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#145 Should I use the word 'heaven'? Will we know everything in the new creation?

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Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

A listener wants to know if the suggestion of Old Testament prophets being raised from the dead presents a problem for the uniqueness of Jesus' resurrection? Is 'heaven' the in-between-state before new creation? Will we know everything once we are raised? Tom answers listener questions along with guest scholar Justin Bass.

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Transcript

[MUSIC] >> The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast.

[MUSIC] >> Hello and welcome along. NT Wright is one of the best-known New Testament scholars in the world.

I'm Justin Bradley, the guy lucky enough to sit down with him on this show and ask your

questions. And today, a listener wants to know if the suggestion of Old Testament prophets being raised from the dead presents a problem for the uniqueness of Jesus' resurrection in the New Testament. And what about our resurrection? Is heaven the in-between state before that new creation? Will we know everything once we're raised? Lots of interesting questions today about resurrection.

Tom's answering them along with once again our guest scholar, Justin Bass. Thanks to Rama in Canada who gets in touch to say, I'm so thankful to have found this podcast. So many of the questions asked are also my own.

What a comfort to know. I'm not the only one. Thank you, Rama.

And do leave us a rating and a review to help others discover the podcast. You can find out more from the show, of course, as well at our website, premierunbelievable.com. Just before we jump into today's conversation, just a shout out to all our US listeners as this show drops, of course, on Thanksgiving. Hope you have a great weekend.

One of the good things to come out of Thanksgiving weekend in recent times is that the following Tuesday has come to be known as giving Tuesday. That's Tuesday, the 29th of November this year. It's a day to turn the tables on the commercialism of Black Friday and support your favorite causes.

Well, if you would like to support us from wherever you are in the world, not just the USA, on Giving Tuesday, you can do that. There's a link with today's show info. If you do make a gift, it makes a huge difference to us meeting the costs of the Ministry of Premier Unbelievable.

That includes, of course, the Ask and To Write Anything podcast. You'll be helping us to bring thinking Christian faith to many more people. You can give right away, by the way, you don't have to wait until Giving Tuesday.

The link is with today's show, so thank you for partnering with us. Right now, let's get into today's conversation. Welcome back to the show.

We're really privileged at the moment on the Ask and To Write Anything show to be joined, not just by Tom, but by Justin Bass, who's our guest, who's bringing his own perspective. He's got his book, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, that I'll make sure to link to again from the show. We're talking about one of the specifics that Justin deals with in that book today, Resurrection, some of the questions that have come in, not just so on the Resurrection of Jesus, but also on Resurrection in general, what will that Resurrection state be? Those kinds of questions are quite common, aren't they, Tom, when they come in? Let's talk about, first of all, one of the specifics.

I might start with you, Justin, on this one, and then bring Tom in on this, which is Philip in Oznerbrook in Germany, asking, "Was Jesus really the only example of a Resurrection

before the general Resurrection?" I'll give his full account of this here. He says, "I think Tom Reiter said multiple times that the disciples "would never have expected a single person to be raised from the dead, "but only all of Israel or the whole world at once, "and uses this as an argument to show that the disciples weren't inventing "the Resurrection of Jesus." Now, in the Gospels, though, there are people who think Jesus is an Old Testament prophet that God raised from the dead, and when Jesus asked Peter who the people think he is. So, doesn't this idea that there are examples where people say, "Well, it wasn't Jesus, Elijah raised from the dead," and so on? Doesn't that show that the idea of a single person being raised was there, in some way? And then Philip goes on to say how lovely he finds the podcast.

But, yeah, I've heard this from other skeptics as well, saying, "When you talk about the uniqueness of this particular claim, "was it so unique, given that there seemed to be hints that perhaps it wasn't unknown "this concept of a single Resurrection?" Yeah, I mean, at the first point, it's interesting that the only place you could find may be a possible outside example from Jesus isn't the Gospels themselves. So, this is only in the Gospels, these kind of statements. But first, yeah, I think it is, let's separate these passages first.

Outside of that, there is no, in Second Temple Judaism, in any text do we find the hope of a resurrected Messiah, of Resurrection beginning in a single individual. And then later they would come at the end of the world. This is unprecedented, unparalleled.

So, when it comes to passages like this, I do think they're not always the easiest to figure out exactly what's behind these statements. But I think there was this very popular transmigration of souls idea in Greek philosophy. And it's interesting that Herod Antipas, when he learns about Jesus after he had beheaded John the Baptist, when he learns about Jesus doing miracles, he says, "Oh, this must be John the Baptist raised from the dead." That's the language that the Gospels give it.

