

He Remains Faithful

DAVE BAST

Most people today are looking for something solid to believe in; something they can depend on; something that is trustworthy. Whether it is a religious faith, a philosophy of life, a political candidate, or even just a new diet, we want to know whether or not it works, if it delivers what it promises, if we can rely on it. Well, Christians believe that the ultimate thing we can rely on is the Bible. The Bible is God's word, inspired by His Spirit, trustworthy in everything it intends to teach; but there are actually some parts of the Bible that are especially dependable. There is a wonderful series of statements in the New Testament that invite our special attention; each one of them – there are five – is introduced with the phrase, “This saying is trustworthy, deserving of full acceptance.” Today on Groundwork, we will look at another of those appealing, trustworthy sayings. This one speaks of the faithfulness of God. Stay tuned.

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. We are looking at another of the trustworthy sayings; these little, pithy, maybe creedal statements that the early Church put down and repeated, and even memorized and shared with one another before there was a Bible that they could turn to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; or anything written. So, everything they knew they had to have in their hearts and on the tip of their tongue to share with others; and so they developed these sayings. They all occur in the Pastoral Epistles, the last letters Paul wrote. There were three that we have already looked at in this series from I Timothy. There is one here now in II Timothy that we are going to get to, and the final program will be one that is in Titus – the letter to Pastor Titus. But here is the one in II Timothy 2, beginning at verse 8:

⁸Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my Gospel, ⁹for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal; but the word of God is not bound. ¹⁰Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ¹¹This saying is trustworthy.

DAVE BAST

If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him. ¹²If we endure, we will also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. ¹³If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have seen in these trustworthy sayings, both very, very short sayings like: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. We have seen a saying that was a little longer and a little bit more offbeat about it is good to want to be a minister or an overseer; but now we have this one, which even in lots of Bibles is laid out like a poem. It is a very, very lovely, lyric sentiment, laid out like a psalm almost; so, here is a faithful saying that was circulating in the early Church that was probably easy to remember partly because it had this very easy “if/then” structure and kind of stands out like a poem or a stanza from a hymn.

DAVE BAST

Yes, or maybe an early creed; and there are several passages like this in the New Testament. Most famously you might think of Philippians 2 and what is called the Christ hymn, but that is not introduced as a trustworthy saying; it certainly is, but, this one is specifically called trustworthy; and you can well imagine the early Christians gathering and reciting this together, and perhaps even singing it. I mean, maybe there was music that helped them remember it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And this certainly – especially the first part, but really the whole faithful saying – gets at some core issues again about our identity with Jesus, our union with Christ, and the great, great promise of the Gospel. Again, it is all “if/then” and it is all “we” and “He;” the “we” being the Church and the “He” being Jesus of course; and it all comes into context before Paul quotes approvingly back to Timothy the faithful saying itself, he prefaces it by saying: Now, listen Timothy; you are a pastor... And this is perhaps Paul’s last letter; certainly his last one to Timothy that we know of. Paul may have died sometime not long after writing this, perhaps. What is the most important thing for Timothy as a pastor in Ephesus to remember? Jesus Christ. Remember Jesus Christ; and that kind of sets it up and gets Paul to this faithful saying.

DAVE BAST

“As preached in my Gospel,” he says. I find that introductory paragraph wonderfully poignant. There is almost no doubt that this is Paul’s last letter. Later in Chapter 4 he will talk very personally about how he is at the point of being sacrificed. His life is going to be poured out like a sacrifice. He is going to die a martyr’s death; and so here he says to Timothy: Now, I want you to remember Jesus Christ; and he kind of summarizes: Risen from the dead; the descendant of David; He is the Messiah; He is the king; He is the savior; He is the One who is risen, as preached in my Gospel; by which he does not mean: The Gospel that I invented or made up. Some people have accused Paul of doing that – of kind of inventing Christianity out of a simple message of Jesus, the Good Teacher; but no, when Paul says that he means: The Gospel as I received it, as I passed it on to others, as I faithfully worked for it, as I have even suffered for it; and then he adds that personal note: Remember my chains.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and I love what he writes here, and you can picture Paul sitting in a prison cell, perhaps in Rome, near the end of his life, just before he is executed. So he is in a prison cell; he is literally in chains; he is bound to the floor in shackles, and yet he is sitting there smiling – I picture him smiling because he is saying: Timothy, on account of speaking this message, I have been put in chains, but guess what? There is not a chain in the universe that can bind the message. The message is going to continue. They can lock me up forever, but they cannot lock up the Gospel. They cannot lock up the Good News of Jesus. And then that leads to the faithful saying that this is the essence of the Good News, that if we died with Him, we rise with Him, and we are going to reign with Him in glory, and you cannot lock that one up. So, I picture Paul looking very beatific and at great peace despite being in a prison cell literally weighted down with chains.

