

Hope

DAVE BAST

Are you a hopeful person? Well, there is a lot out there that could chill our hope: War, terrorism, the economy, money problems, personal problems, family problems; and if things are going pretty well for you at the moment, just remember, nobody is getting out of this alive. Does it make sense to even have hope in a world like ours? Can we have any real kind of personal hope, even in the face of death? 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, and joining me again today as my co-host is Scott Hoezee. Scott, welcome to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Great to be back; thank you, Dave.

DAVE BAST

So let's recap a little bit. We are in a series on the Christian virtues. After talking about the pursuit of virtue as leading a life worthy of the Gospel, we are getting into the big three.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; of faith, hope, and love. One of the things we talked about in terms of virtue from a Christian perspective is that these are not our achievements; they are always the gift of God.

DAVE BAST

And so, faith is the starting block, and of course, that comes from 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul talks about, at the end: Now these three abide: Faith, hope, and love, but the greatest is love. And of course, we will look at that in the last program in this series, but today we want to think about hope, and to do so, I would like to read a passage from Paul's letter to the Romans. This is a famous verse. It is Chapter 5, verse 1:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

So Paul goes back to faith and what that does for us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, yes; it all comes from faith. Christian people know, of course, that faith is the gift that allows us to receive the gift. God gives us the gift of faith through which the grace comes and everything comes from faith, including our hope, our love, all of our Christian character, it comes right out of the fact that we have been saved by faith.

DAVE BAST

And he begins with this famous word – a little bit of a complicated term – but *justification* by faith, which is a big deal for most Protestant Christians – most Reformed Christians. He says: Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God. Unpack that a little bit for us, that idea of “justified by faith.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sure; well, and you know, John Calvin famously called justification the hinge of the Reformation; the idea that we are justified completely by God, and it is a little bit trite maybe, but the way some people remember the word *justified* is that it is “just as if” I had never sinned. It is just as if I had never sinned, because God completely credits us – he puts into our bank account – all the riches of Jesus Christ; and it is free and it wipes out all of our sins in one fell swoop.

DAVE BAST

It makes me think of a famous question and answer from our Heidelberg Catechism: How are you right with God? And the answer comes back: Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. It is the thing that restores our relationship with God, and it overcomes the sin problem that is at the root of our trouble in life. So, faith is the key to that, but Paul goes on in this verse to talk about the other things that faith does for us. It not only gives us peace with God, but it gives us access to grace, which is a rather unusual way of putting it; as if grace is a sort of house and you get into it by faith.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and that is so typical of Paul and is part of the glory of Paul’s writings in the New Testament; that, indeed, his favorite way of talking about Christians is that we live in Christ; and so you said grace is almost like a house, but for Paul, in Christ, that is sort of like our spiritual zip code; that is our spiritual address; that is where we live. We live, somehow, inside Christ – inside the whole new situation that Jesus’ work made possible; and again, you get in through faith, which is the gift that unleashes all the other gifts.

DAVE BAST

One of the symbols of the early Church for the Church is a little boat, and that appears in Christian art and Christian iconography. It goes back to the fishing boat of the Sea of Galilee that the disciples were in with Jesus; and I sometimes think of that as a wonderful image for what it means to be “in Christ.” I mean, you are either outside the boat... If you are outside the boat, you are in the water – you are in the drink; but if you are in the boat – if you are in Christ – that is where the blessings of God are found. So, it is kind of difficult to sort of argue: Well, why do you need faith in Christ if you think of it in those terms? Faith is what puts you in Christ. If you are outside of Christ, you don’t have anything.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right; and so, everything we do as Christians, including now what we are going to talk about today in terms of hope, it comes through faith. I am reminded of the parable of the talents in the New Testament, where Jesus talks about a master giving money to his servants, and then says get busy, and they do, and two of the servants at least make a lot more money, and the master is pleased with that; but of course, it is all his money. They could not have done anything if he had not given it to them in the first place; and so, we get faith, and then from the faith, and by being justified, that is where our hope comes from. Sometimes people think hope means: Oh, I hope I get saved; I hope I can go to heaven; but that is a little backwards, right? We don’t hope to get saved, we have hope because we have been saved.

