

Easter Hope

DAVE BAST

Christ is risen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is risen, indeed.

DAVE BAST

Amen; and that is the way Christians have greeted one another on Easter morning for 2000 years. Today on *Groundwork*, we listen again to the best part of all the good news; that Christ is risen from the dead, having conquered sin and death, and that he lives to save us. But that is not just the message of the New Testament Gospels; it was foretold centuries before in the Hebrew Scriptures. Let's look at that now on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and Scott, I want to start right away by reading a psalm; it is the 16th psalm, and it goes like this:

¹Keep me safe, my God, for in You I take refuge. ²I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord. Apart from you, I have no good thing." ³I say of the godly who are in the land, they are the noble people in whom is all my delight. ⁴Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out their blood offerings or take up their names on my lips. ⁵Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup. You have made my lot secure. ⁶The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Surely, I have a delightful inheritance. ⁷I will praise the Lord who counsels me. Even at night, my heart instructs me. ⁸I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ⁹Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices. My body also will rest secure ¹⁰because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, now will you let your faithful one see decay. ¹¹You make known to me the path of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the previous program, Dave, when we were in Holy Week, we looked at Psalm 22, which was a decidedly unhappy psalm. This is one of the happiest psalms; this is a psalmist who is full to the brim with thanksgiving and praise and it is just leaking out almost in every single verse.

DAVE BAST

The song of a happy man, we might say.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes. What is interesting about this psalm is, of course, he is looking to God in all things. He is looking to God in his present circumstances, where apparently, in Israel – in the Promised Land – the particular allocation of land God gave him must have been a really good one because he is saying: This is nice. The boundary places – the lines of my property are terrific!

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; it is interesting to me because in our culture property is determined by market forces. It is what you can afford, which is why the rich people have all the lakefront property and the view lots, as we say. But in Israel, if you know anything about the Old Testament history, especially the book of Joshua, God had declared that the land – the Promised Land – as the people of Israel entered it was going to be apportioned by lot; so they would toss for it, sort of, and in a way, it was the idea that God would give people the various places where they would live.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And everybody would get an allocation. There would be no haves and have-nots.

DAVE BAST

And they would have it for good. They would have it for keeps, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so, they had to remember – I recently just did a sermon on Naboth's vineyard, where Ahab and Jezebel – the wicked king of Israel – tried to take or get Naboth to sell his land so that Ahab could take over his vineyard and plant a vegetable garden. Naboth said: The Lord forbid that I would do that. Because Naboth remembered what the psalmist remembers, and this is the Israelites were tenants on God's land, and everything they had – everything they had – was a gift.

DAVE BAST

From him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is all grace, all grace, all grace.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, this guy really has it good and he is rejoicing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and yet, he is also recognizing that if his hope in God is only for this life – good though his life is – it is not going to be enough; and so he ends up going on here saying: Wherever I go in the future, you are going to go with me. You are going to be my GPS. You are going to be my guiding star, as it were; even beyond death. It is interesting some of the things he says, since we are celebrating Easter on this program, it is interesting what he says about life after death.

DAVE BAST

Yes, we do not always see, I think, that in the Old Testament there was a very dim understanding of what the future held, even for God's people. Their view of the afterlife was extremely shadowy, and they had this belief in what they called *Sheol*, and that word actually appears in this psalm. It is paraphrased in the translation that I read. You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, is what he literally says; and so, for the Hebrew, the soul was the core of the person – the breath of life, so to speak. They did not necessarily distinguish between body and soul sharply like maybe the Greeks did.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is the easiest thing in the world – I have done it and we have all done it, probably – but it is the easiest thing in the world at any given point to take what you believe today and just project it backward in history; and figure: Well, when I think about going to heaven when I die – I am a Christian and I have that – so everybody – Abraham believed that; Moses believed that; Miriam believed it – not true. As God has led his people along through history, he has revealed to us more and more things, and at this particular point in history, right; Sheol was not hell, but it was not nice. It was not necessarily – it was kind of a dank holding

cell.

