

I Belong: Because He Paid My Debts

SCOTT HOEZEE

Most modern people dislike the thought that they could in any sense be owned by somebody else. Mostly, this is a good and proper reaction against the history of slavery in our world. The idea that one human being could treat another like property is terrible and it has led to horrible abuses; but in the Bible, we are told it is good Gospel news that we have been bought; that we are owned by God in Christ. Today on *Groundwork*, we will wonder about this. 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is now program number two in a fairly short, four-part series that we are doing here on *Groundwork*; and as we said in the first program, we are kind of teeing up the theme for this series from the very beginning of the Reformed confessional document called the Heidelberg Catechism, a fairly well-known catechism, certainly in the Reformed tradition, but really, throughout the world; one of the better known of dozens and dozens of catechisms that came out of the 16th Century following the Reformation—the Protestant Reformation. So, in our first program, we thought about the fact that we belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to our faithful savior, Jesus Christ; and now, on this program, we want to go kind of one step further and say: Why do we belong?

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly; and as we work our way through this, it is really just a convenient and compact statement of the whole Gospel. This is essentially, in the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, a concise recap of the teaching of the whole New Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

This is what all Christians basically everywhere believe. In a sense, it is noncontroversial for most Christians. This is just the heart of the Good News about what Jesus has done for us. So, as you said, Scott, we looked at the idea of belonging, that we are not our own, we are his; and here is how the Catechism extends that. So...what is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ; and then it goes on: He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the answer from the Catechism: Why do we belong? Because he paid for us—he paid for our sins with his blood. Now, in our modern world, the idea of paying with blood or of a bloody sacrifice might be a little bit repellant to us...something we do not like. It is something we don't think about or even, frankly, talk that much about. For probably most people, about the only time we have seen blood at church is when little Billy Jones got a bloody nose half-way through the sermon and his mother rushed him out of the sanctuary with

bright red blood; but beyond Billy's bloody nose, we don't see blood in our worship spaces anymore, but it was not always so in our tradition.

DAVE BAST

Not at all. I mean, you just read the Old Testament for starters, and for that matter, it is still the case in many religious contexts in the world. I mean, I remember still on a trip to India I was visiting a temple once and I happened to be there when they were sacrificing an animal; and I watched this thing unfold, and I remember thinking: This is much closer to what the Old Testament Temple was like than our modern church sanctuaries are. You know, they had this little kid, tied its legs and bleating, and the priest takes a knife and cuts its throat; and then I also remember thinking: I am glad I don't have to do that, and I am glad I don't need that in order to have my sins forgiven.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, it is...you are right, Dave, that what you saw in more of a Hindu setting...sacrificing a baby goat, is very much like what happened. We cannot even imagine, I would think, of the smells and the sights and the sounds in ancient Israel; but let's listen to these verses from Leviticus. This is from the very beginning of Leviticus, and there are scores of passages in Leviticus detailing different aspects of this, but this one will do. So, here is Leviticus 1, beginning at the 4th verse.

God is instructing the people that when you come to have your sins forgiven, ⁴you are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on behalf to make atonement for you. ⁵You are to slaughter the young bull before the Lord, and then Aaron's sons, the priests, shall bring the blood and splash it against the sides of the altar at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ¹¹You are to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the Lord, and Aaron and his sons will splash the blood against the altar. ¹²Then you are to cut it into pieces and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat, on the wood that is burning on the altar. ¹³Wash the internal organs and the legs with water and the priest is to bring all of them and burn them on the altar. It is a burnt offering...an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

And I am guessing most people would read that and go yuck!

DAVE BAST

That is from what someone has called the "clean" pages of the Bible—the ones we don't turn to very often; and it is pretty gross! I mean, the Temple in Jerusalem was much more like a slaughter house, at least in its outer court by the great altar than anything else; and as you say, the smells, the sights...it was an everyday occurrence—literally every day, because they offered sacrifices daily, morning and evening. You know, lest we think: Well, that is just way back when, you know, in Jerusalem in the Old Testament; that is way primitive, and the New Testament gets way beyond that; we don't go in for that sort of idea anymore, there is a verse in Hebrews that says: Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, something about forgiving sins requires, for God, a death.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that was what this conveyed, all this cutting and splashing, and washing and burning. It was to convey a very important theological idea: Sin is serious. God cannot just wave sin away. He is not going to wink at it. We cannot get rid of our own sins by looking heavenward every once in a while and saying: Sorry, God; sorry I did that bad thing, okay? It does not work that way. In the Old Testament, to know that your sin has been forgiven by God, you had to watch something die...