DAVE BAST

And that is exactly what Paul stresses here: By faith we have obtained access into grace, in which we stand; we have come into Christ; and faith produces hope that we will share in the glory of God. In a sense, hope is faith projected forward into the future.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DAVE BAST

And that is what we want to explore more fully after we take a short break.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome back 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are talking today in part of our series on Christian virtues, and specifically on faith, hope, and love; and today we are focusing on hope. Our hope comes right out of our faith that we have been justified in Christ; and therefore, Christians are people of hope, but what does that mean? That is what we want to talk about now a little bit. What did it mean for the early Christians? What does it mean for us today?

DAVE BAST

Scott, I think one of the things that strikes me, or it strikes any careful reader of the New Testament, is how hopeful they were; and when you stop and think about what their lives must have been like in the first century... you know, they did not have Social Security, pension plans, life insurance, health insurance – well, who needs health insurance, they didn't have hospitals – they did not have very much in the way of medicine – no pain relievers. How would you like to live in a world without aspirin or ibuprofen? And yet, they are just overflowing with hope.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and you know, Dave, too, what strikes me, and you read from Romans earlier, and there is the great line from later in Romans – from Romans Chapter 15, where Paul writes: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. What amazes me is how much Paul talks about hope in Romans, and yet, you realize these were Christians in Rome, where the faith was outlawed; where even being a Christian actually made your life even harder than it would be just ordinarily living in the first century; and yet, hope, hope, hope, and you will overflow with it, Paul says, even under those circumstances. I find that striking.

DAVE BAST

It is also striking to me what biblical Christian hope consists of, and how different it is, for example, from sort of the mindless, cheerful: Oh, I hope I get a good grade on this test, even though I haven't studied; or optimism, for that matter. I mean, there is a big difference, really, between what we think of as optimism: The glass is half full; and Christian hope.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we do often confuse them. I think people outside the Church often think that Christians are just optimistic, and so forth, whereas, we are realistic; but optimism and Christian hope are not the same thing by any means. I mean, because optimism depends on circumstances, right? The optimist says: Maybe things will get better. They will get better. The sun will come up tomorrow. Our ship will come in. Things will get better, that is what the optimist says.

DAVE BAST

It always makes me think of Dickens' character, Mr. Micawber, who was this perpetually down-on-his-luck sort of loser. Nothing ever worked for him, and he would keep saying: Something will turn up. Something will turn up. That is optimism there. Sort of against all odds, and really, unrealistically thinking: Oh, I will get lucky. I will win the lottery.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes; and so what that means is you are saying: Things – my circumstances, my situation, my life right now is terrible and I feel terrible about it, but that will turn around. How I feel will turn around when things

turn around – when my ship comes in – when I get the promotion – when my kid graduates from graduate school and becomes a successful doctor, then I will have good feelings. That is not Christian hope because it does not depend on circumstance.

DAVE BAST

I am not trying to knock optimism; I am not a particularly optimistic person myself, but I can admire those who are. It is probably psychologically better for you than the opposite, but when we are talking about Christian hope, we are dealing with something that is much more substantial – rooted and grounded in reality, not just wishful thinking; and as you say, it is not dependant upon circumstances changing, because you can have hope even when things are horrible and when they don't get better – when you ship does not come in you can still have hope.

I think of what the psalms say about hope, so many of them; so, for example, from Psalm 130:
⁵I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope. ⁷O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. So, here hope is grounded on what the psalmist calls God's steadfast love.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that is exactly what we need. So, the optimist says: Chin up. The worst might not happen. Whereas, a Christian full of hope says: Well, the worst might happen. In fact, our hope comes from the worst thing that ever happened, which is the crucifixion of God's own Son.

DAVE BAST

Right; the worst happened to Jesus on the cross.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it does not get any worse than that; and that is the source of our hope, that God was willing to go all the way to death; and so that says true Christian hope is rooted in something that circumstances cannot touch. So, things might not get better, but we are still going to be people of hope, and that is very different from optimism. It is much more substantial than optimism because it endures.

