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Week 14: Rescue LIFE

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Jeremiah Johnston

In the studio

RANDY: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Randy Robison. This is Tammy Trent.

TAMMY: Hello!

RANDY: Jeremiah Johnston is with us today and we're excited because as we roll into Easter, we hear a lot about the resurrection, of course, we celebrate this. It is foundational to what we believe. But do you know why you believe it? Do you actually really believe it? Or maybe you're questioning it and you want some answers. Well, you're going to enjoy today's show because Jeremiah has all of the answers. Isn't that right, Jeremiah?

JEREMIAH: I have a few.

RANDY: So your book, *Body of Proof* just dropped. Very exciting. What I love about this is it helps to arm those of us who have faith with some knowledge. But I want to hear from you.

JEREMIAH: Well, first off, it is so great to be back with you guys. We just so love the ministry at *Life Today*. It is such a joy to be back having this conversation because he is risen. And that is what we focus on, not just this season but every single day as a follower of Jesus Christ. We have hope.

The passion that I have is unlocking the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus because we're followers of Jesus because of an event in history that actually occurred in real space and time. These are real people, real places, real events. Had we been there that day we could have seen Jesus, hugged him. He could have touched us. And yet, so many believers are unaware of the

best evidences of why we believe that Jesus came back from the dead. And even more so, why it even matters today.

And so I did my Ph.D., you know as a Ph.D. I know a lot about little. And the little I know a lot about is on the resurrection of Jesus. So I'm marshaled the best of the best from studying in Oxford. But put it out, we're in about two and a half, three hours of reading, you're going to be fully up to date on not only the best evidences for the resurrection but how living a resurrection-centric life empowers us in our points of greatest adversity.

TAMMY: Wow! Why is it so important as a believer that I understand that it is a factual, that it is really something that really took place and happened? Why does it have to be so important to me?

JEREMIAH: That is such a great question. There are so many fun ways I could answer it.

TAMMY: Answer it in a fun way—answer it in a fun way for me.

JEREMIAH: Well, we wouldn't be here if the resurrection had not occurred in real space and time. I mean in a devastating passage in First Corinthians 15, Paul says if Christ hasn't been raised, we're the most to be pitied. People should feel sorry for us because if this event did not happen in space and time in history, if it wasn't a real fact of history then we should be pitied. But he said, "But Jesus has been raised from the dead and therefore, we can be steadfast, we can be vigilant, we can always be abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that our labor in the Lord is not in vain."

What I love about the ministry here of *Life Today* is Paul, at the end of First Corinthians 15, remember there wasn't verse changes or versification or even chapters when Paul was writing, he was writing a letter. The very next verse is First Corinthians 16, verse one. And he goes right from the power of the resurrection to hey, Christians, get your checkbooks out. We have people that are suffering, we need to take an offering. And so even the resurrection empowers our ethics today to combat evil. Like this ministry is doing right now, to combat the greatest evil, the evil of

human trafficking, living a resurrection-centric life and knowing the evidences of the resurrection empowers me to stand up against evil when I see it. Because Christ comes against evil, and the hope of resurrection brings people out of bondage.

RANDY: People who are not Christians, not believers, or maybe have some other faith, they would say, I don't need that to stand against evil. So why would you consider it better or even necessary?

JEREMIAH: Because it is a fact of history that everywhere the Christian message goes, and that is a great question, Christianity improves society. There is more equality, there are more freedoms, people are—it is no problem killing people in countries or enslaving people if God is whatever you want it to be. There is something about the Christian world and life view that honors life that causes us to stand for the marginalized. And that's what you all do here at *Life Today*. And that is one of my seven reasons for believing in the body of proof is that everywhere this message of the resurrection goes, it changes not only hearts, but it changes society and communities.

RANDY: For the better, at least when it is done right. I know some people that might be watching right now who might not be a Christian might be saying, but! But! The church allowed slavery; a great example of not following the words of Jesus or following the Bible and the consequences. Because those who were, the abolition movement totally helped get rid of such evils.

