
Jesus Christ Came with a Purpose

DAVE BAST

In the season of Advent, Christians celebrate the fact that Jesus came into the world. As astonishing as it may seem, we believe that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, when Caesar Augustus was emperor of Rome, God himself entered our world as a human being; but this raises an important question: Why did Jesus come into the world? We will dig into scripture that addresses that today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *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 today, Scott, we are in program three of a four-part Advent series. There are four Sundays in Advent always, and we kind of time these programs toward Sunday each week, as they are posted online for those who wish to visit groundworkonline.com...share the link with your friends...but we have been looking in this year's series at the Apostle Paul's doctrine of the incarnation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we noted that some scholars, particularly some more liberal scholars in recent centuries, have tried to make the claim that the incarnation didn't matter to Paul; and all this Christmas hoo-ha that we celebrate every year in Luke 2, and the manger and the shepherds and the angels, and all that...Paul didn't even know about that. He never refers to the virgin Mary, he never refers to the stable in Bethlehem. So, probably Christmas and what we think about at Christmas isn't that important; but not true. Paul did know about it, and we have been looking at passages...two so far...in Galatians and Philippians, and now today, 1 Timothy. Paul makes it clear that he knows all about the fact that the Son of God was made flesh, born of a woman, as we saw in Galatians, made a true human to be the servant of all, as we saw in Philippians 2 in the previous program; so, Paul did know about this, and it is centrally important that the Son of God came into this world—was *sent* into this world—by the Father with a very specific mission, and as a true human being, which he needed to be, to carry out that mission.

DAVE BAST

Right; and today we are turning to a passage in 1 Timothy Chapter 1. Actually, we are going to sort of focus on just one verse, but also we will talk about the surrounding context. This is one of Paul's pastoral epistles, so called because they come later in his career, when he is especially concerned with how the faith is going to be passed on, and how the Church is going to be led when he is no longer there to do it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And so, he has been disciplining these younger men...Timothy and Titus...and he writes personal letters to them, we believe. Some scholars question some of the details of some of them, but conservative scholars believe this is Paul, now as an old man, nearing the end, trying to make sure that these guys have what they need in order to keep the ball rolling.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and call them the pastoral epistles because they were written to pastors. Timothy was a pastor in the city of Ephesus; Titus was a pastor on the Greek island of Crete; and so they are pastoral in that they were written to pastors to help them do their work, and to remind them...both of them...of the basics of the gospel, which basically Paul would say: Look, you will never do better than just proclaiming the old, old story of Jesus and his love, as the old hymn says, right? So, he wants to kind of keep them on task; and because...and we will see this in this program...because these were probably the last letters Paul wrote...and again, some think maybe some disciples of Paul finished them even after he had died...the point being, there had been development in the early Church. On the previous program, we saw that there was already a song about Jesus...a hymn somebody had written that Paul quoted back to the Philippians. They already knew this song, so he referred to it; but there also was a development of trustworthy sayings, short, little, creed-like statements...remember, back in the early Church there was nothing written down, nobody had their own personal copy of the Bible, there were no catechisms or tracts or little pieces of paper you could put in your pocket. You had to memorize things, and so the early Church developed these little pithy sayings that summed up the gospel, and in the pastoral epistles, Paul quite a few times says: Now, here is a trustworthy saying...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You have heard this, and now I am going to give you my stamp of approval; and in 1 Timothy, there is a really important one for our Advent consideration.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, we have actually done a whole *Groundwork* series on five trustworthy sayings from the pastorals, and you can look that up in the archives, but here is what Paul says about one of the most important of them, in 1 Timothy 1: ¹²I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy (there is that word), appointing me to his service. ¹³Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴The grace of our Lord Jesus was poured out on me abundantly, along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then verse 15: Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

So, the trustworthy saying part, right...the little saying that had been circulating is: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...boom...period...that is the gospel...that is the gospel in about ten words!

