

Joy to the World

DAVE BAST

The word *gospel* means good news. The Bible says that God's once and future coming, the truth that we proclaim at Advent, is good news for the world. We celebrate that; we sing about it; but do we embody it? As Christians, we are supposed to be good news for the world, not just say good news to the world. That is what we will talk about 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 for Advent—the four weeks of Advent—the season when we prepare for Christmas, by thinking about God's coming into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, the Messiah; and his coming again, because the work is not finished—the work of salvation. There is still a lot to do, as we know simply by looking around us; and Jesus promised that he would come again to finish the new creation. So, we are looking at this theme, though, outside of the traditional Christmas stories in the Bible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; we all know that you can read some Christmasy stuff, particularly, of course, Luke 2, but also Matthew 1 and 2; but we are not going to those regular go-to passages in this series. We went to Genesis in the first program of this series, and looked at the early promise of a Messiah; and in that program, we even speculated a little bit about God's plans that predate the creation, if you can even say predate before there were dates. Here in this program, we are going to look at the Psalms, the next program we will trace the covenant theme and how it comes together through the birth of Jesus, and in the last program we will go to the book of Revelation for a very interesting passage that looks at Christmas from a heavenly angle, and it is quite a story. That will be the last program.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, Advent...this term that we use. I think maybe when I was a child we didn't talk a lot about Advent, but that is really the season of Advent, and celebrating—observing the season—has taken over large parts of Protestant churches. It was always there in the Catholic tradition; but the word means *coming*, literally *coming*...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Adventum in Latin.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; arrival, even...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. It is a time to think about God's coming into the world; quite simple; and nowhere is that theme in scripture more celebrated and more talked about than in the book of Psalms.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The songs of the ancient Hebrew poets, of course, are about a wide variety...we have looked at different types of psalms. There are psalms of lament and psalms of thanksgiving and psalms of confession, and so forth...songs of assent, pilgrim songs that they sang when they traveled to Jerusalem, but there are also tons of psalms of praise; and a lot of those psalms of praise sound like they almost could be written for Advent because they are anticipating the arrival of God—the coming of God.

So, here is an example from Psalm 98: ¹Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For he has done marvelous things... ⁴Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Break forth into joyous song and sing praises. ⁵Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody; ⁶with trumpets and the sound of the horn; make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

DAVE BAST

⁷Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. ⁸Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy ⁹at the presence of the Lord; for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity.

So, that is a really big deal; and the psalmist...he doesn't just sing, you know, praises to the Lord himself. He pictures nature; he almost personifies nature...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Let the floods clap their hands. Well, they don't literally have hands to clap, do they; but, you get the sense of what he is saying. The trees...they need to shout, they need to sing. Why? Because God is coming.

SCOTT HOEZEE

By the way, have you ever, Dave, been to the ocean, particularly beaches where there is a lot of what they call cobbles—those really nice round stones—and when the water pulls back, it sounds like applause, actually, when you think about it...

DAVE BAST

Yes, there you go...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Maybe they do have hands...

DAVE BAST

Right, maybe they do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, the whole psalm is, indeed, as you say, Dave, celebrating his coming; and we get the same type of thing in Psalm 96. In fact, it is almost hard to tell some of these psalms apart, but in Psalm 96:

¹⁰Say among the nations, "The Lord is King; the world is firmly established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity." (And then at the end, again that personification): ^{12b}Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy ¹³before the Lord. For he is coming; he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth.

DAVE BAST

Incidentally, notice here the movement in the psalms; and the Bible emphasizes this from beginning to end. Many people, if they think about the future, think about flying away, you know...leaving the earth...going to be with God...going to heaven when you die. That is our ultimate goal. That is our final destination. That is what we really hope for. That is what salvation means; but in the Bible, the direction is reversed. It is not us going away to be with God, which is not to deny that we are with the Lord, you know, when we die, but rather it is his coming to us...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

it is his coming back to earth. I know a theologian who says: You want to be left behind, because that is where the action is going to be—that is where the salvation is going to take place; and that is exactly what the psalms are celebrating here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, the other thing to notice here is what gets celebrated in the Lord's coming is something we don't think about so much at Advent and Christmas, and that is the idea he is coming to judge; which, you know, you said at the beginning of the program: The Gospel equals good news; but to a lot of people, you say he is coming to judge doesn't sound like good news; but the psalmists seem to think it is.

