be a good thing. I don't do rest very well.

So this is an ongoing problem. But anyway, obviously I'm here talking to you now. I can function at some levels, which is better than nothing, I suppose.

Anyway, good to see you. Well, good to see you too. And I'm thankful that you're feeling well enough to do a recording or two with us today at least.

And I'm sure there are a lot of people hearing that who will be praying for you as well. Tom, thank you. It's lovely to see you again anyway.

Justin Bass joins us on the show today. Justin is over here in the UK for a little while. We're doing some exciting things.

We're going to be recording a discussion debate with Bart Ehrman soon for our big conversation series. So that's very exciting and that will be coming out. Next year, but we thought we'd squeeze in a little bit of a conversation with you and Tom while you're with us here in the UK.

They're very majestic. Honor to be here. Thank you.

Honor to be here. Honor to be here with you and Tom. Thank you.

Justin, you're a New Testament scholar yourself. Tell us a bit about yourself because you actually have spent a few years, at least in Jordan teaching New Testament there. How did that all come about? Well, let me start with one little story about my conversion.

Yep, please. Next with Tom, if I can, because I think he'll enjoy this. But I got open my eyes in college.

There's a whole story with that. But soon after that, I was at Southern Methodist University, SMU. And I was on my way to get a business degree, to get a business degree, a master's in business.

And I was going to get a law degree. And everything changed. I wanted to just do religious studies classes.

And so I took these courses from this very liberal, you know, attack in the Bible every day, you know, questioning miracles, showing contradictions in the Bible, so-called contradictions in the Bible. And it led me to search for, you know, answers to those questions. And that was what originally got me into apologetics.

And I, people who I discovered were people like C.S. Lewis, William Lane Craig, Luke Timothy Johnson, and a scholar named Inti Wright. The book is said Inti Wright. And so really, really blessed to discover your books early on.

And so the evidence for the resurrection was always very, very early on key for my commitment to Christ and just how passionate I am for proclaiming the Lord and proclaiming the evidence. So it really goes back to those early days. Oh, that's wonderful.

Yeah. Well, you never know where your work is reaching, Tom, do you? And it's lovely to hear stories like that when they come to you. I think it was who was Jesus.

Who was Jesus? Ah, right. Okay. Okay.

1992. I remember. Well, I often say publishing books is like young adult children.

They go out into the world and they meet people that you've never heard of and they come back and tell you about it. It's kind of odd. That's lovely.

So coming to your time in Jordan, tell us about that. Because that's a really interesting place to be teaching New Testament. Yeah.

So the story with that is so after the Lord opened my eyes and SMU and I ended up graduating with a business degree, but then I went to Dallas, theological seminary and got master's PhD graduated with PhD in New Testament studies. And then I went on to pastor a church. I was teaching part time at DTS and I started debating atheist and different kinds of unbelievers.

And the whole time I actually thought the Lord was going to call me to the mission field from early on when I first heard about the unreached. When I first heard about all the people who had never heard about Jesus throughout the world. I was passionate about going, especially to the Middle East, but the call just never came.

And so around the time I was, I had been pastoring a church for about six years and my wife and I had the opportunity to go to Ammon Jordan. And while we were there, we felt the Lord call us, hey, sell everything and come to Jordan. And there was a connection early on from DTS because I don't know.

You probably know Dr. Amad Shahadi. He's written some great books on the Trinity. He's the president of Jordan evangelical theological seminary.

And he graduated from DTS in 1991 with a PhD and went back to Jordan. He's Jordanian, but he went back to Jordan and started the seminary. And I had that connection I knew about jets.

And so I met with him. That was one of the things I did when we went there to visit. And they had this great need for a PhD, you know, a professor, for a professor that had a PhD for accreditation and other things.

They really needed that help. And so everything just fit perfectly. And so I started teaching there, amazing students, sharp students.

They're training Arabs for the Arab world. And it was just such an honor to be there for three years. And COVID kind of ended my missionary career.

So we came back just to promote my book on the bedrock of Christianity and ultimately got stuck in America. We were only going to be here for a month and then we got stuck. But we ended up having to transition back.

And but the Lord took care of everything. And so but but I'm still connected. I haven't read it yet.

Yeah. So so we'll talk about the book in just a moment. But Tom, it's interesting.