Dave Bast: Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You had to watch the light leave its eyes and the blood leave its body. I know this is terribly graphic and it may upset...even listening to it can make us a little bit queasy, but the idea was, sin is serious.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, there is a tendency, I think, in a lot of people to say: Well, why doesn't God just forgive sin, you know; he is God. Why doesn't he wave his hand and say it doesn't count? It reminds me of a line from the late Catholic priest/former Lutheran pastor, Richard John Neuhaus, who said: God cannot say your sins don't count without also saying you don't count. For God to take us seriously—to take our actions seriously—requires him...you know, there are some things even God cannot do, and one of those is just to wave off sin, because that would be to wave us off and dismiss us as being of no account; so he has to do something about it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But all along, in the Old Testament, with all of these animal and bird sacrifices, all along there were hints and whispers and prophecies and finally promises that this was all pointing to something bigger—to a big sacrifice that is going to happen someday, once and for all; and we are going to turn to what that was next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and we are talking today about the payment that Christ made for our sins; and Scott, you just mentioned that there was something much bigger to come than all of those Old Testament animal offerings, those sacrifices, all the blood in the Temple and splashed on the altar, it was pointing to something much bigger and much greater; but the whole umbrella idea behind all this is the idea of atonement; of God making us one with himself. Again, you can even hear it in the word: *at-one-ment*, or a bigger word maybe from the New Testament: Reconciliation. How is God going to bridge the gap? How is God going to take care of sin in such a way that he can forgive it without compromising himself, and receive us back into fellowship with himself? That is the idea of atonement.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, the idea biblically is that...right, what you just said, Dave...sin, when it entered our world, it opened up like a chasm...like a Grand Canyon...with God on one side and us on the other, and how are we going to get back together? Adam and Eve get kicked out of the garden, where they used to walk in fellowship with God, but now they are not in the garden. So, there is this barrier...I mean, there are lots of images, right? There is this barrier... there is this gap. Whatever it is, God is on one side and we are on the other. Something has to make us one—at one, as you said—atonement. Somebody has to bring us back together; and all along, we get these hints and whispers that even though Israel was mandated by law to sacrifice bulls and calves and turtledoves, or whatever they could afford, or grain offerings even; that was not going to do it ultimately. You had to keep doing that kind of thing. It is sort of like taking out the trash. Once is never enough; you have got to keep coming back to the Temple; but God said one day that is going to end. Of course, as I think everyone listening to this knows, that end finally is Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, this is a major theme in the book of Hebrews. I quoted a bit ago from Hebrews 9: Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Here is some more from that same chapter:

²³It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices.

He is talking about that Temple in Jerusalem. He says that was really only an earthly copy of the heavenly reality where God is, and where God's throne is. So, those things could maybe purify the copy, but they could not do the real job. The heavenly things themselves, Hebrew says, needed a better sacrifice than this.

²⁴For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands, (that was only a copy of the true one) he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, here is a very interesting thing that Hebrews does regularly; and for us it is a little counterintuitive—it is backwards from how we usually think, right? We usually think that you get the original, and then you get the copies, right? So, Leonardo Da Vinci paints the Mona Lisa, and then later you get copies of it on posters you can put in your house, or it is on a tee-shirt, or the Mona Lisa is on a coffee mug. So, you start with the original, which is still in the Louvre Museum in Paris, and then you get the copies; but in the Bible, it goes the other way around. We started with the copies—all those bulls and calves and birds in the Temple—that was the copy. The original came later in Jesus. So, it is the other way around from how we usually think; but the original was waiting in heaven all along...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so...and C. S. Lewis talked about that. You know, it took the Jewish people a while to get their head around this, because it is like those bulls and calves were so tangible. You could see them, feel them, smell them; and now we are told they were just a copy?! Boy, they seemed pretty real to us! But no, Hebrews says Jesus is the original, and when he came, it was once for all.

