

I Believe in God, the Father Almighty

DAVE BAST

Everyone believes in something. I remember an old commercial: A young man looks into the camera and says: Know what I believe in? I believe in playing hard, working hard, rock and roll, my friends, my car, Joanne, and beer; and the announcer intones reverently: Old Style, a beer you can believe in. Well, as Christians, we believe in considerably more than that. We believe in God, the Father Almighty. We will talk about what that means today on *Groundwork*. 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; and Scott, this is now the second program in what is going to be a lengthy series on the Apostles' Creed, but we will break it down into more manageable sections; and it turns out, the Creed has three very definite and obvious sections to it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Matching the Trinity—the three Persons—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and in this program we are going to start digging into that first part about God the Father, and seeing the biblical verses that teach us that God is our Father, and that God is Almighty. So, that is what we will be doing today; but, we can notice, too, Dave...so, in the first program of this series we looked at creeds in general and said they are still very important, even in the digital age of Google. Yes, you don't have to memorize things. You can look up anything you want, but to get something like the Creed deep down into you, that is not information, that is formation. So, we talked about that in the previous program.

Another thing, though, Dave, in our culture that kind of cuts against creeds is how much people love individual choice. We want a spiritual buffet that we can kind of pick and choose from; and in fact, in the 1980s when some churches were trying to bring back in some of the hippies and the dropouts from the 1960s, they kind of stayed away from creeds because some people had an allergic reaction to a prepackaged thing you had to just accept and swallow whole. We like our individual choices.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; it is like going to a smorgasbord, you know, or a cafeteria. You don't all have to eat the same thing, and we don't like to believe the same thing. We like to kind of put together our own spirituality. There is this whole emphasis on: I am spiritual but not religious...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And part of that is a reaction against being told or prescribed by the Church: This is what we believe; this is what you should believe; this is what Christians believe. No, I believe in Jesus; I believe in God; but maybe I believe in reincarnation or I believe in, you know, spirit worship. That is so much a part of our culture today that it is a little bit difficult as Christians to recognize there is this core of the faith that we are committed to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it comes out of the Bible. Creeds, at their best, are an accurate reflection of the Bible itself, and that too, the Bible is not meant to be a cafeteria buffet. We are supposed to learn what scripture tells us; and so, the Creed...the Apostles' Creed...which we are focusing on in this series...the Creed begins kind of, actually, where the Bible begins: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. Now, we will look at the "creator of heaven and earth" part in the next program in this series; but for today, we just want to focus on that idea that I believe in God, the Father Almighty...I believe in God; and that sounds a little like Genesis 1.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it absolutely does. That is where the Bible begins: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; and as you just said, Scott, we will save the creation stuff, and also God's providence...his rule as the sustainer of life...he not only started it, but he governs it...we will do that in the next program; but here, I think we need to recognize that the Creed, like the Bible, doesn't try to prove the existence of God. There is nothing in the Bible that...like arguments for why you should believe there is a God. Even a passage like Psalm 19, which we often refer to the beginning as a sort of natural or general revelation: The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament declares his praise. That doesn't argue for God. It simply says God is there and this comes from God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some while ago I heard somebody reading Genesis 1, who just stopped at the fourth word and didn't go on to: Created the heavens and the earth. Just: In the beginning, God...full stop; that is it. In the beginning, God. We are not going to try to prove to you how God existed. God is God. God is there. God is the reality behind the reality. God was there before was was; and so, in the beginning, God...and then the Creed also: I believe in God...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That there is a God; and again, these days, you know, there are a lot of people in science today who think they have kind of disproven God, or they find that there is no need for God. The creation could have self-made itself; but for Christians, that will never do. God is the foundation of everything.