I mean, have you heard of your work sort of being used in the Middle East much? Do you wear sort of the state of Bible scholarship there among Christians? Only tangentially, I was in Jerusalem for three months in 1989. And that's where I was working initially on my big project and teaching at the Hebrew University. And I got to know some of the Palestinian clergy, particularly in my time, who I was next door neighbor to when I was living in Jerusalem.

I think I must have retired by now, but he was then I think Archdeacon of the Anglican Church in Jerusalem. And I think he was then put up to be Bishop when the then Bishop retired, but then there was a bit of political stuff and he didn't get that job. But he's a leading, I guess, Palestinian liberation theologian.

And he wrote that book, Justice and only Justice were going back to the, I guess, to the 1980s now, 80s, 90s. I then did some stuff. I went to a conference of Middle Eastern clergy in Cyprus and gave some Bible, Bible expositions.

But apart from very brief meetings at conferences and so on, I haven't been able to keep up that link sadly. This is frustrating. I just yesterday sent apologetic letters to two people from other parts of the world who are inviting me to speak at some great gathering or other.

And I say, look, I'm sorry, I'm an old man. I just can't go getting around the world doing all this stuff. But it is fascinating to see.

But also, I've recently had contact with some folk from India, particularly working with the Dalit and so on, and very much concerned with the impact that the sort of things that I've been saying, particularly about new creation, could have on the kind of mission work that they're doing. So that's to say, no, not specifically to the Middle East, but to think things are happening all over the place, obviously. It would be so great to get Tom's books translated to Arabic, many of them, because over there, Tim Keller's books and see us Lewis books incredibly, and some of Chesterton's books actually are in Arabic.

Interesting. I honestly can't remember. I think there are one or two of my books in Arabic, and there are two of my books in Farsi as well, because there's a chap in Iran who translates my books.

And then he sends them out electronically and they are dispersed through the Farsi diaspora. So, yeah, stuff is happening again. I've got control of it.

Which book is in Farsi? I honestly don't know. I'd have to email him and find out. Like sending out your children and see what comes back.

It is exactly. Well, lovely to sort of be able to connect you both today through the podcast. Tell us a little bit about, and Tom's already waved it for the camera, the bedrock of Christianity, Justin.

This is obviously the subtitle is "The Unalterable Facts of Jesus's Death and Resurrection". What's the cool thesis of this book to you? Yeah, as Tom knows well, Biblical scholars, New Testament scholars disagree on just about everything today and over the last 250 years of Biblical scholarship. But where they agree is pretty fascinating.

And so, this is something that really finds this origin for me in my time in seminary, in my time in the PhD studies. And just finding where they agree was fascinating to me. And really where they agree when it comes to the sources and certain facts is Paul.

And so, you can very simply say Paul, certain aspects of his biography, certain letters by him, seven today, but across the last 250 years, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Romans and Galatians. Everyone across the board, there's this small little segment of German scholars that may have been spoken something in Tubingen that denied it for a while. But ultimately 99 percentile, we're talking, agreeing that Paul's regulations, Paul's letters, Corinthians, Romans, the details of his biography within those books are historically accurate.

And then certain facts then emerge from those letters, especially concerning Jesus and his death and resurrection. And the ones I focus on, there's many more, but the ones I focus on in the book are his crucifixion, the fact that Jesus was crucified, again, across the board, everyone agrees. But I also add, and this is really an expansion, I'm trying to do an expansion a little bit on what Tom has focused on, because I haven't seen this a lot in the resurrection books.

The second fact, which is the unique unparalleled claim of the resurrection. I think Christians don't emphasize enough the claim and how unparalleled it is, and really it's a mutation. I like the Larry Hurtado's language of the fact that the early Christians were speaking positively about a crucified man and about crucifixion in general, that's just unparalleled.

The fact that they were even talking about resurrection, the Daniel type resurrection had happened in a single individual and that happened in the Messiah. This was unparalleled. And then that this person that was crucified had risen again in the Daniel type resurrection is also divine in some way.

He's one with the Father. There's only one God, and somehow he is a part of that on that side of the divinity. He is on the Creator's side.

So that would be that kind of threefold unique claim. And then the third is the appearances. This is pretty much throughout Church history.

