

Jesus Preached

SCOTT HOEZEE

Many times when seminary students are just learning to preach, they have a tendency to imitate a preacher they know well. Perhaps it is a preacher they heard most often growing up; perhaps it is a well-known preacher whose style the student really likes. In any event, in their earliest sermons, seminary students often sound a bit like somebody else. This kind of happened with Jesus, too; once he began his public ministry, including his preaching, he picked up exactly where his cousin, John the Baptist, had left off. Today on *Groundwork*, we will dig into the preaching of Jesus. 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 our second of four programs that are looking at the ministry of Jesus. It is something we often look at during the time of Epiphany in the Church year—between Epiphany and the beginning of Lent—but really, any time of the year we are often looking at the ministry of Jesus; and in these four programs, we are going to look at different aspects. So, we looked at his teaching in program one. This is going to be on preaching, as we just said; and then we are going to look at exorcism of demons, and his healings.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, in a sense, we are talking about that period of time in the Gospels, toward the beginning of each of the four Gospels, when Jesus went about, first in Galilee, his home territory, and then down in Jerusalem, and sometimes in the area between, in Samaria...there are some stories from that as well. So, it is the characteristic things that Jesus did, and that is what he went about doing: He preached, he announced the coming of the kingdom, or the approach of the kingdom; he taught people what that meant in terms of the life of discipleship—of following him; and he did many wonderful works of deliverance...of healing people from diseases, from various disorders, including possession by demons and the power of the demonic. So, we will look at that, too, in a special program.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; now we noted in the first program on teaching that the boundary line between preaching and teaching—teaching and preaching—can be a little bit blurry, but we said you can kind of distinguish where teachings were longer, lecture-like presentations of Jesus; whereas, his preaching was really primarily the proclamation that the kingdom of God had come, and that we had to turn our lives around to get ready to enter into that kingdom; and maybe, Dave, as we begin this program, we can just think a little bit about preaching in general, which, as most of us know, preaching probably doesn't have all that great of a reputation. It reminds me of a song that the singer Madonna sang years ago, early in her career; and the title of the song was: *Papa Don't Preach*; it was a song about a young girl who was in trouble, and so, don't preach to me, Papa, which means: Don't scold me; don't yell at me; don't wag a bony finger in my face, because, in the popular imagination, that is what preaching is; it is kind of bad news.

DAVE BAST

Actually, as we see it in the New Testament, and especially in the ministry of Jesus himself, preaching is totally positive; it is a wonderful sort of reporting or announcing of good news that has come into the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; in the New Testament there are two main verbs in the Greek language that are translated *to preach*. One is *euaggeliz?*, from which we get our word *evangelism*. It is telling good news...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the other is *kerusso*, which means to herald or to proclaim; and again, it was always associated with proclaiming a *good* message...a glad tidings...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, both of the main verbs for preaching in the New Testament are all about not scolding people and finger-wagging negativity...positivity...good news.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and they both have as a background the practice of heralds in the ancient world. You know, if you wanted to get a message from one city to the next, you obviously couldn't pick up the phone or even do a radio broadcast like we are doing now, you had to send somebody in person, and so that person was known as a herald; and the announcement that they made—the good news of a victory perhaps, or a new birth in the imperial family, or some great thing that had happened, that was *euaggeliz?*, the New Testament word that we usually translate *evangelize*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, that is the background, and it is the background specifically to Jesus' preaching.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; now of course, we also recognize that the reason we need to receive good news is because we are in a world with some bad news—we are in a world that is in trouble—and so, there is this need to repent...there is this need to turn your life around...and that can sound like bad news, but it's not because it is the gateway to the good news, and Jesus knew that. So we said in the introduction, Dave, that when Jesus began to preach, he basically preached John the Baptist's sermon. John the Baptist gets put into prison. In Matthew 4 we read in verse 12: When Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹⁷And from that time on, Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

