

A Savior Foretold

SCOTT HOEZEE

Movie directors sometimes talk about the MacGuffin. The MacGuffin is a key part of the story that drives a lot of the action. Now, a MacGuffin could be something like the Holy Grail that everyone is looking for; or it is some precious artwork people are seeking, like the bird statue in the movie *The Maltese Falcon*. Usually, the MacGuffin is introduced early in the story, and then it drives the action. Well, in the Bible, we find something like that. It is mentioned early, and then drives the story all the way to what we now call Christmas. Today on *Groundwork*, we will think about this. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is episode one in a four-part Advent series that we are doing for Advent; and we are going to be pondering, in this series, Christmas, but from parts of the Bible that we do not usually associate with Christmas.

DAVE BAST

Right, exactly; so, four parts because there are always four Sundays in the season of Advent. It is the time leading up to the 25th, when we celebrate Christmas—technically, the Feast of the Nativity of Christ; but you know, most people, I think, if they are somewhat familiar with the Bible, know that the Christmas story is in Luke Chapter 2; that is the heart of it...a little bit in Chapter 1, with the Annunciation; or they might think about Matthew 1, where Joseph is brought into the story, or Matthew 2, with the Wise Men; but that is about it as far as Christmas is concerned, in the Bible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, Christmas is previewed and thought about and anticipated in a lot of different parts of the Bible, including one of the earliest passages in the whole Bible, and that particular passage is going to be what we are going to look at on this *Groundwork* program. We are not doing this just sort of because it is interesting or it is, you know, an intellectual exercise to look at different parts of the Bible. We are really doing this to broaden our perspectives on what has become a key Christian holiday, which is Christmas.

DAVE BAST

Right; and you know, for many people, it is their favorite holiday. A lot of that has to do with holiday traditions; and in fact, for some Christians...maybe for many Christians...it is a little bit disturbing or distressing to see the commercialization that has come into the season; but really, this, at root, is such a wonderful celebration because what we are celebrating is the truth of the Incarnation...that this is the moment when we acknowledge that God himself came into our world; that God took human nature upon himself...that he was...without ceasing to be God...without giving up what he was...he became really, truly, fully human; and he did it to save us...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He did it for our salvation. So, you know, if you are not going to celebrate that, what are you going to celebrate?

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we really want to deepen our appreciation for what that is all about; and of course, the broad lines of why we needed a savior are pretty familiar to most of us; in fact, we did a series on *Groundwork* not long ago from the earliest chapters of Genesis. So we know God created the world good. He carved out a safe niche for Adam and Eve, our first parents; but they then fell into sin. They disobeyed God; they decided maybe they could order the world a little better than God had done it, so they tried to reorder things, and of course, it does not turn out well at all. They fall into sin. Now, instead of having a close relationship with God, a chasm, a canyon, a gap opened up between human beings and God; and God had to find a way to close that gap. So, that is where we get our need for a savior, and we learn all of that already in the first three chapters of the Bible.

DAVE BAST

Right; but before we look at that, and specifically the third chapter—Genesis 3—it is interesting, I think, to reflect on some questions that might strike us as a little bit too theoretical, or too out there; but one question is: Did God get blindsided by this problem of human sin? Was he taken by surprise? Did he have to scramble and suddenly: Oh, I better come up with a new plan; or, is salvation...the story of salvation...of God's coming into the world; of his, living and dying in the person of Jesus, and then rising again...is that all sort of a contingency plan that God scrambled to put together after we surprised him by our fall into sin?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or, was it somehow or another something God viewed as inevitable? We will think about that in a minute. Some...and now, some might find this to be getting very speculative, and maybe a little odd, but there has actually been serious speculation across Christian history and Church history by some theologians, wondering: Might the Son of God become human, even if there never had been a fall into sin? Was there something inevitable about God wanting to unite with his creatures in that way? Such as, it would have happened, even if there had been no sin. Again, that may seem really speculative, but some have wondered about it; but more to the other point you were just raising, Dave, there are also some passages in the Bible that make you think that this whole plan of salvation was not just kind of Plan B, that only came up the minute Adam and Eve took a bite out of the forbidden fruit. Maybe something more ancient was going on, if you can even refer to it that way.