This has been the number one way Christians have shown the proofs of the resurrection that he appeared to all these people, and mainly the ones cataloged in 1 Corinthians 15. So we're talking Peter, the 12, the 5, the-- And again, is there a broad agreement among scholars about the disciples claimed that they had experienced the risen Jesus? Exactly. And specifically, we could say Peter, James, and Paul.

I think when you get down to really the bear, again, Bed Rock. And I'm going to add Mary Magdalene because even Bart Erman agrees with Mary Magdalene. And so those four individuals and the other three are mentioned in the earliest Creed.

This Creed found in 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul quotes. So he appeared to Peter. He appeared to James.

And last of all, he appeared to me. It's interesting that those three happened to be the ones that across the board scholars agree on. And those three happened to be the ones we also have strong historical evidence that they died for their faith, that they were martyred.

So it's just an extraordinary thing. We know that they believed Jesus appeared to them. And we also know that they died believing it.

That's an extraordinary thing to me. Tom, just talking about these particular aspects, Paul's witness to the crucifixion and the resurrection, the uniqueness of these claims and indeed the appearances as well. Anything to add to what Justin's already said there? Well, I mean, I'm basically sitting here agreeing with everything I'm hearing, which isn't difficult.

Obviously, scholars have debated, well, maybe there was this little bit in 1 Corinthians 15 or that little bit, which we could pull out or tweak this way on that. But Justin's basic case that 1 Corinthians 15, 3 and following is bedrock. I think he's very widely accepted.

Interestingly, Simon Gavigole in Cambridge has just produced a book called The Gospel and the Gospels. Or maybe the other way around the Gospels and the Gospel, I'm not sure. But he's taking 1 Corinthians 15, the confession of faith there and saying, let's run this as a test through not only Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but also the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of the Hebrews, those second, and third, fourth century, often gnostic texts and just see how they compare.

And his thesis is, guess what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, conform very strikingly to what Paul says was the unique early witness. Now, I have other problems with Simon's book, but on that, I think everyone is agreed that that 1 Corinthians 15 text really does take us back to the beginning. This is, if Paul says to a church that had many different factions within it, this is what we all preach.

As you know well, then we can be sure that we're on safe ground there. The question

then is, of course, what sense can we make of that? Because everyone knows that Christianity was supposed to teach resurrection, but for centuries, a great many people have said, oh, well, they were old fashioned, they believed in all sorts of weird and wonderful things. Which we with our modern knowledge, no couldn't possibly happen.

And so that's where the debate comes in. Yeah, well, that'll be part of the debate we are having with our airman suit. But I'd love to sort of spend some time talking about the final fact that you bring to bear in the book, and this is what you describe as the rise of the Nazarene.

Do you want to just describe that for us, Justin? Yeah, and this one too, I feel like I'm expanding on something that Tom brings out in resurrection of the Son of God that I feel like, as far as I've seen, just isn't really brought up in other books on the resurrection and many books focusing on, even on early Christianity. And it's the fact that there were, by my count, I don't know if Tom actually did a number, but my my count, 14 other movements that Josephus mentions that Fyla of Alexandria mentions that some are mentioned even in the New Testament. But there are 14 other messianic type movements, not all of them are probably a leader that claim to be the Messiah, some of them probably did.

But they're all movements that are very similar to Jesus. They have a charismatic type leader. They gain a lot of followers, some of them even claim to do miracles and different things.

And then they, the thing that really separates all of them from the Jesus movement is the leader and their followers fight against Roman some way. There's some type of violence attack. And so the leader ultimately gets killed, ultimately gets crushed by, you know, whoever the Maximus, you know, gladiator Maximus Russell Crow is at that time.

Basically, they get beheaded or something happens to the leader of this movement. And then the movement's in the followers of this charismatic messianic type leader, whoever they are. Ultimately, those followers just go and get jobs.

They don't ever say this leader is alive in some way. And so let's keep this going. They're a lot more stubborn than the, you know, 19th century Millerites.

That's one of the things that really hit me when I was writing the first of my big series, the New Testament and the People of God. And I remember it was a sudden clarity, which actually sustained me through a whole term of hard pastoral work back in my day job. The sense that all these other movements, when the leader died, you had a choice.

You either had to give up the movement, or you had to get, assuming you'd survived yourself, or you had to get another leader. And the fascinating thing is that the early church did get a leader and it was Jesus' brother, James. And how easy it would have

been granted, we know of other movements where they find someone else from the same family, the line that ends up with the people who die on Masada in the early 70s.