DAVE BAST

And of course, in doing that, he is closely echoing his cousin John's message, who also proclaimed the need for repentance. So, while the act of preaching is totally positive...it is announcing wonderful, good news: The kingdom of heaven is near...there is also a reminder that we need to respond in some way, and the chief need that we all have is repentance; and that, too, is an interesting word in the New Testament: *metanoeo* literally means to change your mind—to change your thinking...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, we might think on a popular level again repentance is beating yourself over the head, or you are feeling sorry or you are feeling sad, but actually, at its root it means to clear up your thinking and turn toward God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And his way—his value system—his kingdom, and away from yourself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and the Hebrew word for repent used in the Old Testament is *shuv*, which literally means to turn around...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is sort of what Jesus is saying; because he says: The kingdom of heaven...in Matthew it is always the kingdom of heaven...it is kingdom of God in the other Gospels...but the kingdom of heaven is at hand...it is right here...and there is a sense in which Jesus is saying: The kingdom of God is right at your back, turn around; don't keep heading in this worldly direction; turn around! Look at what is waiting for you; it is right here. And that is good news, because Dave, what do we mean: The kingdom of God is near; or what do we mean that the kingdom of God is at hand? Well, that is good news because the kingdom of God is where the will of God is in effect...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Where the king calls the shots; and we know from the Bible that what does God want? He wants shalom; and the kingdom is going to bring that back to a world that turned its back on God, but now you turn around again in repentance and discover: Oh, it is all there again...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What wonderful news!

DAVE BAST

Yes; the late teacher and philosopher, Dallas Willard, who wrote a number of wonderful books about the kingdom, defined it quite simply as the place where what God wants done is being done. As you said, Scott, that means shalom...that means wholeness...that means human flourishing...that means an end to misery and suffering and poverty of all kinds...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And for that matter, sickness and sorrow; and we will see how Jesus' healing miracles in a future program deal with that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and the kingdom is also that place...so, how many times in life don't we look at something and say: Well, that's not fair; or that's not right—that's not justice. Well, in the kingdom all those wrongs will be righted*, justice will be done, there will not be unfairness. God will turn everything on its head, but by turning it on its head, he will turn it back to the way it was supposed to be. That is what Jesus...that was the fundamental message...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That the kingdom of God is here. That is what he proclaimed...that is what he preached.

DAVE BAST

And it is good news; we need to respond to it; but sadly, some people hear that good news, and they are not interested in it; they even turn against it and the one who proclaims it; and as we will see in another passage which describes Jesus' preaching, that is what happened to him, too.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this program is part of a four-part series on the public ministry of Jesus, and in this program, we are focusing on the preaching component. Dave, you mentioned at the close of the last segment, Jesus' preaching was good news, but it wasn't always received that well. We were in Matthew's Gospel in segment one, but now let's go to Luke's Gospel, and his first sermon as Luke records it.

DAVE BAST

Right. ^{4:16}He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day, he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him; unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to set the oppressed free; ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" ²⁰Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him; ²¹and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

And that is the passage from Luke Chapter 4. I suppose if that is a sermon of Jesus' it is a pretty short sermon...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

"Today this is fulfilled in your hearing..."

DAVE BAST

It would be popular...one line...yes. He reads the scripture passage and says: Yep, okay; here it is. It is me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now we can go home; but interestingly, it packed a wallop because the passage he was reading there from Isaiah...and no coincidence by the Holy Spirit that that is the passage the scroll was opened to, right? This is all in God's good timing...Jesus talks about that he is there to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor; and Dave, that of course, refers to a practice that was supposed to happen in Israel. It maybe never actually fully did, but it was the year of Jubilee.

DAVE BAST

This was part of the original law in the first five books of the Bible as it was unfolded by God. This is how I want you to live, he said, and when you come into the land I want you to recognize that you don't really own it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It belongs to the Lord, but you can use it, and you can raise crops on it; but every fiftieth year I want you to stop doing all that. In the year of Jubilee proclaim liberty throughout the land, is the verse from Leviticus, [Lev. 25:10] which incidentally is inscribed on the liberty bell in Philadelphia. That is why it is called that. So, the idea was debts were canceled, land went back to its original owners, people who were enslaved were set free, it was the year of the Lord's favor.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They reset the economic clock, which not only was good news to anybody who had gotten into debt or had their house foreclosed on, as it were, but it also meant that every family in Israel would get back the part of the Promised Land that God had apportioned to them in the first place. You were never supposed to be forever off of your land. Unfortunately, as hinted at a minute ago, Dave, we really have precious little if any evidence that Israel actually ever did this...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in fact, by the time you get to the minor prophets, like Amos and Micah, you find out that the prophets assail the people of Israel precisely for their failure. They did end up with a permanent poverty class; they did end up with people who never got out of debtor's prison...who never got their ancestral land back. There was rich and poor in Israel, and that was never supposed to happen.