DAVE BAST

Yes, the underworld; the Greeks called it Hades, and they had a very similar view, actually. What happened they thought as far as they could tell was that when you died, you sort of existed as a shadow somewhere in Sheol – somewhere in this underworld – and it was not at all pleasant, and it was not at all to be desired – and that is why so often you will read – especially in the psalms – the writers will cry out to God: Hey, heal me, please! Do not let me go to this terrible place where no one praises you. Where no one knows you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What good could I do you down there, O God? Sometimes in psalms of lament they would sort of bargain with God like that, saying: Hey, do not let my enemy kill me, because then what? I cannot do you any good down there; and it seems like they also believed that everybody went to this holding cell – everybody went to the realm of death – Sheol or Hades – but, in anticipation of what God is finally going to do, this psalmist somehow, by the Holy Spirit, I guess you would say, by inspiration, had a glimmer of hope, which you do not always read, actually; even in some other psalms they do not get this; but this psalmist had a glimmer of hope that if God is God, and if God is out to fulfill his covenant that he made with Israel to restore the creation so that all nations would come back to God, then it is going to have to mean something more than just life today in the Promised Land with a nice vegetable garden and a bottle of wine with dinner; it is going to have to be after death, too, that You are not ultimately going to let our bodies just go to rot. God has a plan.

DAVE BAST

And I think this is really, in a sense, the pinnacle of Old Testament hope as far as the future is concerned. This guy is saying: My whole life is bound up in God. If you ask me what makes me happy, it is not just having a nice place to live. It is not having all of these temporal blessings; it is knowing God. It is being with God. It is following God; and I believe somehow that that will happen even after I am dead. Somehow God will still be with me and he will restore me; and then he reaches this climax at the end: In thy presence, there is fullness of joy – I have to quote it in the old version – in thy presence, there is fullness of joy, and at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore. God is all about pleasure, ultimately, and that is what he is going to share with us; but, how does it happen?

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think we will look at that coming up next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and Dave, as we are celebrating Easter this year and God's victory of life over death, we have been looking at Psalm 16, and we have noticed – it is interesting that even though the views of the afterlife and what happens to our bodies after we die – even though the ancient Israelites and their view of that was very different from what we now think – particularly since we are on the other side of Easter – nevertheless, we were noticing how interesting it is that the psalmist seemed to have a hint, an intimation, a clue, that indeed, God's ultimate plan for us, and for our very bodies, not just our spirits, but our bodies, was going to extend beyond the grave, and that certainly is something that we know a lot more about now that we know the story of Easter.

DAVE BAST

Yes; it is really interesting how to read the Psalms if you are a Christian. You know, we read them first as the testimony of God's Old Testament people. You have to begin there. It is the experience of the psalmist that is being described here; and then, I think there is another layer of meaning where we take them up as the people of God. We see ourselves as having been joined to Israel, so we use psalms in our worship, we sing them, we recite them: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. We can say that, too. But the Church has, from the very beginning, believed that we also have to read the Psalms – maybe you could say on the deepest level –

as being about Jesus; and he is the subject of much of what the psalmists say and sing; and that goes right back to the Apostles themselves. That is how they read the Psalms. I have always felt that as Christians we are guided in our reading of all of scripture – Old Testament and New Testament alike – by the apostolic interpretation of it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think that is right; and I have always liked the line from the New Testament where, in referring to the scriptures, including the Psalms and all the promises that are made, they all find their yes in Jesus; and so, ultimately – even though exactly who God’s Messiah was going to be was not revealed until Jesus came – ultimately all of those scriptures, including Psalm 16, point forward, which, if we fast-forward from Psalm 16, and from that time way back when to another day in the New Testament, the Day of Pentecost, when the disciples are all in Jerusalem – it is about ten days after Jesus had ascended back into heaven – it is what we call the Feast of Weeks or the Feast of the Harvest – Pentecost – and all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples, including on knock-kneed, weak Peter, and he stands up and delivers that incredible sermon; the sermon in which he will bring in Psalm 16 eventually.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, if we want to know what the first Christian message was, we listen to what Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, as they burst out into the streets. And incidentally, here is one of the interesting points that has often been made in connection with Easter: What is it that transformed the disciples? You can talk about the empty tomb; you can talk about prophecies of Christ rising; you can talk about various testimonies of the New Testament; but one of the fundamental questions is: What transformed the disciples from frightened, hiding behind the locked doors in the Upper Room; Peter having denied that he even knew Christ when somebody challenged him; and now, all of a sudden, six weeks later he is out in the streets of Jerusalem saying to many of the very crowd who had cried: Crucify him! Listen, this is what you did, and this is what God did. And that is the essence of his Pentecost sermon. He says in Acts 2:

²³This Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. You crucified and killed him by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴God raised him up; loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ³²This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are witnesses. That is the first Christian message.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and if Peter had a scripture text – he had a couple of different scripture texts in that sermon – one of them was Psalm 16, and he will actually, if you look at Acts 2:25-28, Peter quotes a huge chunk of that psalm that we read in the earlier segment, including: My heart is glad; my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope. You will not abandon me to the grave, to the realm of the dead. You will not let your holy one see decay. So, now Peter is saying: That is Jesus. The psalmist was hoping that that would be true for him, and it is, but it was true first for God’s own Son, Jesus; and because it is true for him, it will be true for that psalmist who wrote Psalm 16, and for everybody who comes to Christ and who is in the Lord.

DAVE BAST

Yes, he makes a very interesting argument here on the streets of Jerusalem. He says... Okay, David wrote Psalm 16; that was the common assumption. Now, Peter says: David is saying of God, “You will not let my body decay in the tomb. You will not leave my soul in Sheol (or Hades, the underworld). You will restore me to life,” and then Peter points out the rather obvious: Well, you know what? That was not true.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It had not happened yet!

DAVE BAST

Because David’s tomb is here and we all know it. His body – like old John Brown in the Civil War song – it lies a-moldering in the grave – so Peter says in Acts 2:29:

I may say to you with confidence about David that he both died and was buried and his tomb is with us to this day. So, the question is: If everyone could see David is in his tomb, what is the psalm talking about? What does that mean?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus; and because of what Jesus has done – because God raised him up – then he will raise up David one day, too; but in the meanwhile, the fact that it happened to Jesus is the key; which reminds me, insofar as Peter is saying: Look, David was really pointing forward to Jesus when he wrote that psalm, Psalm 16. It reminds me of that line from the Nicene Creed – the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed – two creeds Christians often recite in worship. They are very, very similar. Both affirm our belief that on the third day he was raised again from the dead, referring to Jesus; but the Nicene Creed, I always like, throws in: On the third day he was raised again from the dead *according to the scriptures*, and that is not just according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John's Easter account. What the creed is saying is according to all the scriptures – Psalm 16 and all of what we now call the Old Testament – it all said the hope of the universe is going to be when God's Son rises again from the dead according to the scriptures; that is the great promise.

DAVE BAST

Right; well, you talk about Peter, as we have been, in his great Pentecost sermon, but Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15 summarizes the Gospel this way, in 1 Corinthians 15:3:

³I delivered to you what I also received – this is the essential Christian message, he is saying; this is what we have all said, all of us apostles right from the beginning – that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. (In our last program, we looked at Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 – those are the scriptures that speak of the death of Christ.) ⁴That he was buried and that he rose again on the third day according to the scriptures. So, that is where the creed gets that phrase. It gets it right out of 1 Corinthians 15:3; and here it is. Peter sees it in Psalm 16, and he declares it, and Paul confirms it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right. It is interesting, too, not all Christians affirm this, but there is that tradition some time of what is sometimes called the *harrowing of hell*, or that Christ led captives in his train. So, there is a tradition that some say that between Good Friday and Easter, Jesus went to Sheol – he went to that realm of the dead that we talked about in the earlier segment – and everybody there, Moses, David, Miriam, everybody was waiting and Jesus said: I am rising again and I am going to bring you with me. So, he led them out of that place and led them into the glory of the kingdom of God post-Easter, where their souls would be secure and where one day those souls would be rejoined to resurrected bodies. Not everybody literally believes it happened, but there is the idea...

DAVE BAST

I like the idea; and you just gave me a wonderful flashback. There is an ancient church in Istanbul called the Chora Church, and there is a very famous fresco on the ceiling of one of the chapels, and it is that very scene: Christ in his resurrection power has hold of Adam and Eve and he is lifting them up, and you can see all the kings and prophets trailing off behind; and on the top of it is the word *anastasis* – resurrection. That is what happened when God raised Jesus from the dead. The victory extends to us, too, and we want to look at that in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

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

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and we are talking about Jesus' triumphant resurrection from the dead; how it was prophesied in Psalm 16, proclaimed by Peter on the Day of Pentecost in the first great Christian sermon: You killed him; God raised him; we are witnesses. It was predicted by David in the Psalms, and as the Apostle

