

Glad You Asked (part 1)

DAVE BAST

Here at *Groundwork*, we say that we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives, and our faith as well; and we always, at the end of the program, invite you, the listener, to respond to us and ask us your questions or share your comments about what you have been listening to, so that we try to authentically have a conversation. Well, in this week's program, we are going to dig into the scriptures together to answer some of the questions that you have asked *Groundwork* this year.

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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are happy to be joined this week by our *Groundwork* producer, Courtney Jacob, who is joining us as we field some of the questions that have been sent your way, Courtney.

COURTNEY JACOB

Yes, it is my privilege throughout the year to answer the e-mails, the letters, and usually the Facebook messages we get on the *Groundwork* Facebook page; and it is encouraging to see people digging into scripture, and to find out what types of things people are wondering about. We get a really good mix. Some of them are life questions: How do I live faithfully? Others are very biblical. One of our faithful listeners sent us a question seeking clarity about a specific passage. The question she asked was: Can you help me understand what Jesus means in Luke 22:15, 16, when he says, "I will not eat again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

DAVE BAST

Well, maybe we should start by reading that passage; and just to give it a bit of context, this is in the Upper Room, at what we call the Last Supper.

¹⁵Jesus said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is very interesting, of course; so, this is the Passover. We have known as biblical readers, and certainly our Jewish sisters and brothers to this day know what Passover is. It is laid out very clearly in the book of Exodus. It is the night when the angel of death passed over the homes of the Israelites if they put blood on their doorposts. The angel of death did not take their firstborn son, as happened to the Egyptians. So, they commemorated the exodus ever since, and Jesus' crucifixion comes on Passover weekend. So, it is the typical Passover meal, but of course, what is interesting about this particular Passover is that it is not just the Passover, because inside the Passover liturgy, which has been familiar from time immemorial for Jesus and his disciples, he changes it from the inside. And so, whatever Jesus means by, "I am not going to eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God," he is probably pointing forward also to the new meal he is

instituting inside of the Seder, or the traditional meal. I think that is part of what is going on here.

DAVE BAST

Yes; also the key to me is that term *fulfillment*. It is going to be fulfilled; on one level, very simply. Jesus is saying, “This is my last Passover with you.” So, he is telling them that clearly. He knows what is going to happen. Somehow, the cross does not take him by surprise. He is not going to be shocked when he is arrested a few hours later, and say, “Oh, no; my whole scheme is coming apart.” No, he is going with open eyes to the cross; and the idea is really – which is drawn out later in the New Testament most fully – that Jesus is the true Passover lamb, and all of those celebrations for all of those thousands of years beforehand, going back to Moses – the original Passover – are really pointing to him, and in a symbolic way, they are saying God’s true Passover Lamb, the one who will die to deliver us from death, is Jesus himself. Jesus has that understanding of his own ministry; and the Apostle Paul will later write to the Corinthians: Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us. Christ is our Passover Lamb. So, that is the idea of fulfillment.

COURTNEY JACOB

Yes; when I responded to the listener, I actually found the parallel passage in Matthew to give a lot of – for me it was insight to what you guys are saying, because that is where Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper. It is Matthew 26:27-30.

²⁷Then he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the many, for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” So, there again, he is saying he is not going to drink it again until he is rejoined with them; but this time he brings in the kingdom again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In a sense what he is saying in both – well, in all of the versions, but in Luke and Matthew, and what you just read, Courtney – there is a sense in which Jesus is saying that none of them are ever going to drink the Passover cup, as it has been traditionally understood, because he is changing it. It would be like today a minister in the middle of a normal baptism, or in the middle of a normal celebration of the Lord’s Supper all of a sudden changing it and saying: This means something totally different than what you have ever thought. People would be shocked. And so, here there was a traditional cup of blessing in the Passover that stood for the blood of the lamb back in Egypt, and now all of a sudden Jesus is saying: It is my blood; and this bread is my body. There is a sense in which – because of what Jesus is about to do – there is a sense in which they will never have the normal Passover again. They will have what we now call the Lord’s Supper. Do you think that in Luke when he shows up at Emmaus and breaks the bread and gives thanks, is that the first fulfillment of this happening in the kingdom, or is this something more in the future?