DAVE BAST

It is also pointing clearly to the incarnation; and we will get at that in a moment, but first, let's just think a little bit, and talk a little bit, about that word *trustworthy*. Paul says he was found to be *trustworthy* by Christ, despite his sinfulness...his opposition to Christianity at first...to the gospel. That is on clear display in the early chapters of the book of Acts, but the question is: How do you know when some saying or statement is trustworthy? And boy, if there ever was a question that was important in our time, in this year of craziness...of COVID...and of racial disharmony, to say the least...and of political upheaval and opposition and hatred...and conspiracy theories all over the...how do you know when something is trustworthy?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Fake news has been in the common parlance for some years now, and false messages coming in...you know, maybe even bad actors from the outside posting stuff on Facebook to draw people to... How do you know what is true? Yes, it is very, very difficult to know, but biblically we can trust the words of the apostles and their testimony; in fact, for 2,000 years now, Dave, the Church has been built on the foundation of what the apostles taught.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When we did our series not long ago on the Apostles' Creed, we said we call it the *Apostles' Creed* because it reflects their teachings; and there is a very simple truth that we just have to acknowledge: If we have been wrong about that...if the apostles were wrong...then the Church has been wrong for 2,000 years and there is really no point to it. We could just close up shop tomorrow and call it good and become secular. That is how important the teachings of the apostles were; but we confess they got it right; and so, when Paul says this is trustworthy...I am putting my stamp of approval on this little saying that has been going around...you can believe it, you can take that one to the bank. That is a trustworthy saying: Christ Jesus came into the world, why? To save sinners; it is as simple as that, but it is as majestic as that. So, as we continue to think about that trustworthy saying from 1 Timothy 1, we will explore some more of the implications of that, and we will do it in just a moment.

Segment 2

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 in the third program of our four-part Advent series for the four weeks of Advent this year, looking at passages in Paul, where the...what we celebrate at Christmas...the Son of God being made human is celebrated, and we are today in 1 Timothy, a pastoral epistle. Timothy is a pastor and Paul is writing to Timothy to remind him of the fundamentals of what he needs to keep preaching...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There in the city of Ephesus, a city that we know, by the way, where Timothy was the pastor with a lot of competing spiritual ideas. We are going to see that in the final program of this series in Colossians as well—the city of Colossae. Most of the big cities in the Greco-Roman world in the First Century, when the Church was born, were a hotbed of competing spiritualities. Ephesus was no different. I think there was a giant temple there to Artemis or Diana that was known throughout the world. So, Paul needs to say to Pastor Timothy: Here are the basics. Keep preaching them.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, we talked a little bit in the opening segment about how you know if someone or something is trustworthy, and that you can believe it...you can accept it...you can even stake your life on it, which is what we do with this trustworthy saying, the essence of the gospel. We are betting our lives on this, folks, that it is true. One thing that is important is the person...an honest person...and certainly Paul was. Again, look at his career in the New Testament. He lived what he taught and believed; and secondly, though, does he know what he is talking about; because a person may be honest and they may be basically trustworthy...they have integrity...but maybe they are wrong...they are honestly mistaken; but no, Paul knew because Jesus had

appeared to him and given him the authority to explain the gospel...to state the truth. So, it is trustworthy, and it begins with this: Christ Jesus came into the world... Now, that is an interesting phrase in itself, and it is one that maybe we would sometimes use, perhaps in a birth announcement, you might say. Proud parents send out this message to all their family and friends: Little Emily came into the world at 9:00 p.m. on October the 2nd, and she weighed 7 lbs and 12 oz, or whatever the case may be. So, we may talk like that, but really all we mean by that is that someone was born. With Paul, Scott, I think there is a little bit more behind it than just that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, he was born, right? We saw that in Galatians in program one of this series: Born of a woman. Yes, he was born, but Christ Jesus came into the world...I mean, that is basically saying: God came into God's own creation and became a creature...became a part of that creation in a way that had never happened before. Ordinarily, we...in Christian theology we always try to make sure there is enough daylight between God and the creation. There is such a thing called Pantheism, where we believe that, you know, *all* is divine. No, no, no; we say there is the divine God who created the universe, and the universe is separate from God; and there is also a version called Panentheism, which sort of the world exists inside God, but even there, orthodoxy says: No, there is a separation; God is not identical with the earth or any part of creation; but here, the Creator becomes a creature...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Comes into the world...yes, babies come into the world the normal way all the time, like you just said: Little Emily came into the world; but now, it is God coming into the world as a true human being. That never happened before. There had to be an awfully important reason for that to happen, and that comes next in the trustworthy sayings...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To save sinners.