DAVE BAST

Well, listen to this, for example, from I Peter Chapter 1. Peter writes: ¹⁸For you know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, (which redeems us—which saves us); a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰He (Christ) was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

So, somehow, before God ever created the world, he knew...at least, he had chosen Christ as the perfect sacrifice or offering for sin, and that is kind of mind-blowing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is; and Paul says something to Timothy in II Timothy 1. So that was Peter, now here is Paul: ⁹He (Jesus) has saved us and called us to a holy life; not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace...(and now, here again). This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time; ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus.

So, there again, before time began we somehow received already this grace that saves us?!

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, you can really go around in circles if you think too hard, or try to put this together in too much detail; and you can go off the rails, too—you can get too extreme in what you suppose to be the case; but I think bottom line for me...I come away with the thought that God is not taken by surprise by anything that we do. God does not have to have contingency plans. God knows the end from the beginning, as the Bible says...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And he has always known that he would save us. He would do what it would take to save us through Jesus Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, again, as we are in this Advent series anticipating Christmas, this really boggles the mind and really begins to broaden out our appreciation for just what we are doing when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. This is something from the Ancient of Days. So, all of that is sort of like pre-creation...pre-time...pre-history...setting of the stage; but now, I think, what we want to do is turn to the action once the stage is set; and so, there is a verse very early in the Bible that is like an arrow that points straight at everything we ponder during Advent and Christmas, and we are going to take a look at that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we just noted that there are some really interesting Bible passages that may mean that what we now know as Christmas...the arrival of God's Christ in the person of Jesus...may have a history that predates history. It was a plan God made before was was, as my friend Luke Powery likes to say; but, that is, we said, the setting of the stage; now the stage has been set, so let's look at a verse from Genesis Chapter 3. Again, we did a series on Genesis recently; so, we pointed out that this verse has a really big, jaw-breaking term associated with it. It is called the *protoevangelium* or the *pre gospel*—the first hint of the Gospel—the preview of the Gospel; and it comes up in Genesis 3:14, 15.

DAVE BAST

Genesis 3...the early verses of the chapter describe Adam and Eve's fall into sin. They disobeyed God. They did the one thing he told them not to do. It was sort of a test of their love for him...their trust in him, and they failed the test; and God comes then and seeks them out and finds them, which is a beautiful thing in itself. I mean, he could have just let them go; he could have wiped them out; he could have said: Well, that was a mistake...you know...ball up the paper, throw it in the wastebasket, and go back to the drawing board as far as creation is concerned; but instead, God looks for Adam and Eve...he searches for them...he calls out: Adam, where are you? You know, an invitation to connect again; and then, though, he comes...and when he confronts them, it is with a curse; although, interestingly, he doesn't directly curse them; he curses the ground and the serpent; and so, this is what the Lord God said to the serpent:

3:14 Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals. You will crawl on your belly, and you will eat dust all the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

Just that last bit is that *protoevangelium*—that pre gospel. He will crush your head, though you will strike his heel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And maybe we should just admit that, kind of taken by itself, and if you were just reading this for the very first time ever, you might not right away think to yourself: Aha, hmm, yes; God is talking about his Son here, who is going to become a human being one day...take on the devil and wipe him out. In fact, actually, if you read those words, you might more naturally say: Oh, well; it sounds like there is going to be ongoing strife between Eve's children and her grandchildren and her great grandchildren and this serpent, you know: I am going to put enmity between you and her offspring. So, this is just going to go on and on and on. So, you would not necessarily, right away, read that and go: Oh, oh; we are talking about Jesus here...we are talking about a savior...