Paul also confirms, this is the core of the Gospel: Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; he was buried and he rose again according to the scriptures.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as N. T. Wright, the great theologian, in a recent book put it; his book titled *Jesus and the Victory of God*, which could be the title for Peter's great Pentecost sermon – but really, in a way, it is the title for every hope-filled Gospel sermon that has been preached for 2000 years. It is all about Jesus and the victory of God. What I love about the Christian tradition – and you remember this from seminary, too, Dave, and from our own preaching over the years – the Christian Church has nailed down a lot of things. We have been very clear about the doctrine of the Trinity and what that means, and we have been very clear about how you need to talk about the two natures of Christ, and so forth and so on; but the one area of theology that has always stayed a little bit open is the atonement. What happened when Jesus died and rose again? We have allowed multiple models to coexist together, because what we are saying is that when Jesus rose again from the dead, the effects were so huge, you are really not going to capture it with a single image; so, it is a little bit of everything. It is victory; it is new life; Jesus took our place; everything...

DAVE BAST

Substitution, penalty, payment, right? Example...

SCOTT HOEZEE

But because it is so big. What is interesting to me is even very soon after – not long after Easter – not long after Paul was converted to the faith – already in some of the earliest letters in the New Testament, written before the Gospels were even written down, we believe, Paul just could not contain himself when he talked about what happened. You think of Colossians 1: He is the beginning; the firstborn of the dead. He disarmed the rulers and the authority; all the forces of darkness; he triumphed over all of them in the cross. Of course, in the resurrection there is just no way to overstate this victory.

DAVE BAST

I think we could approach it from two directions. On the one hand, think about what the resurrection meant for Jesus, and what it meant, really, was vindication. What it meant really was not just that he is alive; not just that after the suffering and death that he underwent on the cross – that he endured for us – Oh, oh, now he gets to live again; and oh, he also has super powers. Wow, isn't that cool?!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Like it is a bonus or something, but it is not that.

DAVE BAST

What it really means is that everything that he said was true. All of the promises that he made are confirmed. When Peter says: You killed him, but God raised him, what he means to say is God reversed your judgment. You condemned him as a blasphemer; as an imposter; and God has said: No, no; he is the real deal, and this is the stamp, this is the seal; and it really settles everything. If you stop and think about it for just a moment: If Jesus actually rose from the dead, then we do not have to debate about: Is there a God? We do not have to wonder: Is Jesus really the Way, the Truth, and the Life? We do not have to ask: Well, in balancing all of these religious claims, how do we decide who is right? No, no, no. It is vindication, and the victory means that. On the other hand, what does it mean for us?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and through baptism, when we identify with Jesus, when we die with Jesus on the cross; we enter his death through the waters of baptism, and when we continue to commune with him through the Lord's Supper...

DAVE BAST

I think I might want to add faith somewhere in there, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, of course.

DAVE BAST

Not just the ritual of baptism, but the faith that it entails.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is the gift of faith and the gift of grace, and when you share by faith in Christ – when you live, as Paul said it again and again – when your spiritual address and zip code now is in Christ by faith, then you have that hope of new life, and you are, as David wrote in Psalm 16: My body also rests secure because God has a plan, and the firstfruits of that plan – the sneak preview of what all of our bodies will receive is what happened to Jesus on Easter; and that, by the way, is one of the most mind-boggling doctrines of them all – that bodies that have long ago turned to dust or were buried at sea or were incinerated or moldering in a grave – they are all going to be reassembled by the power of God and joined to our unique souls and we will all have an embodied existence in the kingdom of God. That is mindboggling!

DAVE BAST

Yes, it really is. How is that going to happen? There is a great passage from one of John Dunn's sermons where he says: God remembers where every particle goes, even if it is washed out to sea; and he whispers and he hisses, and somehow they all come together. I cannot imagine that; but if it means vindication for Jesus, and confirmation of all that he was and claimed and promised, it means victory for us, as we have been saying...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And for the whole creation...

DAVE BAST

And for the creation – the whole creation is waiting to be renewed, as the Apostle says. I love this quote from P. T. Forsyth, the great theologian of the early 20th Century. He says, "The evil world will not win at last, because it failed to win it the only time it ever could (at the cross, he means). It is a vanquished world where men play their deviltries. Christ has overcome it. It can make tribulation, but desolation it can never make. It is not going to win. The evil world is not going to win; God is going to win."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Christ has won because He has risen, and as we said, He has risen indeed.

DAVE BAST

Amen! Well, thanks for listening to our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what you would like to hear on our next *Groundwork* program.

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