JEREMIAH: And the way that the resurrection empowered women. I wouldn't be a Christian without the impact of female leadership in my life. And when you think about one of the points that I make in *Body of Proof* is if we were making up a religion, if we were trying to like hey, let's make something up to really trick people. We know Jesus didn't raise from the dead but let's make up a story. They did a terrible job. They did it all wrong. Because in the first-century world, we would never have females being the first eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. Like you wouldn't make it up that way. You would do something better.

In fact, I'm an expert in second and third-century works and they seem to fill those gaps. These are not canonical works, they're not in the scriptures, but they seem to have Roman governors and even the Jewish high priests that are the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection.

RANDY: So reliable sources.

JEREMIAH: Exactly. [Talking over each other]

RANDY: Not the woman who used to be in an unseemly position worthy of death.

JEREMIAH: So this evidence is so robust. So what I wanted to do was most Christians have never, there are 260 chapters in the New Testament; there are 300 passages where the resurrection is mentioned. If we don't understand the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus, we're missing the key to our strength. Because it is not just about Jesus' resurrection, the promise of John 14:19 is a promise that is given to the believer with more frequency than any other promise in the New Testament. Jesus said, "Because I live, you will live also." So our resurrection and Jesus' resurrection are linked and that empowers us.

TAMMY: My goodness, I could sit and listen to you all day. You're so studied, first of all. And even when you two guys are talking, I'm like wow! Wow!

JEREMIAH: I'm just trying to keep up with Randy, his YouTube channel. I love it.

TAMMY: But you know so much about the Word. And it makes me feel like when I'm sitting here just like, I—why don't I know? Why don't I know? I need to be a defender of my faith. I need to understand the depth of the resurrection. And I think I do, but when I sit here and listen to you, Dr. Jeremiah, it's like there's something new that I'm getting from this for the first time as a believer my whole life.

But you're so passionate, you're so studied, was there ever a time in your life where you doubted all of this? You said, "I don't believe it."

JEREMIAH: Yeah, I wasn't a Christian thinker and I wanted to become one. I wanted to make sure that I wasn't just conditioned to believe that Jesus physically bodily rose from the grave. And I don't necessarily recommend this for everybody, but I told Audrey one day, my wife, we're going to move to Oxford and want to study if this really happened.

I heard for three and a half years the greatest arguments against the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus. Even in my viva, which is my oral defense, with living voice in Oxford, a Bible scholar who doesn't believe in the resurrection said, "Don't you just think that's imaginative storytelling?"

I share that story in the book. I said, "No, professor. The evidence leads me to believe Jesus, yes, physically, bodily rose from the grave."

He said, "I don't see it that way. Let's start your viva." And he later passed me with commendation. It's now published in an academic series for the dozens that read academic monographs.

But what's great, though, is the fact that I heard, to answer your question, the greatest comebacks, if you will, to the resurrection and utterly unpersuaded by all of them.

Here's the cool thing about our faith. Unlike any other religion or belief system that you've mentioned, Christianity puts itself to the historical test, whereas other religions and isms eschew any kind of relation to history. For example, Christianity's closest cousin is archaeology. And so that's why with new discoveries, with Jewish burial traditions, we can see, we can learn more about the robust evidence for the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus. So archaeology is a huge friend of Christianity. And it is fun. It grows on our faith because as a believer, I have to pursue truth. The most dangerous place we can ever get to is if we're deceived. And by the way, when we're deceived, we're usually the last person to realize that we're being deceived. Other people can see it. But it is a dangerous place when we stop pursuing truth.

And Christianity had died. Luke 24, these two, we know one of them is Cleopas, we don't know the name of the other on the road to Emmaus, they had walked seven miles from Jerusalem. And the force of the Greek is we had hoped Jesus was the Messiah, but I guess he's not. He died on the cross. They don't realize Jesus is walking with them. And what does he do? He shows them from the scriptures how they testified of him. And they said, "Were not our hearts burning within us?" So no one ever expected the message of the resurrection. No one believed that way in the first century. It was innovative.