DAVE BAST

Right; so we will look at that in a moment, but think again about this phrase: Came into the world. That implies he came from someplace else. He came from the Godhead, wherever God is, which we traditionally call heaven; and that implies that he chose to do this. His coming was voluntary. All of this sets him apart from us. There is no evidence that...some people have believed that all souls are preexistent and God just sort of has them with him in heaven and he drops them into a body when a little child is born. There is no evidence for that in scripture...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DAVE BAST

That is speculative. Our lives begin when they begin; but Jesus' life was preexisting, as we know from the New Testament. So, his coming actually was a decision on his part, and it implies all the truth about him, as we have seen in Philippians about his glory and his deity; and actually, Jesus himself says something like this in John Chapter 6, where he says:

³⁸“I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up on the last day. ⁴⁰For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal

life, and I will raise him at the last day.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, that is a beloved passage for us Christians, right? But let’s admit that if...Dave, if you or I or anybody listening to this program...if tomorrow we ran into somebody at the mall and they said: You know what? I have come down from heaven...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am on a mission from God...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We would take a few steps back and say: Okay; well, social distancing; it’s a good idea with *this* person. That is a loopy way to talk; and if you remember, in John 6 Jesus will also go on to say that because of who he is, coming down from heaven, his flesh and blood are true food and drink...

DAVE BAST

Yes, for eternal life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And most of the disciples...most of the wider group of disciples who had been following Jesus, left him...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because this was just not a normal way to talk. You don’t talk about: Well, I came down from heaven. No. So, this is either completely true, or it means Jesus was insane. I mean, C. S. Lewis said make your choice.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; yes, a human being doesn’t talk like this, as you pointed out. If I am going to introduce myself, I would say I came from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Jesus says: No, I came from heaven. Paul says he came into the world. It was a divine act of love...of self-humbling...of serving; and he came, Paul says, to save; and we will think more about that and unpack it a bit in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this third program in a four-part Advent series to go along with the four weeks of Advent this year, where we are looking at passages in the Apostle Paul’s letters where he refers to Jesus becoming a human being; and we are in 1 Timothy, where Paul quotes a trustworthy saying; and again, we think these were short, little creeds that the early Christians were sharing with each other so they could be memorized easily, carry them in their heads, and they expressed the essence of the gospel. Again, in a day when you had no written materials of any kind, what you knew about the gospel was what you could remember, and so it is easier to remember something short, like: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Almost anybody can remember that...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is the gospel. That is the saying, but then in what we read earlier Paul then adds on to it: Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am the worst sinner. If I can get saved, anybody can get saved. So, we can wonder about that a little bit, about Paul kind of becoming autobiographical here, but it also gets at, indeed, the core reason why Christ Jesus came down from heaven and became a human being.

DAVE BAST

You know, Scott, there was a famous theological work from the Middle Ages, probably one of the most famous treatises written by an English bishop named Anselm titled in Latin *Cor Deus Homo*, why did God become a man? And that is the base question here that Paul has been answering all through these passages that we have been looking at in this series on the incarnation: Why did God become a true and real human being? Really God, really human; and as we have seen, it was to take on the burden of the law so that he could keep it for us; even to pay the penalty of sin, which is death; to abolish the curse that was on lawbreakers; it was to show us his humility in accepting this lowering of himself and giving up his privileges to sort of set us an example. Next time, we are going to look at the incredible passage in Colossians Chapter 1, where he is described as the firstborn over all things...all things hold together; but here, Paul puts it more succinctly than anywhere else: To save sinners; and by the way, if anyone was a sinner, I sure was. It might make you kind of scratch your head. Now you know, yes, Paul was persecuting the Church, and that is what he is talking about. I was blaspheming. He must have said terrible things about Jesus, this supposed man... We just talked about how the things Jesus said and claimed were crazy if he were only a human. Paul once believed that exact thing...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That's it.