DAVE BAST

And “Look,” he says, “You know, I have endured all of this for the sake of the elect,” as he puts it, or God’s people, or the Church, we could say any of those things, but, “Look what I have endured; and I have done it for their sake, that they may also obtain salvation.” And there we are reminded at the very end of Paul’s life of what he said earlier about what motivated him all along to preach this message, and even to suffer for it, he had this sense of obligation of debt; that he had been given so much by God. He had been such a recipient of grace. We think of the first of the faithful sayings in this series: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I was the worst – I was the chief. So, Paul never lost that sense of wonder that God would be gracious to him, and he is willing to do anything and everything so that others could have that same experience, and that really gets him off on the subject – it ties into the subject of the saying, which is: The need to endure. We need to endure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, in just a moment we are going to want to look a little more closely at that faithful saying and its relationship to who Jesus is and what that means for our faith.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

Hi, I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork, and we want to dig now into the faithful saying, and it begins this way, Scott. The first line is: If we have died with Him (we being Christians, Him being Christ), if we have died with Him, we will also live with Him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Part of this faithful saying, by the way, a number of people listening might recognize this from some parts of communion liturgies. This faithful saying and the sentiment of it has been woven into what we remember at the Lord's Table, and one of the things we remember at the Lord's Table is this truth that if we die with Him we will live with Him. Paul is not talking about physical death here; it is spiritual death; it is identifying with Christ on the cross. Sort of like Galatians 2 where Paul said: I was crucified with Jesus. Were you really there that day? Were you literally on a cross? No, of course not; but in baptism we die; we drown; we go into the waters of death. The Holy Spirit seals us to what happened to Jesus on the cross; so our spiritual selves die, are crucified with Christ, and when that happens, Paul says, then we also live with Him in His resurrection. If you are with Him with the bad part, you are going to be with Him with the good part. If you were with Him on Good Friday, you are with Him on Easter morning.

DAVE BAST

Right; it is very significant exactly the wording Paul uses, or we should say the faithful saying uses that Paul quotes. If we die *with* Him, we will also live with Him. We often talk... I think Christians talk about Christ dying *for* us, but we don't talk as much about us dying *with* Him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

With Him, yes.

DAVE BAST

And that is equally important in New Testament terms. So, you alluded to baptism as kind of this symbol or experience of dying and rising with Christ. Well, that is basically what Paul says in Romans 6. Let me just read a couple of verses from Romans 6:

³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ were baptized into His death? ⁴We were buried, therefore, with Him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. Exactly what the faithful saying says.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Even at baptisms today... I think this could be true, I suppose, when an adult is baptized, as well as in some of our churches we are perhaps a bit more accustomed to seeing infants or babies baptized, and I guess particularly when a baby is baptized you do not really want to think about the child's death in any sense, and so baptism sort of just becomes this moment of: Oh, it is like getting washed up. It is like getting your sins cleaned up. And that is true. That is part of what baptism means, as the New Testament teaches it, but the main thing it means is death. That is why years ago Flannery O'Connor, the great writer who often would use shocking imagery to make the point; to teach what baptism meant, she had a child in one of her stories try to kind of baptize himself and ends up literally drowning in a river. I think it is called *The River*, isn't it, the story? And when somebody said to her later: That is terrible. You had this child drown in your story; he died. And she said: Well, I am just trying to hit you over the head with what the truth of baptism really is. It is not just some cute little ceremony where you wash your hands. We die with Christ, and that is the path to life

with Christ as well. And that is one of the dearest truths of the Christian faith.