RANDY: I mean, it is kind of crazy to think somebody died and came back to life and ascended in bodily form. So let's be honest about that. It takes faith. Why do we need evidence then?

JEREMIAH: Because faith is not believing in the absence of evidence, faith is believing in the evidence. We have faith in all kinds of things. We need to doubt our doubts, by the way, too. I'm a Christian because the evidence is so strong that Jesus physically, bodily rose from the grave.

So I've shared this story as well. It has a very real impact on my daily life. As I'm writing this book and as I'm praying through the pages, my wife has helped me understand that when we make an evidential point there should be an immediate pastoral point. Why does that matter to a mom like my wife who has five kids? That's great, you know that but how does that help me to be a better mom today?

So when I was writing *Body of Proof*, my little sister, Jennie Lee, she and her husband experienced a stillborn baby at 25 weeks. And we have ministered to my little sister through that. And that informed how I wrote *Body of Proof* because of the resurrection, yes, she grieves, but not without hope. Wesley is with Jesus right now. We can talk about our loved ones who have died in the present tense. I don't talk about loved ones, my oma and opa are living today with Jesus. They're more alive than they've ever been. And that's because of the resurrection.

TAMMY: Our whole faith is based on the resurrection.

JEREMIAH: It hinges on it. My passion, though, is, this is why I thank God for *Life Today*. The

resurrection of Jesus is truly understudied, it is under-preached, it is under-taught. We know we believe it, but we don't know why. If you look at the Christian marketplace, there are not a lot of books just dedicated to this theme oddly. Yet, it is the center of the Christian worldview. So I'm anxious about teaching it more.

RANDY: You have seven of the best reasons, not just seven reasons, seven of the best reasons. You hit a couple of them. Hit a couple more highlights.

JEREMIAH: Absolutely. So Jesus demonstrated resurrection power. So he didn't just say that he was going to personally, bodily rise from the dead. He demonstrated resurrection power, the widow of Nain's son. By the way, the skeptic who's watching this. Well, you're treating the New Testament documents as historical documents. Yes, I am. I'm looking at them through a critical eye treating them as historical documents.

The church had a hashtag. This is another thing I love. Did you know the church had a hashtag? "On the third day," if you look at the gospels, if you look at the early Christian proclamation it was hashtag #on the third day. Jesus had a way, I love this, of Messiahnizing passages and applying them to himself. And he would take Hosea 6:2: On the second day, he will revive us. On the third day, he will raise us up before him that we may live before him. He takes Hosea 6:2 and applies it to himself. And in Mark 8:31, Mark 9:31, Mark 10:33 and 34, Jesus predicts his forthcoming death and resurrection on the third day.

Now keep in mind, do remember Peter? He didn't want to hear anything about that. He said, "Not so, Lord!" And do you remember what Jesus said to Peter? "Get behind me, Satan." So even the disciples didn't quite get it. And that's why we have the words of institution, communion, "Do this in remembrance of me." They still didn't quite understand. They were hoping for a conquering Messiah that would kill the Romans, vanquish a corrupt priesthood, and purify all of Israel. They didn't understand the Messiah was going to die.

And so that's why Jesus said—that's why he had to predict it. There is something innovative about the book. I'm delighted to say in the original contribution to knowledge, there is a new

argument for the resurrection. There was no psychological reason to invent a resurrection narrative in the Christian message. Judaism is a coherent religion. They already believed in an eventual resurrection. They could have honored Jesus as a great rabbi. They didn't have to invent this whole resurrection story. Why did they? Because it actually happened.

TAMMY: That's so good. I remember hearing you talk about that and I'm like, I'm going to write that down. He really knows a lot of stuff here. You're teaching us so much.

JEREMIAH: It's empowered my faith in ways that great adversity that we all face. The resurrection gives us hope and it allows us to face evil, it allows us to face adversity, it allows us to face uncertainty. Because faith doesn't equal certainty, faith equals trusting God through uncertainty. So the resurrection helps me do that.