DAVE BAST

Right; Hebrews goes on to say in Chapter 10—the next chapter—that it is impossible for animal sacrifices to pay for sin. I mean, they are just animals. It took something more...something more important...something more precious...and that something more was nothing less than the life of Jesus himself...the blood of Christ himself. That is why, as Christians, we talk about the blood of Christ. It can become a cliché, but it is a profound and deep mystery, that God himself entered into human life, became a human being, and he did so primarily not just to give us an example of a good person or to give us wonderful teaching, or to do all those miracles that he did, it was to offer himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And here is how the Apostle Peter put it in his first letter; writing to his readers, Peter writes: ^{1:18}For you know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹but you were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ; a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹Through him, you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, so your faith and hope now are in God. There is that idea of belonging, Dave.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is how. So, this program...this series...is about I belong—we belong. Why do we belong? This is why: We were bought.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly. So, you know, it is really interesting to dig deep here. We talked about Christ's sin offering...his sacrifice of himself...his blood sort of healed the gap...closed the gap...healed the breach. So, that is reconciliation; but here is another word that the Bible uses for what Christ's sacrifice did. It redeemed us, it bought us back, it bought us out of slavery. We were enslaved to sin. We were, frankly, under the tyranny of the devil, as the Catechism says, and Christ bought us back. So, we are doubly his, in a sense. I mean, we would owe him everything because he made us. God is our creator, but the fact that, in addition to creator, now he is our redeemer, that puts a double burden, you know, a double stamp of ownership on us.

So, yes; we belong to him now.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the good news, as Peter points out, is that this did not just kind of come from a neutral set of circumstances. We were not just sort of blank slates and Jesus came along...or just sort of, you know, wandering orphans or something, and Jesus picked us up. No, Peter says: You have been owned by something else before this; what Peter describes as the empty way of life that had been handed down to you from your ancestors. In other words, you had been owned before this...

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

By the devil.

DAVE BAST

This is what makes the Exodus such a perfect analogy or parallel to the experience of Christian freedom and redemption in Christ. Just as the people of God in the Old Testament were enslaved in Egypt; they were not free; they could not come and go. They could not escape. It was hopeless. They were helpless; and God came with his mighty arm, as the Old Testament says. He stretched it out and he set them free; and that is precisely what Jesus has done for us. By the incredible act of dying for us on the cross, he has redeemed us, he has set us free.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and again, that is the language. We have been...again, we are digging into scripture here and using the Heidelberg Catechism as kind of our lens to...or our gateway into scripture. He set us free from the tyranny of the devil; that is the language of the Catechism; but what exactly does that mean today and tomorrow, and as we live our lives? So, we belong to him because he bought us with his precious blood. He set us free from the tyranny of the devil. How should that affect how we think and talk and act every day? We will think about that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and we are closing out here program number two of a four-part series of how we belong, body and soul and in life and death, to Jesus Christ; and in this program we said that we belong to him because he paid for us with his own blood; and as we just said at the close of the last sequence, Dave, that means he set us free from the tyranny of the devil.

Let's just hear... We have looked at Hebrews a little bit on this program, so let's hear a couple words...we were in Hebrews 9 earlier...we will go backwards now and go to Hebrews 2, and hear these words. This is talking about Jesus here:

¹⁴Since the children have flesh and blood, Jesus, too, shared in their humanity, so that by his death, he might break the power of him who holds the power of death, that is the devil; ¹⁵and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶For surely, it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendents.