DAVE BAST

Right; and in fact, Scott, the prophets declared God's Word that because the land hadn't rested...it hadn't enjoyed its Sabbaths, which it was supposed to do...they weren't supposed to grow crops every year...that was part of the Jubilee, too. They were supposed to trust God to provide them with food; so, part of the purpose of the exile, God said, was that the land would lie fallow and would get the rest that he intended for it. The problem with Israel was a problem of Jubilee and ignoring it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But Jubilee was God's design, and in Israel even, Jubilee wasn't just once every fifty years, it was sort of a preview of what life in the kingdom of God would be like; and so when Jesus comes to the synagogue there in Luke 4, and he says: I have come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and this is fulfilled in your hearing; what he is saying is this Jubilee is going to come, and not just for a year, it is going to become a permanent state of affairs when God's kingdom fully comes. I have come to restore you to shalom and delight and flourishing; and it is going to be that way forever one of these days.

DAVE BAST

You would think people hearing that would say: Hooray!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Wonderful! When does it start? Show us...you know...but, instead they became deeply offended that Jesus would make this implicit claim that he was the one who would bring it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, they knew him when he was knee-high to a grasshopper there in Nazareth, right? They knew him when, so they kind of rolled their eyes and said: Phht; this is just Joseph's kid—the carpenter's kid. Who does he think, throwing his weight around like some big-time preacher? Jesus senses this, there in Luke 4, and then he says to them: You know, this is your problem. You never take the good news when it comes to you, which is why God so often works outside of Israel, and he probably will again; and then the people really get mad, and at the end of Luke 4:

²⁸All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. ²⁹They got up, drove Jesus out of town, took Jesus to the brow of the hill on which the town was built in order to throw him off the cliff, ³⁰but he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

So, there was Jesus' first sermon evaluation and it wasn't good.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; he got negative marks. Well, there we see so clearly the need for personal response, and how divisive even the proclamation of the kingdom can be. It would seem like it is nothing but good news, and yet people can react to it in very negative ways; and thus, the need again for repentance. You know, order your thinking along with God's thinking, and your doing along with God's doing; and that is an issue that never goes away, and is always relevant. How do you respond to the Word of God as Jesus proclaims it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it does point to an irony in preaching; and of course, anybody who has ever preached...but really, most of our listeners aren't preachers...but all of us have maybe tried to tell the Gospel story to a coworker or even a wayward family member, and we know that, sincere though we may be...accurate though we may be...even eloquent though a preacher's speech might be...it doesn't make it happen; and that is the irony, that we just sort of speak words on air, and unless something else happens to those words, they will just be just words; *but* the Spirit of God can do quite amazing things with those words; but it does point a little bit to the nature of preaching, and what preaching is...what it does...and what it cannot do; and we will think a little bit about that in practical terms about our lives in this world today, and we will do 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 Dave, as we just saw as Luke tells it in Luke 4, Jesus' first sermon didn't end well. It started out sounding great...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It sounded wonderful, but then the next thing you know, by hook or by crook, for various reasons, the people were furious with Jesus. What else does this tell us, this kind of reaction to preaching?

DAVE BAST

Well, it is really an example of what John says in his prologue: He came to his own people and his own people didn't receive him; or Jesus put it this way: A prophet is not without honor except in his own country or his hometown. So, they were overly familiar with Jesus; they thought they had him pegged; they thought he was just one of them...another, you know, sort of blue-collar worker, and when he comes across as this powerful proclaimer of the good news that God's kingdom was at hand, many of them couldn't handle it...some, of course, responded positively, but many negatively as well. So, maybe the issue is...or it helps to clarify it to think about that phrase: The kingdom is at hand...or as Jesus says in another place: It is among you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; it is there, it is available, but will you tap into it? You had mentioned earlier, Dave, the wonderful Christian writer who died a couple of years ago, Dallas Willard. He wrote a wonderful book called *The Divine Conspiracy*; and he made a great analogy...the kind of analogy you just wish you had come up with yourself, right? But he talked about the process of rural electrification in the United States, early 20th Century...I suppose in Canada as well...and we started unspooling miles and miles of black electrical wire held aloft by thousands and thousands of power poles; and we started running these wires down country lanes and gravel roads in the heartland—places that had never had access to electricity before; and so, Willard says, you know, once those wires were strung up and the power was running through them, somebody could point to them and say: Behold! Electricity is at hand. But, you had to want to hook your house up to it for it to do you any good. Otherwise, it was just buzzing by over your head, and a lot of people were actually afraid to do that.