They are part of a family that goes back nearly 100 years. How easy it would have been for them to say, well, of course, we love Jesus. He was great, but of course they killed him.

But now we have his brother, and he's obviously the one, and he's a great man of prayer and a fine teacher, and he's respected universally, et cetera. So he must be the Messiah. But nobody ever said that James was the Messiah.

And that kind of negative evidence, like Sherlock Holmes's dog that didn't bark in the night, you know, the fact that nobody said James was the Messiah. Well, no, they wouldn't because they knew that Jesus was, and the only reason why they knew he was was that he'd been raised from the dead. And so that's a kind of a no-vum.

It's something that bursts into history in all sorts of senses. Yeah. And I think it really shows the kind of mindset that these especially Jewish men had at this time, and this mindset wasn't, we're going to try to figure out how to keep this thing going when the leader dies.

You know, it's like, the leader dies, it's done. And so, I mean, it captures a kind of mindset of this time period. So it always frustrates me when they do, you know, when people challenge, you know, the idea of the resurrection, they try to compare, you know, the Jesus movement with, like, movements from America in the 19th century, like the Millerites who, you know, predicted Jesus would return in 1844 or something.

And then when he didn't return-- And they just shift the goal post. Yeah, they just change it. Oh, he returned invisibly or something like that.

They weren't like that. And also love that it's a counterfactual. It's a counterfactual because we know that Jesus movement could have gone just like the other 14.

And so the question is, the historical question is, well, why didn't it? And I like to compare, you know, Simon Barcockbuzz, the most fun to compare with Jesus because Simon Barcockbuzz actually did. We know for sure claim to be the Messiah. He actually did the one thing that no other messianic pretender ever did.

He actually reigned from Jerusalem for almost three years, issuing coins, you know, writing letters to his generals. I mean, he actually had a little pretend kingdom for almost every year, the incredible thing. When you say pretend a pretend kingdom, I mean, it was, I've often said to the students, it was basically a three-year kingdom of God movement with the Messiah at the heart of it.

From Jerusalem? I was so glad when I saw that you were going, doing a lot with

Barcockbuzz in this book because I found over the years that most students have never heard of Barcockbuzz. It's as though they may be heard of the story as far as 80, 70, and then maybe the writing the New Testament extends a bit, but then they kind of tune out after that. But actually the Barcockbuzz parallel and of course, 200 years earlier, the Maccabi parallel, which is very interesting, the resistance movement there against the Syrians.

And those kind of frame the Jesus story, both in the sense of, well, it's like that, and then in the sense that, guess what? It turns out radically different. And as you said a moment ago, one of the differences being that even when they're being persecuted, Jesus followers don't fight, as Jesus himself says, to a Pontius Pilate. If I were a king from this world, my servants would fight to stop me being handed over.

And that carries on. And that's the other real extraordinary noveme, that this is a messianic movement, a kingdom of God movement, but it proceeds not by force of arms, but by the kind of witness we see in Acts, which is the telling of the story, prayer, healing, communal life, suffering, martyrdom, etc. That's how the kingdom of God advances, which was as much of a puzzle.

When you look at Acts chapter 1 and the disciples are saying, is this the time you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel? It's as though they're saying, is this when we get to do the stuff with the swords and kicking out the Romans? And Jesus saying, no, no, no, no, no, just wait and see. It'll be quite different, but you will receive power, but not the sort of power that they expected. And that leads to another aspect.

So I feel like I'm taking now that same kind of argument that you I feel like originally made with the 14 other movements, comparing that to the Jesus movement saying, well, if those failed, why didn't the Jesus movement fail? So I'm doing this kind of century by century, not every century, but I'm doing this by other key events that have happened throughout the last 2000 years. And so another one would be going along with exactly what Jesus says. You know, you're not going to fight.

You're not going to know we're not going to destroy the Romans yet. We're not going to bathe in the center's blood yet. That's coming Psalm 58.

That's coming. But ultimately, you're going to receive power from the Holy Spirit. You're going to go to Jerusalem.

You're going to start here in Jerusalem, just like Isaiah two said, and then you're going to go to Judea and Samaritan. Then you're going to go to the ends of the earth. And of course, we would agree, Luke, Luke himself, probably when he said ends of the earth, maybe he thought of Spain, but Rome seems to be the center of what he's talking about.