But I think he's probably referring to some kind of transmigration of souls, because one, John the Baptist and Jesus were contemporaries, they were cousins, they lived at the same time. So, Jesus isn't John the Baptist raised from the dead. This would be some kind of almost reincarnation, or like I said, transmigration of souls, or something like that.

So, I don't think this is the Jewish idea of Resurrection. So, there might have been some fuzzy ideas in the folk understanding, mixing in with Greek and Jewish ideas. But I don't think this is a good example of any type of pre-understanding of a resurrected Messiah in the Jewish sense.

You'll talk about that, Tom? Yeah, fascinating the John the Baptist thing. And Herod saying that, I've often said to people when this question has come up, I don't think that even the most sympathetic supporter of Herod Antipas would have said that he was the best authority on classic Jewish belief in the time. I'm not sure that was his primary

concern.

But also, in a sense, he may have had this vague idea of the spirit of John the Baptist has gone to indwell this person. But as Justin just said, Jesus had been around at the same time as John the Baptist. And as far as we know, there would be no suggestion of somebody going and checking John the Baptist tomb to see if his body was still there.

And checking Selomi or Herodias' fridge to see if the head was still there and so on. You know, there's a sort of sense of we're not talking about the same thing at all there. What strikes me in a passage just after that in Mark chapter 9 is after the transfiguration, Jesus says, don't tell anyone what you've seen until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.

And the disciples are scratching their heads. And Mark says they were puzzled, wondering what the rising from the dead would mean. In other words, as far as they were concerned, as we know from, say, the response of Mary and Martha in John 11, oh, I know he'll rise again at the resurrection of the just on the last day, whatever.

And Jesus says, I am the resurrection. That's what resurrection means. They can't get their heads round.

The idea that the Son of Man, this strange Jesus that they're accompanying, is going to be raised from the dead. What's that going to be all about? And I think I would want to probe a little bit further as well and talk about how the resurrection, as we know it, came to mean. And I think, Justin, you say something about this in your book, *Bedrock*, that I think it comes in C.S. Lewis's *Miracles* as well, which was probably where I first read it, actually.

The idea of new creation itself being launched in the person of one man. In other words, this isn't a random odd miracle, like some old prophet happening to show up one day and say some rude things about whoever is king at the time. This is actually an event of cosmic importance.

And that's what's being claimed for Jesus' resurrection in a way that it simply wasn't for any of the other random things. And I was going to say, because obviously there are other resurrections that take place in the gospel, specifically the ones that Jesus performs on Lazarus and others. And can we assume that the type of resurrection that that involves was understood to be quite different to the sort of resurrection? Oh, yes.

Because those are people who would then go and live a normal life and die again. Whereas something has happened to the notion of resurrection itself, as I argue in various places. As you see in Romans 6, the Messiah having been raised from the dead will never die again.

Death has no more dominion over him. The resurrection with the capital R, if you like, isn't coming back into this life and living it again. It's going on through into a new bodily

life, which will not die again.

Whereas the raising of Lazarus, the raising of Jarrus' daughter, the raising of the widow's son at Nain, these are all people who will then live an ordinary life and die an ordinary death. Well, one more little thing that occurs to me is that there's that interesting little moment in Acts when Peter's been released from prison in terms of the door. And the disciples can't believe that he's been raised.

And they say to the woman who's seen him, oh, it must be his ghost or his angel or something like that. Angel. Right.

And was that a sort of... In Acts 12, yeah. Was there some sense in which people thought there might be some kind of, I don't know, angelic/ghostly sort of thing that happens when people die? Precisely. You've got it in Acts 23.

It's very interesting when Paul puts the cat among the pigeons in his hearing before the Sanhedrin because he knows that some of the mafarrisies who believe in the resurrection, some of the Sadducees who don't. So he says, this trial is all about resurrection. At which point the Pharisees take his side because they say that this man must be a good guy.

But they don't believe he's actually seen a genuine resurrection. They have a view of the interim state between the present life and the resurrection, in which you can either be an angel or a spirit. Interestingly, they don't say soul at that point, by the way.

And so he says, so the Pharisees say, supposing an angel or a spirit spoke to him. And in other words, maybe Paul has had one of those odd experiences of somebody who's in the in-between state. They don't believe he's actually raised from the dead.