DAVE BAST

I was just thinking as you were talking, Scott, of a phrase that occurs in the book of Revelation of both God the Father and Jesus: The One who was and is and is to come...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DAVE BAST

This eternal God who exists outside of time; who was there before the world was or anything was...even time and space existed...he simply was. He always has been what he was; he always will be what he is. It is a huge idea about God that we grapple with; we can kind of get close to it, but finally it overwhelms our imagination to think of this eternal, pre-existent, self-existent God, who is not part of the creation; he is not a creature himself, he simply is; and that is who we believe, we say right off the bat.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and you know, the legendary Cambridge physicist who died not long ago, Stephen Hawking...now Hawking did not believe in God. He thought there was no need to posit the idea of a god...but Hawking admitted what a lot of scientists, including scientists who don't believe in God...he said we really cannot

answer the question: Why is there something rather than nothing? I mean, the universe is here, but it didn't have to be here, so why is there something rather than nothing? Scientists might claim they can answer that question, but they really can't, because, indeed, they can only study what is inside the bubble of the universe. A God who is outside would have made himself known in other ways, and we Christians believe he has, through his self-revelation. He took the initiative and made himself known.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; so, there is no way to prove this one way or another; and the one thing we reject is the idea that science has finally proved that there is no God. Nobody can prove either positive or negative. You have to believe in something. We said that at the very outset. It may be something as trivial as beer, or maybe something as profound as God; but ultimately, everybody stakes their lives, by faith, on what they ultimately believe in, and we believe in God; but we believe, not just in any god or *a* god—some generic god—maybe the creator. We believe specifically in the God Jesus taught us to call Father, and that is what we want to consider 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.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; so, Scott, we were just talking about the fact that, by faith, we believe in God as Christians. Many people believe in God. They have different views of God. Our view as Christians is shaped by the next two words that come in the Creed: God, the Father Almighty; and those are really the key to the nature and identity of the God we believe in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and I think we will take it a little bit out of order. We are going to think about the *almighty* aspect of God first, and then how when Jesus came we were taught to call God Father. The almighty aspect of God is all over the Bible, right? So, we think of that famous passage in Isaiah 6, where Isaiah has this vision: In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and exalted, seated on a throne with the train of his robe filling the Temple. ²Above him were seraphim, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, with two they were flying, ³and they were calling to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." And so, here is that vision of God, high and lifted up. The almighty God. The omnipotent One, as we sometimes say.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; or think of this passage from Psalm 93, here is another great one: The Lord reigns. He is robed in majesty. The Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength. Indeed, the world is established, firm and secure. ²Your throne was established long ago. You are from all eternity. (Echoes of Isaiah there, aren't there) ³The seas have lifted up, Lord; the seas have lifted up their voices; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. ⁴Mightier than the thunder of the great waters; mightier than the breakers of the sea; the Lord is mighty.

There is the power of God. I mean, it is...the roar of the sea is nothing compared to the power of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; we just mentioned that word about omnipotence—that God is omni-potent. That is a Latin phrase: All powerful...almighty. That is the line from the Apostles' Creed: We believe in God, the Father Almighty; and of course, well, you think of the Virgin Mary, right; or others when sometimes miracles were announced as the angel Gabriel told Mary that, although a virgin, she was going to conceive a child, and said: Is anything too hard for the Lord? Nothing is too hard for the Lord. He is omnipotent—he is almighty.

DAVE BAST

Right; and just to clarify, though, what that means, in the popular mind, you might think: Okay, almighty or omnipotent means God can do anything—God can do absolutely anything. That is not quite exactly what the Bible means when it describes the power of God. I remember when I was a student, Scott, which is now many years ago; I was engaged in a conversation with a young, self-proclaimed agnostic or atheist, and he asked me: Are you a Christian? And I said, yes, I am a Christian. Oh, you believe in God; a god who is omnipotent? And I said, yes, I believe in God, who is omnipotent. Oh, then can God make a rock so big he cannot lift it? Tada! You know, as if he trumped me somehow with that old riddle; and the response to that is: No, of course not. That is nonsense. The fact that God is almighty doesn't mean he can, or would want, to do nonsensical things. God cannot make $2+2=5$.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; I mean, God created all things. That also means he created order; and he created logic itself. So, no; God cannot do the illogical because God is logical. God created a logical universe, so he cannot create a married bachelor. He cannot create a square circle. That is just nonsense; that is not a proof or a disproof of God's almighty nature; that is just word games that cut against logic. So, of course, God can do anything that God purports to do within the nature of God himself, and of the universe that he made.