DAVE BAST

I like the fact that the psalmist urges us to look at the character of God and to find our reason for hope or our ground of hope, in that he says: It is the steadfast love of God that is the wellspring of our expectation of being blessed in the end, or of coming out all right in the end; and that is one of the great Bible words – that Hebrew word, *chesed*, which is often translated *steadfast love*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and that is the one thing... I mean, that is my favorite Hebrew word. I did not know we were allowed to say Hebrew words here, but...

DAVE BAST

Yes, you can say Hebrew if you explain it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right; it is the number one thing for which the Israelites praised God again and again: Oh, God, thank you for, we praise you for your *chesed* – for your lovingkindness, which actually, we cannot translate this word into English. You can read a bunch of different bible translations and they are all struggling to say: What is it? What is it? But what it is is God's core character of faithfulness; and more than that, loving and gracious faithfulness; always being gentle with us, always loving us, and that does not go away no matter what the circumstance; and again, that is the source of our hope.

DAVE BAST

It is the fact that God chooses to stick to us; it is not us sticking to him – it is not the strength of our hold on him – it is his hold on us; and you think of some of those incredible statements in the Old Testament, where God says in Isaiah: I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. It is like he has taken our name and tattooed it. That is how committed he is to us. He is not going to forget us; he is not going to leave us. So, that is one, solid foundation for us to hope.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and I cannot imagine that there are not people listening right now who so need to be reminded of that great truth because I am sure some of our listeners are going through very hard times; times that sometimes in Christian theology we refer to as *cruciform* times of life – cross-like – cross-shaped times of life when everything around you looks pretty bad, and is: Cancer and unemployment and wandering children or rebellious children. These are as bad as it gets, and so, those are the times to remember our hope is not in the circumstances, our hope is in the God who stays with us in the dark times, even as God stayed with God's own Son through the death of Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Yes, you mentioned the cross as another basic, bedrock foundation for our hope; and actually, it is not just the cross, it is what comes afterwards, too, you know: Cross, resurrection, ascension, and promise of coming again. In fact, the New Testament refers to Christ's second coming as "our blessed hope;" so, it is all founded on what God has already done in Christ, and what he has promised yet to do through Christ. Okay, it is the character of God – that *chesed* – but it is also the acts of God in history in Jesus Christ that are going to be completed.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right; and so, Dave, as you said earlier, hope is our faith projected into our future, but not naively because we have a lot of history...

DAVE BAST

Sure, because it has already happened, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; in fact, I like those who say that what happened to Jesus on Easter was our future in the past. That is going to happen to all of us, and we know it will happen because it already did, and that is our hope.

DAVE BAST

So, let's not just leave it theoretical, but let's talk after another break about how we get this hope. How do we experience it? How do we come to really live into it?

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Welcome back to *Groundwork*. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

So, we were just talking about hope, it's foundation in the faithfulness of God and in the work of Christ already done for us, and the promised future that Christ will bring; but how does it actually come? How do we get hope – how do we live in hope?

Here is a great verse from Romans – also Romans. We have been looking at Romans 5, and we will come back to that again; but here is from Romans 15:4:

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope, Paul says.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; it is a gift, as we said earlier. It comes straight out of our salvation – straight out of faith; faith is the gift that unleashes the other gifts, including hope; but it also builds up through our lives.

I am often reminded – and I cannot quote the entire poem – but an Emily Dickinson poem, where she says: Hope is the thing with feathers; as though hope is like a little bird that just sort of flutters into your heart.

DAVE BAST

Right... no...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Not quite; not quite for us Christians.

DAVE BAST

As though there is nothing you can do; it just sort of comes or goes depending, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, maybe hope is the thing with feathers if it is the dove of the Holy Spirit, I could live with that because, indeed, it does not just flutter in, it comes in with power through the Holy Spirit; and indeed anchors us. The symbol of the anchor is typical for hope. It anchors us to what Paul talked about in that verse you just read. Everything that was written in the past was in scripture.