DAVE BAST

Yes, so there it is in pretty stark terms. We are not kind of the free, independent beings we like to think ourselves, or imagine ourselves to be, as born in the world...as born under sin, apart from Christ, we have a dark lord...we have another master, and we are not free really to escape that evil one.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, that is strong stuff, and the devil indeed holds the power of death. In my church recently, Dave, one of my pastors started a series on Exodus...you made reference to this before...and he pointed out in Exodus 1 that...in Exodus 1 with the Pharaoh, so in all of life, anybody who wields the power of death...anybody who can hold the threat of death over your head is going to be the one who you are going to fear and that has power over you, is the one who if they say “jump,” you say, “how high, sir?” because people who wield death in this world—all things being equal—wield great power. It was Pharaoh in Egypt. You don’t do what I want you to do, we are going to kill the babies—the male babies—and if the midwives don’t help, we are just going to start tossing the babies into the Nile. Pharaoh held the power of death; but Pharaoh there is just a stand-in for the devil, or for so many other dictators since in history. If they can threaten you with death, then they think they hold all the cards, and secular, worldly speaking, they do.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is a fearful thing; and all of us, however much we may deny it, to some extent at least, live in fear of death. It is the ultimate obscenity, really, in God’s good creation. It is the thing that does not belong. It is the thing that came in with sin. The New Testament especially, always links sin and death together. You cannot separate the one from the other. Death is not just the natural end to a long, happy, healthy life, as some would imagine. Death is a penal event, someone has said; it is a punishment that came upon sin, and we fear it because we were not created for it. We are not meant to die. Somehow, death has to be overcome, and the one who holds the power of death, who stands there wielding it like his scythe, as he is sometimes depicted, you know, is the evil one—the devil.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and even though, of course...and we don’t want to be glib or ignore common-sense realities in all this, Dave...because death is the enemy, particularly when we are young—when we have young families—we have children—we don’t want to die. We are not eager to die before we are 40, or you know, suddenly; but, as Christians ultimately now we have been set free from the ultimate fear of death, so that even if we die young, much less if we die old and full of years, that death does not have the last word anymore; and those people who think they can threaten us eternally by holding the threat of death over our heads, cannot terrorize us ultimately; and that ought to affect our lives every day; and one of the things the New Testament says it ought to do is give you a deep and abiding joy that the world cannot take away.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; in the last program, Scott, we talked a lot about a verse from Romans 14 that says: Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. We are not trying to say, oh, it doesn’t matter whether we live or die. We care about that; we want to live; all of us do. We want to live full and happy and productive lives; but what it is saying is even when death comes, as it will to us all, we still belong to the Lord. That cannot break his hold on us, as we have said often, quoting the great Romans 8 passage: Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ; and that includes death itself. So, we live with this basic fundamental assurance, and we can have joy knowing that death is now simply our entrance into glory.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and here is a great line from Jesus from John 8, where he says: ³⁴Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵Now, a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son (or a child) belongs to the family forever. ³⁶So, if the Son sets you free (Jesus says), you will be free indeed.

That is the good news. That is the fear of death that Jesus sets us free from. We now have a family—an eternal family. We have a place in heaven because of Jesus. We belong to him, and he bought us with his precious blood. He set us free from the tyranny of the devil, and now we stick close to this Jesus because he is the one who has bought us and brings us there.

I can remember when I was in college, there used to be a faculty only dining room on the campus of my college, and a couple of times while I was a student, a professor would invite me to lunch in that dining

room. Well, of course, when you are a young kid and you are in that dining room, lots of other professors look at you like, what are *you* doing here? So, I always stuck pretty close to the professor who invited me so I could quickly say: Look, I'm with him—I'm okay—I belong here—I'm with him. That is what we get to do with Jesus now. He invites us into the divine family. After our death, we will be invited into the precincts of heaven itself; and nobody can say to us: What are *you* doing here? Aren't you a sinful person? And we are right next to Jesus, and we say: No, I'm with him...

DAVE BAST

I'm with him, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He bought me and I'm with him; and so, I am in the family now.

DAVE BAST

Yes; his precious blood cleanses me from my sins. You know, Jesus says in that verse you just quoted: You are no longer slaves to sin. He does not say you no longer sin...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Because we do. We fall back. You know, for us as Christians, our life with Christ is often one step forward, one step back...two steps forward, one step back. So, yes; we still sin, but we are no longer under the dominion of the one who has the power of sin. We have been set free from that. One of the things I do, Scott, quite often, is pray this wonderful phrase from the Catechism back to the Lord: Set me free from the tyranny of the devil; do it again today. Help me to walk with you; help me to know I am part of your family—that I belong to you.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deep 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 combat our fears by discussing the assurance and comfort granted to us through our belonging in Christ.

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Printed on January 29, 2025