DAVE BAST

That he was just human, and so they were crazy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I often have wondered if Paul had nightmares of when he was Saul of Tarsus, dragging women away by their hair for confessing Jesus, beating up men, standing by while Stephen, the first deacon, was stoned to death, and he grinned through it, he approved of it, we are told in the book of Acts. He must have had...we talk about PTSD—post-traumatic stress disorder—once he met the living Jesus...and if you remember the Damascus road, Jesus' first question to Saul was: Why? Why have you been doing all this? Why have you been persecuting *me*? Jesus identified so closely with his followers that Jesus said: You have been persecuting me, not just these other people that you have been hauling off to jail; and the irony, of course, as he writes in several different places, including Philippians, is that at the time, he thought he was more righteous than God...

DAVE BAST

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was Mister Hebrew. He was perfect; and then he met Jesus and he said: You know what? All my credentials are a pile of manure, he says in Philippians 3. That is how unimportant it is compared to the shining love of Jesus. So, he was deeply, deeply ashamed, but he uses himself here...and you know, a rule we always say in seminary is if you are going to talk about yourself in a sermon, it had better only be because others can identify with you, so that you are not just putting yourself out there as a preacher. Well, that is what Paul does here. He mentions himself, but only to say: But dear reader Timothy, tell your people if Jesus could love me anyway, he can sure love you and everybody, so rejoice in that.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; that is a great rule for any preacher or person, for that matter. If you are going to talk about yourself, don't put yourself on a pedestal, but be vulnerable and reveal your brokenness, your flaws, and that is what Paul does here; but, it raises the question, really, what do you think of when you hear that word *sinner*? You know, I am guessing that many of us think of some kind of horrible person...a mass murderer or a child predator, or you know, some evil dictator...you think of Hitler or Stalin or somebody like that; but maybe you ought to think of yourself first and foremost. I mean, Paul was a highly respectable person. Most of those who knew him then would have said: Yes, look at what a model Paul is. He is religious; he is pious; he is devout; he is learned; he is smart; yes, he is a young man on the rise, but no; I (Paul) was a sinner in all that. Again, a lot of people complain about Christianity: Why are you always talking about sinners? Why are you so negative? Don't you know that we are really divine inside? That is kind of the attitude of many in the world; it is sort of a New Age thing. You are all gods, we are told. No, as Christians who are faithful to the scriptures we have to insist on this word *sinner* for ourselves.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Wasn't it John Calvin who said: I see the word *sinner* and I see my name fitting right in there? I mean, you know, sort of any sinners here? Yes, present. Hello, that is me. Whether we want to describe ourselves as the worst of sinners like Paul did, we need the complete grace of Jesus to be saved. We are not going to get there ourselves. We talked about that in the first program. The Galatians had come to think they could help get themselves saved; and Paul says: No, no, no, no, no...Jesus did it all, and if you are not one hundred percent in with Jesus, you are still lost. You are still in your sins. One of the things about sin, Dave, that has been traditionally taught is that sin alienates us from God, and if God is our creator and the only true source of life, you're alienated from God, you're cut off from life.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Who can help us with that? Well, Christ Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; in fact, Paul has a famous verse in Romans 5...Romans 5:8, where he says: God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Christ died for sinners. Scott, I know you know the very gifted preacher of our time, Fleming Rutledge, who has published a number of books of sermons, and in her sermon on that verse...Romans 5:8...she says: I see myself in that word *sinner*; and boy, I can identify with that. If you can, too, then you need to know this; that Christ came for you. That is what Christmas is all about...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That is what the story leads up to. Yes, it starts in the stable, but it ends on the cross, and it was for you; and the only way I think you can probably miss out on this incredible story of love and grace is by refusing to see yourself in that word *sinner*, and thinking; Nah, I don't really need it. But if you do...if you feel it...then thanks be to God. Jesus came into the world exactly for you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks be to God; and thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast. Please join us again next time as we conclude our Advent study of Jesus' incarnation by digging into Colossians 1:15-23.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com, our website. Share what *Groundwork* means to you and make suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

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