

Peace: Yes or No?

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Bible is God's holy revelation to us. Contained in scripture are the truths we need to know in order to recognize our sinfulness and come to the salvation that God has prepared for us in Christ Jesus. And the Bible is a reliable teacher, but still, the Bible is a big book, and so, perhaps it is not surprising that across the sweep of scriptures you can find texts that seem to contradict each other. Today on *Groundwork*, we begin a series on Bible texts that, at first glance, say opposite things; but what do these texts really mean, and how can we deepen our understanding of scripture when we bring such passages together? We begin today with the question: Does Jesus bring peace into our world, or conflict? 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. Dave, here we are, kicking off a new series of what we are calling our contradictory texts series. The texts that are from different parts of the Bible, but when you bring them next to each other, they look opposite.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I am really excited about this because I think it is a very interesting, and even provocative way of studying scripture, and that is what we are here for. That is what *Groundwork* is all about. We always talk about digging into the soil of scripture, and we are really not going to stay on the surface of a lot of these questions and issues because we are going to be forced to consider both sides of the coin.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we can begin, in this particular program, too, dealing with peace. Obviously that is not something restricted to just a couple of texts in the Bible; peace is a major theme. So, a text that we are going to come up to in a minute that will seem to fly in the face of that is the kind of thing that disturbs us because all through the Bible peace, or sometimes we often use the Hebrew word, *shalom*, that is a pretty big theme of scripture. We think that God created the world for shalom, for peace, for flourishing. The Old Testament prophets like Isaiah were always predicting a day that when salvation would come then peace would return. The lion would lie down with the lamb. Warfare would cease. They would beat swords into plowshares. And then, of course, the angels came the night Jesus was born and they said: Well, the Messiah is born, so now it is peace on earth.

DAVE BAST

Peace on earth, exactly; and certainly peace embraces the idea that conflict is no more; that the differences and the wars and the fighting have been reconciled; but it is much more in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, than merely the absence of conflict. The biblical view of shalom, as you have been pointing out, has to do with flourishing and wholeness and the restoration of all things. It is the hallmark of the new creation. So, it runs through scripture. Give us an example of one of the great passages, maybe, from the New Testament; from the Gospel where Jesus talks about it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sure, and we believe that this peace comes to its climax in Jesus; and so, here is Jesus in John 14, the night in the upper room before Jesus is arrested, and he is leaving his disciples with some comfort. I am going to pick it up at John 14:23:

Jesus said, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me, ²⁵And all of this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things and remind you of everything I said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

DAVE BAST

Those are wonderful words from the upper room. Jesus, on the last night on earth before his crucifixion, leaves these words of peace and comfort and a wonderful promise: Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. But now, keep that in mind; let’s jump over to another incident earlier in Jesus’ ministry. This is from Luke Chapter 12, and listen to this. He is also speaking to the very same audience, his twelve disciples, and he says this:

⁴⁹I have come to bring fire in the earth and how I wish it were already kindled, ⁵⁰but I have a baptism to undergo and what constraint I am under until it is completed. ⁵¹Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. ⁵²From now on, there will be five in one family divided against each other; three against two, and two against three. ⁵³They will be divided, father against son and son against father; mother against daughter...” and so on and so forth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right...

DAVE BAST

Which one is it now? My peace I leave you, or I did not come to bring peace; I came to divide.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, what is it, a misprint? Was Jesus in a bad mood that day? On the face of it, Jesus cannot say – and again, he is speaking to the disciples; it is not like he has a different audience here – he is saying, “I did not come to bring peace; I came to bring conflict. So, what is going on with that? And that is, of course, what we want to talk about, but we should point out, maybe, before we get into that much further, that that text in Luke 12 is maybe a little startling to hear that on Jesus’ own lips, but it is not like the rest of the Bible never talks about this. We have a lot of other passages, New Testament and Old, that also predict that when the Messiah comes, conflict will follow.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. Just speaking of Jesus himself, there is another famous incident – this time he was not talking to his disciples, but to the scribes and Pharisees – where he quotes from the 118th Psalm about the stone that the builders rejected, and if you listen, Scott, as I was listening when you were reading from Luke 14, you notice that Jesus drops in there something about those who obey his teaching versus those who do not obey. Now we begin to see where the source of the conflict can come from. So, Jesus talking about that cornerstone, but the builders rejected it says it is either going to be – and he is speaking, of course, metaphorically of himself – you are either going to have to build your life on me or I am going to fall on you and crush you. Or you are going to stumble over me...