DAVE BAST

I mean, we can do lots of things God cannot do. According to the Bible, God cannot lie; God cannot do evil; God cannot deny his own nature...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

The Bible says; so, yes; what this means on a wonderful faith level for us is that God can do anything he chooses to do. Nothing can thwart his will, as you quoted the wonderful word to Mary: Nothing is too hard for the Lord. So, he is able to save his people; and the ultimate—even death cannot thwart God's will, as we see in the ultimate proof of God's almighty power—the resurrection of Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, in Ephesians Chapter 1 Paul writes to the Ephesians: ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people; (and then this) ¹⁹and his incomparably great power for us who believe; that power is the same mighty strength ²⁰he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand, and in the heavenly realms.

So ultimately, that omnipotence—the almighty power of God we confess in the Apostles' Creed—all got focused on Jesus and on the thwarting of even death itself, when by his mighty power, he raised Jesus from the dead.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, here is the great thing to remember: When you say I believe in God, the Father Almighty, he has enough power to save me, and he will raise me from the dead someday; and even death cannot thwart his will...his purpose...in love, to rescue his people...to deliver us from sin...to overcome evil in the end; that is the thing we believe and we hold onto.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it was that same Jesus, Dave, who also taught us to call God Father. Now, you know, the ancient Israelites so revered God's holy name, which in some version or another is probably Yahweh...or we used to call Jehovah...but it is four consonants in Hebrew: a YHWH—yod-hey-vav-hey; and they were so afraid of taking God's name in vain, they never actually pronounced that word. They would substitute Lord in there,

and so forth; but yet, when Jesus came, of course he had utter reverence for God, but he said when you pray call God your Father—call God Abba. Abba, which is actually even more familiar...it is more like Daddy; and that is who Jesus revealed the first Person of the Trinity to be; and that is the warm language of love...of love of a child for a parent that he taught us to use.

DAVE BAST

Yes, he did teach us that; and if you remember Luke Chapter 11, Jesus' disciples come up to him and say to him: Lord, teach us how to pray. John the Baptist...he has taught his disciples how to pray...how should we pray? And Jesus said: When you pray, start this way: ^[2]Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed by your name. So, other places throughout the New Testament also show us that the early Christians followed Jesus' example in calling the Almighty God, Father.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so Jesus laced this throughout his teachings. You think of Matthew 7, when he says, you know, if you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to *your* children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him; and then this teaching sifted down to the apostles, and so eventually you get Paul in Romans 8, in a very, very famous passage:

^{15b}You have received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry "Abba, Father." ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God.

So, this is a remarkable revelation. You know, one of the oldest heresies in the ancient Church, Dave, was from a man named Marcion, who claimed: Man, the God of the Old Testament has to be a different God than the God of the New Testament; because the God of the Old Testament was fearful. People didn't even dare say his name; and now you've got Jesus talking about this nice Father...it must be two different Gods; but no, they are the same; but Jesus has come to bring us into a new relationship with this God, where we can call him our Daddy.

DAVE BAST

Right, because we are, as the Spirit teaches us, God's adoptive children; and brothers and sisters of Jesus, who is God's only begotten Son; and so, in a wonderful way, we are urged, really, by Jesus and the apostles, to hold these two things together: He is God, the Father, the Almighty; both at the same time, and it is relatively easy, I think, Scott, to kind of hold one or the other, or one above the other. So, it may be that we choose to think of God as loving and kind and father-like, or maybe we want to emphasize the other. What is hard is combining them always; especially when things get tough in our lives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; to hold those two in tension is difficult, particularly in this world when we go through tough times; and as we close the program, we will think about how this identification of God as Father and the powerful one comforts us. We will take that up in a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are considering our belief as articulated in the first phrase, really, of the Apostles' Creed: I believe in God, the Father Almighty.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we were just saying, Dave, that we need to hold those together. That, yes, we are talking about the awesome, Almighty God; the one Isaiah saw in the passage from Isaiah 6 we read earlier in the last segment of this program: High, lifted up; holy, holy; his glory fills the whole universe; and he is the one we can call Daddy, that we can come to tenderly. It can be a little bit of a trick to hold those in creative tension in our lives; but Dave, belief in *both* can be difficult because in our lives today, things happen...cancer comes, terrible disasters happen, we suffer; and on both fronts, we say: Well, it is the classic problem of evil. If God is all powerful, he should be able to prevent all this bad stuff, and if he is a loving father, he would *want* to;