DAVE BAST

Well, yes; both of these psalms we have read make that emphatic point. You are supposed to sing and celebrate, because God is coming, and why is he coming? He is coming to judge—he is coming for judgment; and as you say, Scott, really? That is good news? Because most of us, if we think about judgment at all, we think about it in terms of punishment; and our hope is that we escape that punishment, because most of us are aware of things that we have done that were not good—that were not right. In fact, for many people, just the concept of the final judgment, or the last judgment, is a terribly scary thing. At the very least, we are afraid we are going to be horribly embarrassed because we think, you know, maybe God will play my whole life like a movie. Every bad thing I ever did...every wrong thing I ever thought...every nasty thing I ever said. It is going to all be on a jumbotron for the whole universe to witness; and what a horror that will be!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; but that is not really the point. The point of being glad for God coming in judgment for the psalmist was because...what you could almost substitute is God will come to do justice. He will come to make the wrong things right; and if you were Israel, and often a people who were beat up by the world in unjust ways...when you are writing from the underside of history...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Then the coming of justice is good news, because it means all the unjust dictators and the oppressors and the slaveholders and the rulers who misused their power to hurt people, they are going to be judged, because God's justice is going to replace all of the injustice under which we suffer now.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, if you are one of history's downtrodden...if you are one of the have-nots of the world, then this idea of judgment is reason for celebration...it is cause for singing. I mean, think of, for example, the people of Holland or of France being liberated from Nazi occupation during World War II. That is the psalmist's idea

of judgment. That is why he is singing and celebrating and calling on us to do the same; and we should sing. What should we sing? Well, let's listen to some of the words that the Bible offers us next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this second program of four for the Advent season, as we are looking at Advent and Christmas from other parts of the Bible than the ones we usually associate with Christmas; and in this program, Dave, we have been looking at the Psalms.

DAVE BAST

We have; and we have just seen that the coming of God, which Advent points to, is coming for judgment, and that is good news...it is not just bad news...because it means justice will be done, and righteousness will be established, and all the wrong things that have dogged us and marred our world...even the destruction of creation...that is all going to be taken away, dealt with once and for all, and in its place God will bring peace or shalom, or flourishing. So, what does the psalmist tell us to do in response to this? He tells us to sing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Psalm 96 again. We will go to the beginning of this psalm. We read a little bit from later in the psalm earlier, but we will go right to verse 1: Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth. ²Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. ³Declare his glory among the nations; his marvelous works among all the peoples. ⁴For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. He is to be revered above all gods.

DAVE BAST

So, there is the invitation to us to sing...to declare...to praise; and it makes me think, Scott, for one thing, of how important music is in this season of the year, of Advent and Christmas. We begin to get Christmas music, you know, it seems like maybe the day after Thanksgiving already...it is everywhere...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or before Halloween...

DAVE BAST

Yes; so maybe...and of course, it is co-opted often because it is played in the mall, it is played in the store, and there is a strange, you know, mash-up of secular holiday music. Think: *White Christmas*, *I'll be Home for Christmas*, these sentimental songs; but also the carols—the old familiar carols: *Silent Night*, *O Come All Ye Faithful*, *Joy to the World*...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the funny thing is, too, is that a lot of the times if you put something really religious into a public mall, some people are going to object. You know, that does not belong in a public space. Somehow, music...nobody ever complains about it because I think people just associate those tunes, even if they are not believers, they associate music with Christmas; and as Psalm 96 makes clear, why not? You have got to sing to the Lord; in fact, you have got to sing to the Lord a *new* song because he is doing a *new* thing; and he does new things all the time. So, sing to the Lord. It is the only proper response.