But so that, yes, when they say it must be his angel, they assume Peter has been killed in prison, like James had been earlier in the chapter. And this is one of those post-mortem visitations. But that's perfectly compatible with then going to the prison, asking for the body and giving it a decent burial.

Yeah. And another good one that goes along with Acts 12 is the account in Luke 24, when Jesus appears to the 12 for the first time, minus Judas. It actually says they thought, you know, he was a spirit.

I guess, Fantasma in the Greek, they thought he was, you know, some kind of disembodied spirit, because I think this would have been the normal expectation if Jewish people at that time actually were convinced somebody that had died were in front of them. They would have thought of immediately some kind of like ghost type experience or an angelic type experience. But it was Jesus actually spending time with them, convincing them, touch me, let's eat, let me explain to you about the kingdom of God.

See, that's what it took. It took, I like Luke's language convincing proofs. You know, it took the convincing proofs of Jesus' time with them over a 40 day period.

And that's when they were like, okay, we're actually starting to begin to understand what rising from the dead actually means. Yeah. And the word there is plume, it's spirit.

And it's one of the things that I'm thinking about a lot at the moment that, that if we're to give up a fully biblical account of life after death, as opposed to life after life after death, which is resurrection, then the word the New Testament gives us is not soul but spirit, that as Paul says in Romans eight, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life dear to Kazune because of righteousness, whatever that means in that context, the spirit is the continuity. And Jesus is saying that we're past that stage as it were, that this is the real thing. This segues very nicely into another question here, which we'll skip to Shirley and Pudsey asking about whether we still call heaven the in-between stage before a new heaven and new earth.

So Shirley asked, granted our final destination is that new heaven and earth of the resurrection, what are we to call the place or state to which we go between our death and the second coming? Surely it is or could be referred to as the present quote unquote heaven and asks in addition whatever that is, do we still have an interest in what's going on here than that time as in the great cloud of witnesses that's referenced and so on. So what's your view on that Tom? Because obviously this is often a question that comes up what happens in that in between stage and you've said before, well we don't get told a lot about it but could we describe that as quote unquote heaven? We can if we like, I merely observe that the New Testament never does and you'd have thought if it was that important you might have expected there to be at least some hint of that. Today you will be with me in Paradise says Jesus to the brigand who's being crucified beside him not that Jesus is going to be there for long because he's going to be back but Paradise is a good word which is delightful but sufficiently vague as a way of saying it's a blissful place where you go to be rested and refreshed until the final place and there are the other texts like John 14 and so on which we've discussed on this show before.

So you can call it heaven if you like and there's that chap who wrote a book some years ago called heaven is important but it's not the end of the world and there's but my fear about using the word heaven is that it then people sink back down into it and think that well just going to heaven that's all that really matters and I think that's a problem in medieval theology. I mean Aquinas has a very strong theology of bodily resurrection and I'm not an Aquinas scholar but I gather from people who are that he says you know that the new creation and resurrection will be the most amazing thing but today's retrievers of Aquinas tend to be focused on going to heaven and having the beatific vision seeing God which is not highlighted in the New Testament at all in the way that people in that tradition have tried to do so I'm wary of using non-biblical or using biblical words in a non-biblical sense let's put it like that which I think is what's going on if we go that route.

Any thoughts? I'd be fascinated to know what Justin has to say on that.