and yet, bad things happen. So, is he not powerful? Is he not loving? Is he one or the other? Is he neither? This is the classic statement of the problem of evil.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and to hold those in tension is the challenge of faith when bad things happen in the world or bad things happen to us. So people will scoff and say: How can you believe in a God who allowed the Holocaust to happen? Or how can you believe in a God when your child died of cancer? But the fact is, that believers can and do go on believing both things about God, not in a simplistic way, not that God did this to my child...God doesn't do evil things...in the sense that God was not absent either...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

I am not...my life is not ruled by chance...by random accidents. Somehow God is there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think the other thing we need to remember as believers, Dave, is neither do we need to pretend that it is easy to believe that God is both good and great. It is not easy; sometimes it is really difficult. Sometimes we are like the man in Mark 9, who had an epileptic son. He wanted Jesus to heal him. Jesus said: Do you believe? And the man cries out: I believe; help my unbelief. I like that guy because I think if we are honest, that is our posture. Yes, I do believe, and yet I've got doubts and I've got questions; and we don't have to posture in front of skeptics or cynics or unbelievers as though, oh, ah, it is easy to believe. I am not bothered by the Holocaust, I am not bothered by drunk drivers who run over 3-year-old children; no, we are bothered...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are often in the position of saying: Lord, I believe that you are great and you are good, but help my unbelief.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I remember, Scott, when I was first ordained, and I became the pastor of a congregation, as did you; and I had to go to the hospital and visit people, or I had to show up when there was a death in a family; and I remember thinking: Now, what do I do? How do I do this? And I resolved that I would try to go and not say anything stupid, first of all, which is, I think, a really good rule for any believer when they are in the midst of this kind of thing, or trying to comfort others. Try not to say anything stupid, but which we mean anything overly simplistic or one-sided about who God is and what is happening in this experience.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think we also need to make room...so, we are studying the Creed—the Apostles' Creed—which is *credo*—I believe...but we also have to make room for people in our churches, people within our circle of friends or within our family circles, who do go through some seasons of the opposite of I believe, of some doubt—of some questions; and that I think, Dave is one of the things that is the strength of having something like the Apostles' Creed—having this summary; that we do, you know, or used to do all the time...maybe it has waned in some places...but to be able to stand up and say what we believe is important; and for some people, there are some Sundays...there are some weeks, some months...where the congregation has to believe for you.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I like that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I cannot say this today, but they are saying it for me, and by God's grace, the day may come when I can come back and say credo—I believe, too; but for now, they are saying it for me, and I am being carried along by their faith; and I think that is a beautiful part of the fellowship of the saints—the communion of the saints, as we will confess later in the Creed. I think it is part of what Paul said when he said bear each other's burdens. You know, when somebody is down, you carry them.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and I also think it is wonderful that we start out the Creed this way, but we go on to spend even more time focusing on the Jesus who taught us to call God Father, but who himself experienced the utter depth of suffering and humiliation as one of us; and we believe that Jesus was also God. You know, Scott, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is very famous. It ends with a big chorus singing this thundering anthem: Beyond the stars, a loving Father lives. That is the theme of the chorus; and a German preacher...a great preacher named Helmut Thielicke said: The Father I believe in does not dwell above the starry sky; he was in a man who laughed and wept as you and I, who was tempted and despaired as you and I, who was assaulted by meaninglessness as you and I, and who was shaken by the pangs of death, as one day they will shake us. That is the God we believe in; the God we see on the cross in Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and on that very cross, Dave, we see both the depth of despair that we sometimes feel: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus said. Why aren't you here? And yet, on that same cross, that Jesus, in the end, said, according to Luke's Gospel: Father...

DAVE BAST

Father...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Into your hands I commit my spirit. So, there you have it. A belief in God even in the teeth of despair; and yet, at the end of the day, he is our Father. We believe in God, the Father Almighty.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee; and we hope you will join us again next time as we dig into the scriptures to better understand our Christian belief that God is the creator of heaven and earth.

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