DAVE BAST

Yes, and yes. Yes to both. I think that now whenever he breaks the bread in Christian worship through the hands of the minister or the server, it is a foretaste of the kingdom. In our church, we have a communion liturgy that has a passage about what the sacrament means, and it says, “This is a feast of remembrance of communion and of hope,” so, we are looking backward at the cross, at what Jesus did; we are in the present having communion with him through his Spirit and with one another; we are joined to one body; but it is also forward-looking in hope. It is looking forward to the true coming of the kingdom when the real marriage feast of the Lamb will be enjoyed by all of the people of God; and so, when he says to them, “We are not really going to share this again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom,” he is not saying there will not be way-posts along the way, where we have experienced his presence and have fellowship with the Lord. What he is trying to do, I think, is ultimately lift our eyes to the final horizon, and keep us looking forward. There is always something more. The fulfillment is not complete yet. We are longing for the kingdom in its fullness. When that comes, it will be a big – a big celebration – a big feast.

COURTNEY JACOB

Beautiful picture. I like the word pictures in there. The next question I want to bring up has to do with labels we use, the letter of the Law, and grace. So, let's talk about that next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and also our producer, Courtney Jacob, who is joining us on this program of listener questions; and Courtney, you have another one that got sent in.

COURTNEY JACOB

I do. The next one made me startle, I think, when I first read it. A woman contacted us through Facebook and she wrote: I have been married three times. Does that make me an adulteress?

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a tough question, and it is also a question that you can get very academic about, but that ultimately we want to be very pastoral about, as well; but, it is tough question.

COURTNEY JACOB

I have to say my first response was, "Is this a trap? Do I have to be careful how I respond?"

DAVE BAST

Well, yes; this is a good illustration of why there are some limits. I mean, it is great to respond to questions about the meaning of Bible passages. We can do that in this kind of setting; but if this is very personal question, you have to know in conversation and getting to know somebody what is going on. Are you feeling guilty? Are you angry? Are you trying to set us up? Now, there is a passage in the Gospels where Jesus uses this kind of language. We might as well confront that. It is in Mark Chapter 10; a passage about divorce, and it is one of these trick questions; Jesus was constantly being tested by his enemies – by his opponents...

COURTNEY JACOB

He got them, too, right?

DAVE BAST

Right. So, the Pharisees came and tested him by asking: Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? So, they are trying to set him up in a false dilemma. If he says yes, they can accuse him of being soft on sin and divorce. If he says no, they can accuse him of being anti-people. You have a hard heart; you are not sensitive to the problems of human relationships. So, he goes on and develops it. First of all, his principle is what God has joined together let no one separate. God is not in favor of divorce. That is not his design for marriage. And then he explains further to his disciples: Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery. So, there is the statement.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, there are different ways of approaching a question like this, and sometimes we do get asked about this, and I did when I was a pastor as well. If the question were asked, "I have been divorced; is that a sin? Or was that a sinful thing?" That would be a different question because you would say well, nobody, including most people I know who get divorced think that that is a good thing or that is why they got married in the first place, so that it could end badly. So we could all agree that divorce and other forms of familial brokenness are not the way it is supposed to be. This is not God's intention for creation. Is it a forgivable sin? Yes; but so – if I lie to my wife, I know I am a liar, but I can be forgiven. If you kill somebody, you are a murderer, but you can be forgiven. The question here goes a step further. If you are divorced and get remarried, are Jesus' words here an indication that you are in a perpetual state of adultery because, therefore,

if you have ever been divorced, you may never, ever get remarried no matter what or it is adultery; that is really the nub of the question. Is there no new beginning? Is there no forgiveness with a new beginning for people who get divorced; that is really the question. Not whether it is a broken thing; we could all agree that is true, but is it irretrievably broken such that, really, to avoid adultery, the divorced must stay unmarried for the rest of their lives, and that is the nub of the question, and it is a hard one.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is. There is a little bit of moderation, I think, that needs to be added to this stark verse, and I would want to qualify it in two ways: The first is this idea of adultery. In Jesus' culture, a divorced woman really had very few options for survival apart from starving. The most obvious option was to engage in prostitution, which was why divorce was so terrible for a woman. It was also usually initiated by the man; so, in a sense, Jesus is trying to actually protect women by what he says here by making it less easy for a man to simply discard his wife and condemn her. So, if you get the scenario, she is left with no resources; she turns to prostitution; most of the men are married – almost all of the men are married in that culture, so it is adultery technically because she is having relations with a married man, but Jesus is trying to really protect women. It is a wonderful illustration of how the Gospel went out of its way to try to improve the lot of women in that culture and society and try to raise them. So, that is qualification one. Qualification two is: He does not say anything here about whether the divorce is legitimate or not; and if you look at the whole of the New Testament teaching on divorce, there are other passages that address this. It becomes clear that there are certain conditions under which the Bible says divorce is permissible as the lesser of two evils; and in that case, the universal understanding, really, I would say, of the Christian Church is that, no, a person is permitted to marry again and is not committing adultery if they have been divorced under so-called biblical grounds.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think, Courtney, in your answer to this person, you may have mentioned John 4.