DAVE BAST

You know, Scott, you mentioned *Joy to the World*, and it is interesting...that is not actually, technically a Christmas carol. The two psalms that we have been using in this program so far...Psalm 96 and 98...they are almost indistinguishable, they are so similar; and *Joy to the World* was written by Isaac Watts, one of the most famous, if not *the* most famous hymn writer of the 18th Century, rivaled maybe by Charles Wesley a little bit later, or John Newton, but Watts published in 1719 a whole book of hymns that were paraphrases of the Psalms; and *Joy to the World* is actually a paraphrase of Psalm 98. So, if you think of some of the words, you can hear echoes of the psalm that we have read: Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her

King. Let every heart prepare him room; and heaven and nature sing. Let all their songs employ, while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy... There is the seas clapping their hands and the trees and all that...and then, this very interesting third verse:

SCOTT HOEZEE

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found. Now, that line, Dave, from *Joy to the World* brings us right back to the first program in this series, and God's curse, particularly on the serpent, right after the sin in Genesis 3. The ground gets cursed because of Adam and Eve's sin. Pain in childbirth is predicted for the woman; the serpent is cursed, and God predicts that one day somebody is going to come to crush that serpent's head. So, that verse from *Joy to the World* is from the very earliest story in scripture.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; so, part of the curse on the ground, God said in Genesis 3, was it is going to bring forth thorns and thistles; and you are going to try to grow potatoes, you know, and instead you are going to get weeds; and that is part of just the frustration that has come into the world as a result of human sin. The pain—the back-breaking pain—that our lives can become; the drudgery that can fill them; how hard it is, not just to get a living, but to have a life, you know, a happy life; and Isaac Watts is saying here, along with the psalmist: Celebrate and sing, because the Lord is come, and that is going to all be taken away and undone. That is what judgment means.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and the coming of justice, as we said earlier in this program; and it is interesting, too, Dave...so, Watts wrote renditions of the Psalms, but he did it as a Christian; and one of the things that we saw in quoting Psalm 98 and Psalm 96 earlier in this program, there was a lot of anticipation that the Lord *is* going to come...he *will* come...it is kind of promissory yet in the Psalms and in the Old Testament; but of course, on the other side of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection, Isaac Watts wrote, not Joy to the world, the Lord *will* come...rather, Joy to the world, the Lord *is* come, which is kind of a funny way to put it. We don't usually talk that way...

DAVE BAST

Old fashioned, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, its present tense is what it is. The Lord *is* come.

DAVE BAST

He *has* come...right; he has been here already. The big difference between Isaac Watts singing as a Christian and the psalmist is, we believe he has already come—he has already come the first time; and we also know his name. His name is Jesus, and yes, he is coming again; but meanwhile, he has left us to carry on the mission that he began; and so, this has tremendous implications for our lives—the Lord's coming; and we will think about that before we wrap up this program.

Segment 3

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; and we want to pick up in this final segment on the idea of singing a new song to the Lord, and the implications of the fact that he already has come the first time. He is coming again. His name is Jesus; but we are his people—we are his followers—and part of what he is doing to renew the creation he is doing through us. So, just a reminder from both Psalm 96 and Psalm 98, listen to the way each of those

psalms begins. It is almost identical.

Psalm 96:1 Oh, sing to the Lord a new song. Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Psalm 98:1 Oh, sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.
So, why a *new* song?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Not because there is anything wrong with the old songs, then or now; and obviously, the Psalms, which the Church has been singing for two thousand years, *are* old songs now...

DAVE BAST

So is *Joy to the World* for that matter. We have been talking about that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, nothing wrong with the old songs, but the idea of a new song that you find all over the Psalms, not only here in 96 and 98, but others as well...it sort of reminds you that God is always doing new things that deserve fresh praises from his people; even...and we talked about this a while back...particularly because in some parts of the Church over the last century or so, there has been such a war over creation, and when did creation happen, and how many years ago did God create? That has created the impression in our mind that even creation was just a one-time work of God...he was done...clapped the dirt off his hands and walked away. The Church has always stressed what is called in Latin *creatio continua*, God's ongoing act of creation. God is always doing new things in his creation, and he is always pushing new things in his plan of salvation: New works of God call for new words of praise on an ongoing basis.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and just to take a look...a real quick look...at the whole span of scripture and the biblical revelation: Songs crop up all the way throughout, and often new ones. Every time there is something new that happens, new songs are sung. So, originally we read in the book of Job that at Creation the morning stars sang together...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is beautiful.

DAVE BAST

And all the sons of God shouted for joy. You just love that idea.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Lovely image...