On this intermediate state is it? Yeah I agree it's it's not the end of the world heaven's not the end of the world I agree with that what's after that is the most important but I do think the the New Testament does give us some idea of some of this intermediate type state where the souls of believers will be you know the the most common is away from the body is to be present with the Lord so for Paul he's going to be with Christ in some way and I think conscious the closest thing I think to calling it heaven would probably be 2 Corinthians 12 the fact that he was caught up to the third heaven that would be I think I guess the closest you could get to it to the idea that if you wanted to use New Testament language to call that that place the realm where we'll be heaven but another another place that that's interesting on the question of what will we be experiencing there Revelation 6 is one I always point to that the souls who are under the altar and this is I think in heaven in God's throne room they're crying out how long oh Lord until the end so they have this kind of understanding of longing and and you know things are not perfect you know we're not you know they're not floating on clouds and playing harps and everything's good and they're in an eternal state you know they're concerned with what's going on in the world and they're concerned with actually justice being done and so I think we too when we go to heaven will be kind of still kind of corresponding with what's happening on earth until Jesus renews everything in his second coming yeah I think the communion of saints is mysterious but really important that sense that we do belong to the larger company that we are the minority as it were the present and present Christians at least I don't know if that's true numerically but we are the present representatives of that great company but it's interesting that is one of the only two places in the New Testament where the word soul *psuche* is used to denote whoever these people are in between death and resurrection the other one being in Revelation 20 and that elsewhere for instance in the second Corinthians passage that you mentioned Justin Paul doesn't actually say that it's the soul I think he would say the spirit and certainly in Philippians 1 when he says my desires to depart and be with the Messiah which is far better I'm very wary of using the word soul there because people today still have this solidly platonic vision of an immortal soul which existed before all time and will exist forever and I don't find that in the New Testament so you're you understand that you're distinguishing spirit and soul as far as our immaterial self yeah it's difficult because the idea of an immaterial self if you take the robust view of what humans are in in God's will that I do then the idea of an immaterial self is almost a contradiction in terms and certainly I'm opposing the usual body soul dualism which says oh well the body's gone but the soul goes marching on that's basically platonic but I do think you have in the New Testament several hints that that when the Holy Spirit collaborates as it were with our spirit the spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are God's children etc etc then our spirit is then held onto if you like by the Holy Spirit in the near a presence of Christ until the time when the spirit the Holy Spirit gives us the new bodies which are already in preparation we've we talked about this before on this show but that's that's

what you're referring to as what I would say immaterial self or you know soul's last spirit that goes to be with Christ you would call that yes and I yes and I would see the work of the spirit I mean it's very for me it's very challenging in the sense that the person that I will be in God's ultimate world is the person that the Holy Spirit is doing the spirit's best to make me at the moment Rick Halzerdrant an awkward customer though I am and that when I die the what the Holy Spirit has wrought within me and what my spirit has become is the person that I then will be and the person that will then be remade physically and I haven't really finished thinking this through and I don't know anyone who's working down this line but I find it fascinating until we get there we may not really fully understand quite quite quite but on that along those lines and this is just we don't have to spend too long on this but Dick Emoryx here wants to know well firstly he says I really enjoy and learn so much from the podcast but I want to ask do you think that eventually when we are resurrected that we will know everything I mean things like how all of physics works and all those puzzles that have baffled the most brilliant minds like Einstein and Newton thanks so much what do you think then again I'll start with you Tom what will we sort of somehow have all knowledge when when we're in our resurrected form what's your thought of that I think it's quite possible that we will have all sorts of knowledge at levels that at the moment we can't even imagine but I suspect knowing the laws of physics or how to pronounce words in Hindustani or whatever may not be the forefront of our thoughts you know that that yes the glory of God's richly diverse creation will be ours to enjoy to help run I mean God's new world we are supposed to be the royal priesthood within that world so the knowledge won't simply be a head knowledge it'll be a vocational knowledge of okay we are now going to be put in charge of different aspects of taking forward God's purpose for his world whatever that will be any thoughts to add to that Justin I do I do love something Augustine says is toward the end of the city of God he said we're gonna be like the angels in the sense that we'll still be reading but not reading books we'll be reading Christ's face I like that kind of the beautiful vision you know but but I do I think it's important that I think this gets to that contribution of you know heaven being boring I mean if I knew everything I just can't imagine how this is going to be and I feel like because God is God and we could never learn everything about God we are going to be constantly growing and progressing in some way even in the resurrection new creation I think I think that's right and I mean it does no harm to ask the question but I think ultimately you're absolutely right Justin to draw this back to it's our knowledge of God our knowledge of God in Christ our knowledge by the spirit of God in Christ who knows what forms that will take I think we can say for sure knowing what we know about the present world and its beauty and its joy and its drama and its grandeur etc that it'll be like that only much much more so it's been so good to have you both on the show today to talk about resurrection in all its forms so if you want more from the show as ever you can find out more at premierunbelievable.com and send your questions in as well by registering with us and I'll make sure there are links both to Tom and to Justin from today's show but for now thanks for being with me Tom and Justin I really enjoyed it thank you very much I hope you enjoyed today's show next time can a

Christian vote for Joe Biden can faith be disentangled from left versus right politics it's going to be an interesting one and interesting to have Justin Bass joining us again for next week's show by the way if you do find the podcast helpful do consider supporting us this giving Tuesday in fact you can give right away to the ministry of premier unbelievable from wherever you are in the world the giving link is with today's show info you can also find links there for more from the show the podcast the newsletter and our next live event with Tim Keller as well coming up in December but for now thanks for being with us thank you if you can partner with us god bless you see you next time