But what does the Holy Spirit mean when he says ends of the earth? I think the Holy

Spirit clearly thought of wherever there are people, as far as the curse is found kind of thing. And so an argument with this is this could have not happened, right? I mean, it could have not happened that the gospel would go to the ends of the earth. And so in the ends of the earth from Jerusalem, one place would be something like Papua New Guinea.

And Papua New Guinea has apparently last I checked 90% at least professed to be Christian. So to me, it's kind of incredible that you have a movement that is .00001% of the Roman Empire. And I believe there isn't Jesus said that, but even a skeptic who thinks that this was, Luke was written in the late 80s or 90s AD, they're writing this.

It's still a very small percentage of the empire. There was no guarantee that this gospel would go to Papua New Guinea. It would go to every nation on the planet.

And so, see, to me, that's another counterfactual. The gospel could have not done that. The Christians could have not been successful, but they were.

Absolutely. And I think we in the post-enlightenment Western world have been kind of bullied by the Enlightenment rhetoric to imagine that actually when we look out at the world, Christianity is really part of the problem rather than part of the solution. And then you see what has happened with education and medicine and care for the poor and so on around the world, where the gospel has gone.

That's been the characteristic, which are, of course, the Jesus shaped things that the church has always done. And you say, actually, so much as the argument that Tom Holland has made recently, so much of what we now take for granted in terms of how we do stuff comes ultimately from a Christian imperative. It's certainly not the way that the Roman emperors would have run the world.

So, yeah, I mean, I'm fascinated at the end of the world. Of course, when St. Patrick in Ireland believed that Ireland was the end of the world, because that was the farthest northwest that you could get, so that if the Irish had been converted, then the end would come. He didn't realize there was something else over there.

That's a lot. A whole other chunk of the world. But one of the things that's been born in on me recently in the New Testament, again and again, they're retrieving passages like Psalm 2 and Psalm 89, which are about the messianic rule from one sea to the other from the river to the ends of the earth.

And Psalm 2, particularly extending the Abrahamic promise, it's not now just one piece of territory in the Middle East. It's the whole world. Ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, the uttermost parts of the world for your possession, so that the mission of the church is the messianic mission, which is foretold, promised in Israel's scriptures, and which then is fulfilled in a way that nobody saw coming.

But it has, as you say, it has happened. It's ongoing. And okay, we've still got a lot of mess and trouble, and the church is still far from the lovely society it ought to be.

But the name of Jesus has gone round the world and back again. I was going to say, to that extent, you're both Bible scholars, but obviously these arguments get used in a sort of an apologetic form to argue for the truth of Christianity. This is obviously for you, the resurrection makes best sense of all of these bedrock facts, just as that's what you would argue.

I'd be interested, Tom, do you think that this is a good approach to kind of trying to persuade people of the truth of Christianity to say, look at the historical facts, look at at least the very basic facts that all scholars can agree on, and that you can point people towards a conclusion that is ultimately supernatural in form? It's very difficult because, as I say, most people now know only too well the bad side of the story, whether it's the crusades, the inquisition, the burning of witches, the this, that, the other, and in present political circumstances, you know, all sorts of things which you could pull out like the Russian Orthodox bishop, supporting the Ukraine war, et cetera, et cetera. Oh, well, if that's your Christianity, and I think we have a question possibly down on the song sheet for later on, I'm not sure if we'll get to it about the present state of things in America, but also the many scandals that have gone on in different parts of the church, and of course the media love that because so much of the media, certainly in my country, is driven by either agnostic or rank atheist producers and directors who love to tell stories of how stupid and wicked the churches. So everybody kind of knows that stuff, and we have to remind them of what people on the ground know perfectly well, that actually the church does all kinds of amazing things in ways that never make it into the news media, and so that's a problem of perception.

So I wouldn't immediately rush to say, well look what a wonderful thing the church is, that must be a proof of supernatural origin, except in this sense that I think it was Stephen Neil who said the church must have been energized by the Holy Spirit because it's been so muddled and so sinful and so stupid that if it hadn't been for the Holy Spirit, what would have perhaps been to its own weight long since. So I'm happy with that talk. Yeah, yeah, yeah, another way, the way I put it, I've made this point in lectures and I've used this in debates and I'm curious to hear how you think about this, the way I've put it when it comes to the great things that the church has done is I say, when we compare the worst in the world with the church, the church has done probably all the sins and maybe more than other things and other movements and other religions and other things in the world.