DAVE BAST

Sure; so, here is a very practical thing: You want to have hope? Read the Bible. Look at the promises, claim them for yourself. Look at what Christ has done. You mentioned that symbol of the anchor, and that is actually used in Hebrews 6 to describe Jesus, now in heaven, there like an anchor for our souls; and I think of a picture of a boat with an anchor. On the one hand, you could say: Well, an anchor holds a boat where it is. If you look at it the other way around, the boat will go where the anchor is because it is connected. So, in olden days in sailing ships they used to sometimes take their anchor and set it out and then pull the ship to it when there wasn't any wind. That is kind of the picture of Hebrews Chapter 6. We are going to go there where he is; that is our real hope.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes; and we continue to be drawn to that which is solid; which is why, as we said earlier, hope is not optimism, but it is also not delusional, and it is not wishful thinking. We cannot see the complete reality yet; and that, again, for any of our listeners who are currently going through suffering and hard times, and for anybody who can remember going through hard times, and for anybody who can anticipate going through hard times – that now catches up everybody – how wonderful it is, and what a gracious gift of God it is to know that in those times we are anchored, and that cannot be moved. We might move a long way from it, but it will draw us back in.

DAVE BAST

Yes; but let's talk about that a little bit more, that idea of suffering and hope, because that is what the Apostle does, again back in Romans 5: ^{2b}We boast in the hope of the glory of God – or we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God – ³not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance (or endurance) ⁴and perseverance, character, and character produces hope...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Hope, yes.

DAVE BAST

So, he has a chain here kind of linking suffering ending in hope. How does that work? Rejoicing in suffering because ultimately it produces hope? Does that make sense?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and of course, it is always important to know that nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus or Paul or the other apostles – no one ever says rejoice *for* sufferings, or give thanks *for* them, but *in* them – in the sufferings that inevitably come – and by the way, Jesus promised that we would maybe have more sufferings on account of being his disciples – so, we are all but promised not just generic human suffering, but persecution; but in that, you remember God is faithful, God is with you, and the more you can remember that during the hard times, the more your hope grows; and it does become stronger. Paradoxically, what the world would think would knock the faith out of you – would knock the hope out of you – by the magic mystery of the Holy Spirit, hope gets stronger. It is like a bone, you know, when it heals it is stronger at the place of the break; and that is what hope does. It is a great mystery, and that is why the world has never quite figured it out. We get stronger the more they push on us.

DAVE BAST

Sometimes little words are important in the Bible, aren't they?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

That little word *in*... rejoice *in* suffering, not *for* it, or not because of it; and the reason, Paul says, is because your suffering if you carry on will produce endurance, and that will lead to character – kind of a stronger Christian character.

You know, it strikes me that we never have to endure pleasure. We only have to endure pain. The only thing that builds endurance is the experience of suffering pain. One of our staff is a runner, and he made the point as we were talking about this that you only build up your endurance... you can only run a marathon if you push yourself through the pain and keep adding a little bit of distance week by week.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and you do that because there is the goal, right? And so, certainly for us as Christians, endurance is not resignation. It is not, oh, keep your head down and grit your teeth and just get through it and be unhappy... somehow or other, because of Jesus, and because we have our eyes fixed on Jesus, endurance for the Christian can also, indeed, as Paul wrote, be tinged with joy because we know we are not alone; God is steadfast; God is faithful; and so our hope does not just make us put our heads down and get through it and just be miserable, but somehow... and people who have suffered far more than me have testified to this... somehow God makes them stronger and God reveals himself in ways they could never have seen coming.

DAVE BAST

Well, it proves that your faith is real. When you endure suffering – when you go on in faith and hope – it shows you that you are not just trusting God because he gives you lots of happiness. Peter talks about how our faith is refined as if through fire when we suffer; so that is what leads to character, and character ultimately leads to hope because we know it is real.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And our character, of course, for Christians is becoming more like Jesus, too.

DAVE BAST

And becoming more like Jesus means we are going to be doing a lot more loving.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And love is where we will go next in this series on faith, hope, and love here on *Groundwork*.

Thanks for joining our conversation, and don't forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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Printed on June 3, 2026