DAVE BAST

It's Christmas—it's the Christmas message.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; more naturally, you would just think: Well, it sounds like it is setting up a long history to come, where there is going to be this strife; but...that is in there, but scholars have long seen something more in that as well.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and remember here, the serpent is a stand-in for Satan...for the devil...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He is the one who did the tempting. He is the one who exercises a terrible malevolence and hostility against human beings. It is almost as if, because he cannot strike at God directly, he is going to strike at the crown of God's creation...at these people that God has made so lovingly, so carefully, made in his own image. So he strikes at the image of God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And, as you say, Scott, the result surely has been that all of human history has been a struggle with evil.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and it plays out here, right? It is a struggle between God and Satan, good and evil, but it does not just happen up in the clouds, it happens here. We did a series on Job a while back on *Groundwork*, too, and there we saw the book begins with sort of an argument between God and Satan, but they settle it, not by doing an arm wrestling match up in heaven, but it plays out in the life of Job here on earth...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this conflict between good and evil—between Eve's offspring and the serpent—is going to happen here; and so, it is also going to be here on this earth where God's solution is going to play out as well.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and it is going to play out in human history, just as the conflict plays out in history. You know, I don't think we should, from this, draw the conclusion that Satan directly attacks you, possibly; or that he...you know, he has some kind of magical powers...like vampire movies, you know...he is like a vampire, who goes around literally killing people. This happens through human behavior. This happens through the mystery of iniquity, as it is called in the Bible. So, the damage that Satan is doing is often indirect, and it is often caused by other people; but God's solution is also going to be caused through people...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He is going to take up the story of human history, and we actually enter history, literally, in Genesis Chapter 12, because history means you've got written records that go all the way back and tell the story; and the story that Genesis 12 tells is a story that comes into our world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so it begins. We talked in the introduction to this program about that movie term, the MacGuffin, something that gets introduced early in a movie or in a story, and then everybody is looking for the MacGuffin. Well, here is this figure. There is going to be a son of Eve one day—this is the Bible's MacGuffin—there is going to be a son of Eve one day, who is going to definitively crush that serpent's head; and you are right, Dave; from here on out, eventually in Genesis, we get the flood story, at the end of which God says: Well, I cannot deal with humans in that way. I am not going to flood and kill. I am going to go the way of grace; and so, then you get, as you just said, Genesis 12.

God says to Abram, "Go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you. ²I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you; I will make your name great; and you will be a blessing. ^{3b}All the peoples on the earth will be blessed through you."

So, that begins the story, ultimately, of Israel. That story continues now, later then, through David, right? So, we just said, in Genesis 3 we get the sense that a son of Eve will one day be the one to crush the serpent's head; and eventually that becomes known also as the Son of David.

DAVE BAST

Right, exactly; you know, it is really interesting to trace this, because what God is doing is, he is kind of narrowing things down in his purpose. So initially, in Genesis 3, the promise is: Your offspring, Eve...you know, one day a human being is going to be my means of undoing all this evil, and destroying the evil one; and then, many, many thousands of years later...maybe even more...it is one family of people...it is Abraham and his descendents; and not all his descendents. It is the people of Israel, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...their descendents. So, God has narrowed it down to one sort of nation; and then later on, it is one house within that nation—David and his descendents; and finally, it is going to be one person that God will work all his purposes out, and that ultimate son of Eve will be Jesus, the Messiah.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so, we said, Dave, that this widens our perspective; and it ought to deepen what we think about during Advent and at Christmas; and kind of how that goes is something we will ponder for a bit as we close the program in a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are in the first program of a series for Advent—these four Sundays that lead up to Christmas, where we think, as Christians, about God's coming into the world in Jesus, about his coming again to finish the work that he began in Jesus—the work of saving—of renewing all things; and we are looking at passages outside of the

traditional Christmas stories, that show us what God is up to; and we begin in this program, then, with Genesis 3 as the primary scripture that we are thinking about, and the promise of an offspring of the woman, who will crush the serpent.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we did not say this at the beginning of the program, Dave, but we could preview a little bit here, too, that in the next program we are going to kind of look at Christmas from the Psalms. In the program after that, we are going to trace the theme of covenant through the whole Bible, and how it climaxes at Christmas; and then, in the final program, we will go to the Bible's last book, to look at Christmas from the other side, from the book of Revelation.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you think Christmas is in Revelation? You bet it is, and just keep listening.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But here, what we have done is we have gone back to the beginning, to go even farther from the beginning, to widen out our appreciation of Christmas. We talked in the first part of the program about those mysterious passages that said that God made this plan, he established this grace, he chose that lamb without blemish before the beginning of time...before the foundation of the world was even laid. That certainly boggles the mind; but we also see that the sin of Adam and Eve, the dust of that first sin, had not even settled yet, and God said: I've got something in mind. I've got somebody in mind, and he is going to come one day and take care of everything that just went wrong in my creation.