RANDY: I think it also helps in a lot of very practical things that we go through losing a loved one, our own suffering. Just the idea of eternity changes the way we view this life. How much perspective shift takes place when we understand, not that it is just a nice story, and that yeah, we're going to act like this is a Santa Claus thing? Yeah, Jesus rose from the grave. But I don't really believe it. When you actually look at the evidence, let the faith take root, and now my perspective has shifted towards eternity. How does that impact everything in life?

JEREMIAH: Well, you're hitting on something, Randy. It's the center of a Christian worldview. And by the power of the Holy Spirit within us, our worldview can change. We become converted to Jesus Christ. He begins to change our worldview. And then when we begin to realize that we're not living for the 80 or so years on this earth, we're living for all eternity, and we know we're going to live again.

In fact, it is fascinating to me, the New Testament talks more about the resurrection than it even does heaven. Some day this new heaven, this new earth, we're going to live physically in a new heaven and new earth. Yes, we're going to live in heaven immediately when we die, but a new heaven and a new earth are coming. The early writers of the New Testament seem fascinated by the fact that it was all about a resurrection-centric faith. So they were able to look through the

adversity, the challenges that they faced, they did so with hope. That's why they were able to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

And Paul passed on that legacy when he wrote First Corinthians 15. We see this in First Peter chapter one, verse three. Because of the resurrection—I love this—First Peter chapter one, verse three: Because of the power of the resurrection, God keeps our salvation protected. God himself saves us because of the resurrection.

RANDY: I want to ask you this real quick, and I'm probably going to open that big can right here at the end of the program with not enough time. But— [talking over each other]—in the Garden of Eden, God said, "If you eat of this you will die." They ate of it. They died or didn't die? Right? We would say physically they didn't die but spiritually there was a death.

When we talk about resurrection, do we need to talk about it in the future tense or can we look at the salvation work of spiritual rebirth and already taste the resurrection now?

JEREMIAH: Absolutely. That's a great, again, perspective. Because of the resurrection, we can talk about it in the present tense. We're already glorified with Christ in heaven, Ephesians tells us. And so yes, that reality is true. It is now and not yet. When we face the resurrection, it is now and not yet. We know we are already seated with him in glory. Soon we'll see him, it says, through a glass dimly. Soon we'll see him face to face. And I'm looking forward to that day.

RANDY: I love it. And I love your point about it changing our perspective now and changing our actions and enabling us to go into areas with this newfound purpose to help people, to alleviate suffering. In fact, Tammy, we have an opportunity right now to do that.

TAMMY: Yes, we do. It is an incredible opportunity that we've all been given to come together. Would you take just a moment and watch this?

On the mission field

ANNOUNCER: Tonight there will be children in various parts of the world who will not be tucked into a warm bed by a caring loved one, who will not experience the security and safety of a permanent place they can call home. Instead, they will be found in streets filled with drugs and violence or down alleyways teeming with strangers who could harm them. And for some, they will find themselves trapped in broken homes of grinding poverty and despair.

All of this becomes a breeding ground for the unimaginable, human traffickers who will target these children, kidnap, and force them into the sex slave trade. For most of these children, the sexual abuse will produce physical and emotional scars that will haunt them for the rest of their lives. For others, they may either die in captivity or simply disappear never to be heard from again. These are the realities that no child should ever have to face—but they will.

Every minute, two children will be exploited by a sex slave trader somewhere in the world. Who will be the next victim?

End of video**In the studio**

TAMMY: There is clearly so much more work to be done. We really can't give up. We can't stop. We have to come together. We have to bring an end to this as quickly as we can. I believe that that's going to happen. I believe we can help make that happen. But it starts with saving one child at a time. And together—together we can make a difference and bring life to these little girls.

RANDY: I kind of want to run up to that one guy that you saw in that roll-in where this dude's my age or older and there is a little girl there. And you want to run up and say stop! In some cases, we can, and we will. But in most cases, I think the best course of action is to just get the little girl out of harm's way; to rescue these girls, to reach them before they ever are taken. Tell them look, there is something better in life for you than this. Restore them, give them that hope for a future.