DAVE BAST

In fact, there is a... Some of the ancient churches... I remember visiting a magnificent ruin of a church in Ephesus, actually, to which this letter was addressed, much later than the New Testament era, but still from the fifth or sixth century, and the baptismal pool alongside this church in the courtyard is in the shape of a grave – it is long and narrow – and the people would walk down into it. They would be plunged down, and then they would walk out of it again and rise up; so, that symbolism of dying and rising... and interestingly, according to the New Testament, we, in a sense, live through all of the events that Christ lived through – the great events – His saving acts. So, He died, He was buried, He rose again, He ascended, and He is coming; those are the great events. Three of those happened already; they are in the past. One of them is future, His coming again. Now, He is sitting in heaven in glory; but for us, we have died and we have, in a sense, been raised. Our resurrection fully is future, but we have already died and been buried and been raised to newness of life in Him, and that is really what we need to hang onto and remember as the core of our faith.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, we have that spark of resurrection life in us right now that even our physical deaths cannot extinguish; but that thing that you mentioned about the future is in the next part of this faithful saying: If we endure with Him, we will also reign with Him; and there are hints of great glory here; and here is something also that I... I mean, this is a really wonderful thing, but I do not think we always think about it as much in the Church today; that we are promised that we will be reigning – ruling the cosmos – the new creation – right alongside of Christ. If we are among Christ's elect – if we are the saints of God – we get to reign with them. People forgot that right from the beginning. If you go to I Corinthians 6, there is a part where the people are having squabbles and they are bringing their church arguments to judges in this public court, and Paul said: Settle these things among yourselves; for goodness sake, do you not know, Paul says, one day you get to judge the angels. You are going to be in glory right alongside of King Jesus; and we do not always reflect on what an amazing truth that is.

DAVE BAST

Yes; it is staggering; it is mind-blowing; we cannot begin to imagine what it will mean for us when our redemption has fully come, when our bodies have been raised, and we reign with Him in glory. I mean, I cannot even start in on that. For most people... You know, Scott, we like to get a C. S. Lewis quote in almost every program. We just seem to fall into that habit, and it has been a couple of programs, I think, but he has this wonderful quote where he says that we expect too little. We are like a child playing in the slums and making mud pies, who does not know what is meant by the promise of a holiday at the seashore – at the beach. We think of heaven in purely individualistic terms or in purely spiritual terms, and we talk about streets of gold or strumming harps in the clouds; and we do not begin to realize the glory that will be given to us, the excitement and the grandeur of the vision of somehow reigning over the cosmos with Christ and the Father.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and here is a wonderful line from St. Augustine, from his book about the city of God, wondering what is the new creation going to be like? Here is a wonderful line from Augustine: There will be true glory where no one will be praised in error or in flattery. There will be true honor, where it is denied to none who is worthy. There will be true peace, where none will suffer attack from within himself nor from any foe outside. There we shall be still and see. We shall see and we shall love. We shall love and we shall praise. Behold what will be in the end without end. That is Augustine's attempt to wrap his mind...

DAVE BAST

Yes, the end without end.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; all shall be well and all manner of things will be well.

DAVE BAST

Well, but in order for that to happen to us, as the faithful saying says, we need to endure. We would not be doing justice to this passage if we did not also focus on that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So we will think about 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. As we just said, faith unites us with Christ in His death and resurrection; and we look forward to a future resurrection as well, when our bodies will be raised, when the new creation will be consummated; God's work of salvation will be complete, and we will reign with Christ, whatever that may mean.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; in glory.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I had a beloved professor who said he thought it would mean that he could spend at least a couple of centuries studying geology because he was really interested in that; but, you know, we kind of play around with that playfully; but it will mean mind-blowing glory for all of us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, as you said at the end of the last segment, Dave, getting there involves endurance; and we do need to look at the second half of this faithful saying, where things grow a little darker or a little more serious – I don't know; so, yes, Paul is quoting this faithful saying: If we endure, we will also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He will also deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. And so, tucked into this catch phrase from the early Church is an acknowledgement, not just of the great promises of the Gospel, which are altogether true, but also of the need for us to plug on as well, and stick with Jesus, endure with Jesus in a world that, as was happening to Paul at the very moment he wrote this – he was in chains, as we noted in the earlier segment – the world could be...

DAVE BAST

But he is enduring...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; the world can be pretty rough on us precisely because of the message we carry; and so we have to endure. So, a couple of interesting things about this faithful saying, and some of them seem contradictory, and I am not even sure I understand it, because on the one hand Paul says if we deny Him, He will deny us, but then a little while later he will say: Well, He will actually stay faithful to us because He cannot deny Himself.