DAVE BAST

Right; some people...you know, they thought maybe it would burn their house down...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And of course, electrical fires are a reality...it is possible; or they thought that somehow it would make them sick or cause other problems; so, they went on with kerosene lamps and lanterns and old wood-fired stoves and all that when the electricity was right there at hand. So, it is a wonderful illustration of the fact that, yes, the kingdom is at hand, but we also need to plug into it, and that is what we've been talking about with this idea of repentance or changing our thinking—aligning our thinking with God's thinking.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is one of the mysteries of preaching, Dave. I wrote a short little book for the *Calvin Shorts* series called *Why We Listen to Sermons*; and I ponder in that book: Why do we use preaching, and what happens...and what prevents preaching from just being, you know...a lot of people think about just so much hot air...

DAVE BAST

Yes, and all that scolding...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; they can talk...well, what keeps it from being just words or just another speech is that the Holy Spirit is amazingly adept at working through preaching; and it is the Spirit of God that transforms the preacher's words or the words of all of us when we witness to others. We don't have to be in a pulpit to proclaim the

nearness of the kingdom; all of us can witness to the kingdom of God, and we are called to do that; but, if the Spirit is not in the thing...if the Spirit is not blowing in the room, then it is—it is just so much hot air—it is just piffle—it is just words; but when the Spirit is in the game, amazing things happen, and that is what motivates people...through the preached word, through the proclamation that Jesus did, that the kingdom of heaven is at hand...that is what makes them turn around and repent—change their minds.

DAVE BAST

I am thinking of an anecdote I read sometime ago in a memoir by J. B. Phillips, who was quite noteworthy as a New Testament translator...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DAVE BAST

And a preacher in mid-20th Century England; and he told how whenever he was asked to come and preach in a church, as he ascended to the pulpit, with each step he would say to himself: I believe in the Holy Ghost...I believe in the Holy Ghost...you know, that phrase from the Creed...I believe in the Holy Spirit; and for a preacher, or for anyone, as you say, trying to communicate the good news of the Gospel, that is the essential thing to remember. It doesn't depend on our eloquence or our cleverness or our power or our oration or anything like that. It is the Holy Spirit who will take the testimony of scripture to the kingdom and drive it home to people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; this is also why almost every preacher you talk to could tell you that we often get thanked for things we never said, but they heard them by the Holy Spirit; and Jesus talked about this in John's Gospel. John 15*, as he was preparing to leave his disciples, he said: ²⁶“When the advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me, ²⁷and you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”

So preachers, by the power of the Holy Spirit, point to that nearness of the kingdom...the kingdom is at hand...call people to hook up their lives to the available power...like the electricity illustration...when the Spirit is at work, that is what happens.

DAVE BAST

Well, and that is why we have tried to say, I guess, if there is one thing we wanted to stress in this, it is the idea that preaching is an announcement, it is a sharing of good news; it is not an attempt to heap guilt on people...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Or point out everything that is wrong with them, or rail against the sins of the world, or any of that. Preaching, when it is biblical, the kind of preaching Jesus did, and after him the apostles...yes, it doesn't shy away from pointing to the evil that is there; it doesn't refuse to call for a response that people need to make; but it is positive in the sense that it simply tells the truth about the power of God and the wonderful grace of God and the plan of God for all to be well and all things to be well; and then the preacher trusts that the Spirit will drive that home in whatever way the Spirit chooses.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is why there is such urgency to preach. We just have to let the world know. We have looked at every Gospel in this program so far except Mark. So, let's hear this one from Mark 1 that shows how Jesus wanted to keep on preaching. The disciples come and find Jesus and say: Everybody is looking for you...and in Mark 1:38:

Jesus said, “Let us go somewhere else, to the nearby villages, so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” ³⁹So he traveled throughout Galilee preaching in their synagogues.

I like that line there, Dave: That is why I have come, Jesus said; I have come to preach—I have come to preach the good news; and he did so, and now he deputizes us.

DAVE BAST

Yes; happy the people who have such a preacher. May we go and do likewise; and thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time as we study Jesus’ ministry work of casting out demons.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com, our website. Share what *Groundwork* means to you. Make some suggestions for future *Groundwork* episodes.

*Correction: In the audio of this episode, host Scott Hoezee misspeaks and says “all those rights will be wronged,” when he meant to say “all those wrongs will be righted.”

**Correction: The audio of this program misstates the reference for this passage as John 16. The correct reference is John 15:26-27.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/jesus-preached>

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