And that's what Rescue LIFE is about. It is about you guys enabling us to continue the work on the ground with our many partners around the world, in some cases, to build a place for those who have been rescued to go and be restored and to hear the gospel, and to learn a trade. All of this happens only because you care enough to reach out and say, yeah, we'll partner with you.

And right now, Tammy, we've got that matching gift. Very excited about that because now that means that your gift today of \$64 will reach a girl. Normally, it's an average of \$128; that's just what it breaks down when we look at our overall operations, the number that we reach. But that's doubled today. So if you want to have a double impact, a gift of \$128 will reach, rescue, or restore two. A gift of \$1280 will reach, rescue, or restore 20.

Whatever it is that you can do, Tammy, I know that we cannot just reach into hell with a bit of heaven, but we can give a girl something to live for.

TAMMY: Absolutely. Something to live for. And I'm sure that, Randy, right now they feel like they have nothing. They have absolutely nothing. I'm sure that they don't even know it to ask for it at this point. They don't know what to pray because it just feels so hopeless. And every single day feels the same and looks the same. Will it ever change?

Today, we have an opportunity to change that for them. And so we're asking you if you would consider partnering with us in that way to bring change to the lives of these little girls. I know it will change their lives forever. I want to give them hope, and I want to give them a better future. Let's do that.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: *Innocent children and young people longing to be loved and cared for are being abducted and sold at the hands of violent predators, forced into the evil industry of human trafficking.*

Through Mission: Rescue Life you can reach out to warn children who are at risk for sex trafficking, rescue those already enslaved, and restore young lives and give them a future. With a generous \$320,000 matching gift, now your gift of \$128 to help reach, rescue, or restore one child can be doubled to help two children. Your \$64 gift will be matched to help save one child from the horrors of human trafficking. And a \$32 mission rescue gift will be doubled to \$64.

With your gift today, we'll send you "Believe This, Not That!" featuring the promise from heaven for every need on earth. This book is a resource every believer should have when facing discouragement, pain, fear, or the vast array of negative thoughts that attack all believers.

With your gift of \$128 or more, you'll receive "Experiencing Israel," by Tony Evans. Discover the holy land like never before and view stunning scenes in spectacular full color photography. Also, find practical applications that bring the world of the Bible into your life today!

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280 which will now help save 20 children. And you may receive our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Consider the Birds."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

On the mission field

>> I remember the first time my wife Andrea and I stood right here. This place was a construction zone. There was mud everywhere. It was dirty and messy. And there were holes, so you had to really be careful where you stepped.

>> But as the new foundations were laid, we watched this area completely transform. It became a place of safety, a place of beauty, a place of healing. It really is a picture of what this rescue is all about.

>> So that's why we work alongside law enforcement. We participate in raids, and kids are freed—kids are freed from slavery. And then they're brought to the Child Rescue Center.

>> But there is still so much more work to be done. Millions of children just waiting to be rescued. And together with your help, we can reach these children, rescue them, and restore them body, mind, and soul.

Please just do what you can. You will literally be setting these children free who are now enslaved and enabling them to reach their potential that God intended.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: I hope you are going online, going to the phone. Make the best gift you can. We can make such a huge difference in these people's lives. I think it's our calling.

When you do that today, I hope that you'll request *Body of Proof*. Because Jeremiah Johnston will equip you to just understand how the resurrection matters in our lives. What do you want people to walk away with when they pick this up?

JEREMIAH: I want Christians to walk away knowing that Jesus said, "I'm the resurrection and the life. Though you die, you will live. You will have everlasting life." So empowering them to know the resurrection.

The amount of truth, the data is so powerful that Jesus rose from the grave. But not only is it powerful in history, it is powerful in the present. I want Christians to have a robust faith that is centered on the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus. It is going to be a game-changer. This is something they're going to be able to pass on to their children and their grandchildren as well. This teaching is one that has carried the church.

TAMMY: Thank you so much for writing this book for me, and for so many others. Every

believer needs to read this book. Thank you for putting the time in, for putting the work in, for studying so hard.

Thank you so much for watching. And we'll see you next time on *Life Today*.