DAVE BAST

Which, incidentally, Jesus specifically said: Whoever denies Me before men I will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And yet, the next line: If we are faithless, He will stay faithful...

DAVE BAST

He will be faithful...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because He cannot deny Himself. So, there is some grace and some hope there even when we stumble and fall...

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But the point being, after the beautiful first couple of lines of this almost poetry-like stanza, then we kind of hit reality, that there is that possibility of denying Him or maybe falling away or being faithless to Him; and this is, therefore, an implicit encouragement just to stick with it – to endure as Paul is enduring; and again, both of these letters to Timothy are written to Timothy as he works in a hard place. Timothy surely must have been tempted to despair, too. Timothy must have been tempted to give up, too – give up the ministry, give up his church – go to something where you are not always being criticized and knocked around by the world, and this is Paul's way of saying to Timothy: Even as I want you to encourage your people in your church to endure, you endure, too. I will pray for you...

DAVE BAST

You know, this is another one of those areas in the Christian faith, where we have to do a bit of a balancing act. In so many places, this is true. You know, faith and works, that is a balancing act. Here, grace and endurance are the balancing acts; so, we come from the Reformed tradition, and one of our cherished and beloved doctrines is called the perseverance of the saints. We will endure. God will... I think of Philippians 1:6: He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus. It is God's work in us, that is our trust and our hope; but the balancing act is, we need to hang in there; we need to stick it out; we need to endure; and frankly, all of the promises – the wonderful, unblushing promises of reward in the New Testament are made to those who finish the course, who stay the course, not to those who begin. You know, the promises are not for those who make some profession of faith initially. It is for those who end, who are there in the end; faithful to the end.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and our great hope in that is not merely – in fact, maybe not at all – our own strength – our own ability to hang on by our fingernails or something; but the faithfulness of Jesus; the relentlessness of the Holy Spirit; sort of that hound of heaven image that we sometimes have heard about; the Spirit is going to do everything He can to make us strong. We have to cooperate with the Spirit, absolutely; but, greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world – another great sentiment from scripture; and that is a good thing to know because this kind of verse can also induce anxiety in a lot of people.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How do I know that I am enduring? How do I know... Am I being faithful enough? Have I denied Him without even knowing it, so He is going to deny me now? So...

DAVE BAST

Yes, well, I don't think it is meant to induce fear in us. Maybe a little bit of healthy respect...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, a little soberness, maybe.

DAVE BAST

A little soberness; but the main thing is, just keep going. You know, keep going in the pathway of obedience; keep going to worship; keep going with those spiritual disciplines.

I always get nervous when I see or hear of Christians – mature Christians for many years – who decide they do not have to go to church anymore; that they believe in their hearts. That is not a good sign. So, if you are in fear of whether or not you are going to be able to endure, go where grace is found. You know, gather with God's people. Hear the word of God. Receive the sacraments. Those are what our older forefathers and mothers in the faith called the means of grace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what do they mean by: The means of grace? Well, what they meant by it, and what we should still mean by it is that we really do believe that we are strengthened, that we are nourished, at the Lord's Supper, for instance. This is not just a memorial; this is not just a time to say: Oh, yes; two thousand years ago Jesus died on a Friday afternoon. I remember that now, good. Good to bring that to mind now and again, huh? No, the Lord's Supper as Christians have professed along the ages and as many of the confessions of the Reformed tradition say more poignantly than we sometimes think in active church practice, you really get fed there; and you need this food...

DAVE BAST

Food for the journey... food for the journey.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes. If you do not eat this food – if you do not eat this bread and drink this cup, you are going to become weak, sick – the same thing if you stopped eating physically.

DAVE BAST

And the other thing I think we should say – and maybe this is a good place to end is, if you think maybe you did deny Him, or you have fallen away a bit, or it has been awhile, you know...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, or you had a failing at work; you could have spoken for Jesus and you didn't...

DAVE BAST

Whatever; you can go back. You know, just remember Peter – the supreme example of one who denied the Lord was Peter and the Lord restored him. He called him back because He is faithful even when we are not, He is faithful; and what He is faithful to is His own nature and His own promise and His own gracious love, which receives us when we come back and accepts us again and lifts us on our feet and sends us on the way once more. So, do not despair.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen. Thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue to dig deeper into the scriptures. Visit groundworkonline.com and tell us topics and passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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