COURTNEY JACOB

Yes; and some of what Dave was saying in the analysis or what was behind Jesus' answer shows me that when we look at just the text, we might see Letter of the Law. It is black and white when it is not necessarily black and white; and so much more of the biblical story is grace; and I used John 4 as the example, because there Jesus meets the woman at the well and he knows her history, he knows she has had five husbands and she is living with a man who is not her husband, but he does not look at her and accuse her of sinning.

DAVE BAST

Adulteress! Adulteress!

COURTNEY JACOB

Adulteress!

DAVE BAST

Get away from me!

COURTNEY JACOB

Exactly! Instead, he goes on to talk to her about the living water. She is the one who brings the testimony back to her village, and that seems to be the grace; the larger, more important story being told in John 4 than her sin.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think also John 8, with the woman caught in the very act of adultery, there is that story where Jesus...

DAVE BAST

And neither do I condemn you, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The man is nowhere to be seen. It takes two to tango, here, folks; but it is always the woman that they wanted to... So, I think that backs up, Dave, that Jesus was interested in protecting the vulnerable; and in this case, among the vulnerable of society were women, divorced women and divorced foreign women, and so forth. So, I think when you look at the example of Jesus... Again, the nub of this question is: Can you be forgiven for divorce; and can there be, therefore, a new beginning in your life such that if you got remarried, you would not be condemned by God as an adulterer or an adulteress? I think the example of Jesus in the rest of the Gospels when he encounters, not just theoretical questions like his enemies were giving him in Mark 10, but the actual situation, then as you just said, Courtney, it was grace all the way. It was new beginnings. The question is, if you have been divorced and remarried, can you be forgiven? Can you have a new start? The answer is yes if there is repentance and remorse. Now, if you are high-handed about it or you do not care or you do not think it was that big a deal that you got divorced once or twice, anyway, who cares? Well, now we are in a different ballpark and we would have to... But, I do not know. I do not know enough about this listener. It is different in every case; but where there is repentance and remorse, there is Jesus to offer renewal.

DAVE BAST

Well, for me, too, the important thing is, Jesus did not deal with people in categories. He dealt with people as individuals, and each person's life is different; each person's situation is different; so, just take comfort from that.

COURTNEY JACOB

Yes; okay, so we will move a little bit from the individual to the Church at large with our next question; and take a look at this particular question that looks at the Church around the world and persecution. So, let's talk about that next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and our producer today, Courtney Jacob, who has joined us for this program of listener questions; and you have one more, Courtney.

COURTNEY JACOB

Yes, we have one more for today, and it came from Ann, who really asked us to consider the big picture of the Church around the world. This is how she phrased the question: Poor Christians are being hurt and even killed in the Middle East and elsewhere right now as we smugly assert we are protected by God. Why should God protect us and not them?

DAVE BAST

Yes, good question. You know, I have often thought of a line from an old hymn by Isaac Watts; the hymn is called *Am I a Soldier of the Cross*, and the line goes: Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas. Why do we have it – we are on a featherbed on our way to heaven, and then there are Christians... I was just in India recently and we were in a countryside area and meeting with some listeners to our Hindi language program, which we do, actually, with ReFrame Media's parent organization, Back to God, and Words of Hope. We learned about a group of five families from a village who had become believers from listening to the programs, and their community turned on them; first forbade them to use the well in the village, so they had to go down to the river some distance away to get their water – these are very, very poor people – tribal people from India – and eventually they turned them out of the village, destroyed their homes, stole their land and their animals and all their property. So, these five families were living, now, in a Mennonite refugee center in a nearby place; all because they had embraced Jesus Christ and refused to stop following him when the pressure was put on.