DAVE BAST

But there is a new song at the time of the Exodus; as the people of Israel cross the Red Sea, Miriam breaks out in a song; and the Song of Moses is recorded in Exodus 15; and of course, think of the angels singing glory to God in the highest when Jesus is born; and the book of Revelation is filled with songs of the redeemed in heaven: Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigns, and he shall reign forever and ever. So yes, every time God does something new music breaks forth. You just need to sing because that is how we celebrate; and the fact is, God continues to do new things, and he does them in and through us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and in his ongoing pursuit to do what he promised in the beginning, and that is that one day the shalom—peace—but peace in the sense of wholeness and fullness and everybody helping everybody else live lives of flourishing and delight, that is the goal God is pushing toward all along; and God is perpetually...continually...doing that.

In fact, another Psalm... We will shift to a different Psalm now as we close the program...Psalm 72 also paints a wonderful picture of this, of the coming of God—meaning the coming of justice and righteousness.

So, here is Psalm 72:

²May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice. ³May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills in righteousness. ⁴May he defend the cause of the poor of the people; give deliverance to the needy; crush the oppressor. ⁵May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon throughout all generations.

DAVE BAST

⁷In his days, may righteousness flourish, and peace abound until the moon is no more. ⁸May he have dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. ¹¹May all kings fall down before him; all nations give him service. ¹⁶May there be abundance of grain in the land. May it wave on the tops of the mountains. May its fruit be like Lebanon, and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field. ¹⁷May his name endure forever; his fame continue as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy.

Wow, that is beautiful; and it is all talking, in this case...this is a royal psalm. It is talking about the king—the king when he comes—and there is such an emphasis, as there is in those earlier psalms, on the nations. This is universal; this is filling the earth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and, indeed, the filling of the earth. There is a theologian named Larry Rasmussen, who wrote some years ago that when you read the Old Testament in the Psalms and the prophets, and their predictions of what is going to happen, he said sometimes it is hard to distinguish salvation from good highlands agriculture, because it is all about the flourishing of the land, and the growing of grain, and the coming of grapes. It is setting to right all that sin and evil set to wrong. It is bringing creation back to what God intended in the beginning; and that is that it is a source of delight; it is a source of abundance; it is a source of flourishing; so that God's people, made in God's own image, can indeed enjoy their fellowship with each other and with their Creator God.

DAVE BAST

You know, the heading of this Psalm—Psalm 72—says it is about Solomon; but actually, one commentator, Derek Kidner, calls it courtly extravagance. It is kind of flattery; because even Solomon, as great as he was, didn't have this happening in his reign. It was not perfectly just; it wasn't helping the poor; it wasn't relieving them. You did not see grain so abundant that it didn't just grow in the valleys, it grew all the way on the top of the mountains...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, it is kind of an exaggeration, but it is pointing forward to a greater king than Solomon.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Solomon was the first literal son of David; but as we said earlier in this series, there would be a final son of David one day, who would be the eternal and perfect king; who wouldn't make the mistakes Solomon, or even David had made as human beings, because it would be God's own son. The son of David would be the Son of God, who will be the one finally to come. So, in the context of Advent and Christmas, when we are thinking about all of this, what this means is that the enthusiasm we have at Christmas should be again so much more than just being about the birth of a little boy in the Middle East two thousand years ago, as we said before in this series. This is cosmic. Our enthusiasm for this is grand at Christmas. It should be grand; not just private; not just kind of Hallmark sentimental; it is a grand enthusiasm; and the world should be able to see the beginning of that coming of shalom in us, right? This should be on display in how we live, in how we think, in how we frame up conversations and discussions.

DAVE BAST

You know, *Joy to the World*...we talked quite a bit about that...that wonderful Christmas carol...okay, let's just call it a Christmas carol, based on Psalm 98, but maybe a good question for us to think about as we close here is: Is that joy coming into the world through me—through my church—through my congregation—through my witness in deed as well as word to the reign of the King, who makes all things right?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Joy to the world...and indeed, let it come through us.

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time, as we study passages in Genesis, and throughout the Old Testament, to see why the events we celebrate at Christmas initiate the fulfillment of God's covenant.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com; share what *Groundwork* means to you, and suggest topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

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