So sin to sin equal, but what about when we compare the best with their best? That's my argument. What about when we compare forgiveness in the history of the church with other religions or atheists? What about when we compare that? You show me a Father Maximilian, a man who stood up and took the place of a man at Auschwitz and then

starved and died that priest, Father Maximilian, and he died in the place of that man in Auschwitz. Where's the story like that outside of the Christian church? The Amish forgiveness, the guy comes in and shoots all the kids up and the Amish forgive them.

You don't find that kind of forgiveness in Islam, in Hinduism, in Buddhism. This is a distinctly Christian type thing and it goes back to Jesus on the cross saying, "Father, forgive them." Absolutely. And you see it and it's very interesting that when Stephen is martyred at the end of Acts chapter 8, he says, "Lord, don't play this sin to their charge." Now, as we were saying about other innovations, so if you look at the Jewish Marta stories, for instance the Maccabean Marta stories, the Martas, as they're being tortured and killed, are calling down God's vengeance on their persecutors and that's what you do.

That's the most natural and obvious thing and it could claim some support from some of the Psalms, etc. But the radical difference that Jesus makes at that point is so extraordinary that it is still mind-blowing. It's very interesting that forgiveness right there at the heart of the Lord's Prayer isn't it interesting that we pray that day by day, forgive us as we forgive, etc.

That is one of the central bits of Christian DNA and it stands out and it's obviously healing and fruitful and regenerating in ways that the rest of the world can't imitate and often can't understand. And if I can add to that, I don't know if you heard that challenge that Christopher Hitchens would bring out regularly and see Christians would dismiss this challenge that he would bring, but I actually thought it was a good challenge and I thought it should be met. He would say, "Tell me something that Christians can do that I can't do." And he would go around and ask this and they would say, "Well, we're all just sinners and stuff like this.

This would be some of the ways Christians would answer it." But I think he's right. If we are new creation people, if we are Easter people, if we are filled with Holy Spirit, there should be things that we do that none of the rest of the world can do. And interestingly, Hitchens did admit that one of the answers he received that he thought was a good answer was, "You cannot from the cross say, Father forgive them.

They know not what they do." But he went back on and said, "Yes, but I don't think loving your enemies and forgiving your enemies is a good thing." So, of course, and you having lived in the Middle East will know, I remember when I was living in the Middle East in 1989, somebody said to me, "Of course you realize that in this part of the world, forgiveness has never been a virtue because forgiveness is seen as weakness, because if somebody does something wrong, then justice demands that we get even. Otherwise, the world is a mess because justice is what matters." So, justice in the sense of retributive justice, meaning that forgiveness, "Oh, you're just being a wimp, or you can't stand up for yourself, or you're not looking after your family or whatever it is." And that

really struck me, and I remember coming back to the UK after my time in the Middle East there and thinking, "The UK is not perfect, but at least in this country people know that they're supposed to forgive, even if they don't do it all very good at it." It's been a wonderful conversation. Thank you.

We've got more chance for you both to interact on future episodes of the show, because Justin's going to stick around for some more conversations and some questions that are coming up in the next couple of episodes when we talk about the New Testament, the Gospels, and Resurrection as well. But I've really enjoyed being able to introduce you to each other. So thank you for being with us, Justin, and thank you, Tom.

It's been a blessing, been an honor. Thank you very much. Great to be with you.

And just a reminder, the bedrock of Christianity is Justin Bass' book. We often talk about Tom's books on the show, but today we're talking about Justin's book. It's available.

We'll make sure there's a link from today's show. But for now, Justin and Tom, thanks for being with me. Thank you.

[Music] Thank you for being with us on this week's edition of the show. Coming up next time, Justin Bass will continue to be with us. Tom's back again as well.

And we'll be looking at some of your questions on the Gospels. So look out for that. For more from the show, PremierUnbelievable.com. Don't forget as well.

We're not far off our special day. Tuesday the 15th of November. Cultural questions with Sean McDowell.

Hope to see you there. Do register at unbelievable.live. Now, thanks for being with us, and see you next time.

[Music]