COURTNEY JACOB

That really puts a face on this question.

DAVE BAST

This is real. This is happening.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and while you were in India, I was in Africa, and a friend of mine from Egypt was with me, and while we were there – you know, there has been the Muslim Brotherhood and the ousted president of Egypt – and so, in the summer of 2013 upwards of 60 to 70 Christian churches were burned out of revenge by followers of the Muslim Brotherhood, and quite a few of the pastors were shot and killed; and my friend from Egypt is ministering to some of the children who have lost parents; and again, because they profess Christ. So, how does that happen? It has happened pretty much throughout Christian history; for the last two thousand years of Church history, there have been some places where Christians have suffered cruelly, and other places where that has not happened. It is not the question that Ann asked about “poor” Christians, but it is not just poor Christians. There are a lot of places where the Church is strong: Brazil, South Korea; but there are other places where the Church is very strong, but it is persecuted; and how do we make sense of the fact that God promised to be with us; that Jesus said: I will always be with you; is it simply a result of God giving us special favor in the West as opposed to some Churches in the Two-Thirds World, where persecution is; or sometimes I flip it around the other way. Seeing as Jesus promised the disciples that they would be persecuted, sometimes I wonder why aren’t we persecuted more?

DAVE BAST

Yes, what is wrong with us? Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How come we get along so well with our unbelieving neighbors?

DAVE BAST

We must not be much of a threat; yes. I feel quite strongly about this question. I have, as it turns out, I count it a privilege to know a number of believers from Iran, and I have friends who have been and are being literally persecuted in the way we think of it – in jail, beaten – so, do not get me wrong, I feel for this question, and I think one of the good things about it is, it might ask us: What are we going to do about it? Are we just going to blow this off or are we going to pray and give and do what we can to help suffering Christians in need? But, I also want to add a little bit of nuance by just reminding all of us that there are other people – non-Christians – who are also being persecuted by authoritarian regimes. There is far worse Muslim on Muslim violence in the Middle East than Muslim on Christian violence. Far more Muslims are being killed from other sectarian parties. So, it is not just appropriate for us to say: We only care about our own. I think this kind of thing calls us to be aware of vast areas of injustice and hatred; and one more little bit of nuance: Christians are also capable of inflicting unjust suffering on others...

COURTNEY JACOB

Sad but true.

DAVE BAST

So, let’s not glamorize or over-exaggerate this. There are a lot of stereotypes, I think, that take hold in our minds, and we think of Christians being thrown to the lions; but the true picture of the world is a muddled, messed up place, and the violence that people do to one another is a horrible thing, and we need to stand against it.

COURTNEY JACOB

So, I want to quickly rephrase this with the time we have left. Scott had mentioned before, Jesus promises his disciples when he sends them out – I found it in Matthew 10 and John 15 – that the servant is not greater than the master, and they will experience suffering – Jesus experienced suffering; but then we also have a number of promises throughout the Bible about protection: In 2 Samuel David praises God for his protection. David praises God for protection a lot in the Psalms; I found it in Psalm 46:1; 2 Timothy 4; I can keep listing passages, but do these promises for our protection contradict these promises for suffering, and is it smug for us to assert in the West that God has protected us even though we have religious freedom?

SCOTT HOEZEE

What you are asking there, Courtney, and what a lot of people ask, and maybe what Ann ultimately was asking, too, applies to a lot of different areas of life. There are some people in the Church who get sick and others who never have any illness in their family. There are some people we pray for in the church for healing and they get better and others die; and yet, we are claiming the same promises for God: He heals all my diseases, we say in Psalm 103. The main thing – these are some mysteries of life – there is suffering in life – and I think the main thing is that we be very careful not to draw hard and fast distinctions – not to act like we know why, like: Oh well, they are suffering, and I don't suffer as much as this fellow member of my church because their character needs building more; so God is working on them more than me. Or: We are better Christians than they are. We are not supposed to stratify each other or try to explain it. We lean on the promises of God. We know they are true. We know they find their yes in Jesus; and in the mysteries of life, of illness, and cancer, and genocide, and persecution, we just trust God to stay with us through all of that without trying to always, always explain it, because we just can't.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation today. I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and also today, Courtney Jacob; and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/glad-you-asked-part-1>

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