DAVE BAST

Right; you know, if you stop and step back and think about it, there are really only two grand pictures of human life and human history. The secular picture sort of shows history as following a line. It is evolution and progress, and if you are an optimist, you say: Well, we are just getting better and better; we are getting more sophisticated; and that is going to keep going until we fly out into the stars and colonize outer space. The Bible's picture depicts something quite different. It has a starting point, where we are wonderfully created in God's image, but then there is this terrible fall. It is more like a U...a great big capital U...and God comes down at the low point to rescue us, and then he will bring us up and renew all things. So, you kind of have to take your pick between which of those you believe. Do you believe in this sort of human story without God, or do you believe in the big story of the Bible, of God's rescue mission?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and people want to know: Does life add up to anything? Does human life mean anything? Does the universe have a purpose or a goal? A *telos*, as philosophers and theologians like to talk about. Does it have a *telos*—does it have a goal? You know, there are people who...and we know a whole lot more about the physical universe than we did a hundred years ago even, right? We now know our own galaxy has a billion stars like our own sun. There are a billion others like it, and there are probably a billion other whole galaxies with a billion stars each. You can look out into that and join the cynics and the atheists to say: Of course life doesn't mean anything. In the midst of all of this vastness, we are nothing. But, you are right, Dave; if we take the Bible's starting point; that before the foundation of that whole universe, God had a plan; well, then we know, what we celebrate at Christmas is not just the birth of one little boy from the Middle East two thousand years ago. What we celebrate at Christmas is the glorious fact that the universe has a purpose...it has a goal...it has a loving God at the bright center of everything, and he has always had a plan.

DAVE BAST

Right; in fact, we talked at the very outset of this program about the possibility...could it be that Christ would have come among us and been incarnate—God would have been incarnate in Jesus—even if we had not fallen into sin? That is certainly possible. We don't know that, because, you know, that is not the story that the Bible tells; but one of the things God was doing in Jesus is uniting himself with us...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Sure; if we had not fallen into sin, no doubt Jesus would not have had to die, but he might still have come to be one of us. There is a wonderful piece of music written by J. S. Bach...maybe the world's greatest composer. He wrote a Christmas oratorio, and there is a piece there where he is musically depicting the shepherds and the angels in the fields outside of Bethlehem; and the angels' music is played by the strings and the shepherds' music is played by the reeds...like oboes and very homely...and they alternate: heaven-earth...heaven-earth...heaven-earth, until the very end; and on the last cord they all play together, and that is Bach's way of saying: Jesus came to bring heaven to earth; to unite God with us—the divine with the human.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is what we have been getting right from the beginning, right? It is not just a generic story—it is not a generic rescue plan. God is not just sitting on some far-off cosmic throne beaming some generic message of hope to the third planet from our sun. He came here in person. It is a very, very human story. It was a very human story in the beginning when Adam and Eve made that very human error of disobeying God, and bringing the whole creation down with them; but as we said earlier, if the problem started here on the human stage, God said, right from the get-go in Genesis 3 already: Fine, I will do a solution on the human stage as well. You mentioned the shepherds, Dave, and I think in a *Groundwork* program a while back we may have noted this, but when the angels sing their songs and make their announcements to the shepherds, they don't just say: Hey, there is a savior that got born over in Bethlehem; you can go see him. The angels say specifically: Today, there is born in the city of Bethlehem, to you, a Savior—a Savior has been born to you. That is how personal it is; and that is what we celebrate at Christmas. This is what God has wanted to say from the very beginning...from before the foundations of the world...this is a plan for you.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks be to God; and thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with us today on *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we take a look at Christmas from the perspective of the Psalms. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you; or tell us what you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

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