SCOTT HOEZEE

You will trip over me... So, Jesus will be rejected. On *Groundwork* some time ago we had a show about Simeon, old man Simeon in the Temple, on the fortieth day of Jesus’ life when they present him in the Temple, and Simeon looks at Jesus and he says to Mary: You know what? This little boy of yours, he is

going to be the cause of the rising and the falling of many in Israel; and a sword will pierce your soul, too. So, there is a prediction. We can go back to Malachi and some of the Old Testament prophets; Malachi said when God's Messiah comes he will be like a refiner's fire. Who can endure the day of his coming? In other words, judgment will come with him, too. So, Jesus' words in Luke 12 to say: Look, I am here to bring a baptism of fire and it is not going to bring peace; it is going to bring conflict. There are hints and whispers of this all through the scriptures.

DAVE BAST

Yes, there absolutely are. So, I think, to this point we can say for sure the idea of peace versus conflict with respect to Jesus is not quite as simple as it may at first appear; and we want to dig deeper into each of those areas in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork* and the first episode in our new series on contradictory texts; bringing together different parts of the Bible that, just on the surface of it, seem to say opposite things; and today we have looked at John 14 and Jesus' well-known saying that he would leave his disciples with a peace the world could not possibly give, but true, true peace; and then we flipped over to Luke 12, where Jesus told those same disciples: You think I came to bring peace? I did not come to bring peace; I came to bring conflict.

Now we are wondering what happens when we bring these two things together. What is the truth of each passage and what is the truth of them together?

DAVE BAST

Right. So, let's start with the peace side of the equation and just talk a little bit more about that. This is worth a whole program; this is worth probably a whole series of programs; the different senses in which scripture speaks about peace; the peace that Christ brings; the peace that he creates, and it is a central theme of his work. You think of some of the passages in the Epistles of Paul, where he speaks of the fact that being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, there is a vertical peace. There is a sense in which he brings the peace of a restored relationship with God; forgiveness of sins, and all the rest. That extends horizontally, as Paul teaches in Ephesians 2, for example, where he says: Christ himself is our peace, having made peace by the blood of his cross, he has broken down the walls of hostility between Jew and Gentile. So, he unites us. So, there is a vertical and a horizontal peace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For those who are, as Jesus was saying in the John 14 text we read in the first segment of this show, there is a sense in which, when you are a friend of Jesus; when you know Jesus; when Jesus is in you and you are in Jesus and you are all in the Father and all of those things which Jesus talked about; then you have peace. You know your sins are forgiven; you know that you have been made right with God through grace; you have a sense that the whole creation is being put back on track for what God intended for it in the beginning, and that is very simply a great source of peace. A peace that, as Jesus said in John 14, the world can neither give nor take away, therefore. It is a deep, deep spiritual peace that defies whatever you see around you in the world because it is given to you by the Holy Spirit, sealed into your heart as a result of grace.

DAVE BAST

I think we also have to – I do not want to get too technical about this – but, we have to distinguish between a peace in an objective sense and peace subjectively; between the difference of the reality of peace being made and feeling that reality, maybe, or experiencing it. Perhaps you could even use the analogy of a war. Maybe there is a negotiated settlement to the war, so peace has been established, but some people have not gotten the news yet and they are still shooting at each other. They have not experienced that. And in the same way, Christ's work makes peace with God, with redeemed humankind, with the whole creation, but it is not totally experienced yet, either in ourselves or out there in the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If we go back to that John 14 context, Jesus is telling – that chapter begins with Jesus saying: Let not your hearts be troubled – and then that section we read a moment ago through verses 25 and 26, he returns to let not your hearts be troubled; peace I leave with you; but of course, it was the most troubling night of Jesus' life; the night he spoke it; and it was a troubling night for the disciples. Judas has already left at that point in the narrative; the prediction of Peter's denials has been made, so that shook him up; that shook them all up. If Peter is going to crumble, the rest of them are not going to fare any better. So, it was a troubling night. There is a sense in which the peace of God comes to us even though outward circumstances are not necessarily peaceful in some generic sense.

You mentioned subjective and objective peace, Dave. Sometimes we talk about the difference between joy and happiness. Sometimes people think they are the same thing, but as many Christians can testify, you can have deep, deep joy even in unhappy circumstances. Happiness is the more trite and light; joy is the deeper reality. The peace Jesus gives through salvation, through his ongoing work of restoration of the whole cosmos, is that deep, deep peace that abides even when things are falling apart, which is why often – I have experienced it; you have; many, many people have – we see that peace in people who are about to die, which is a tragedy for the family and death is not the way it is supposed to be; and yet, the peace of Jesus endures.

DAVE BAST

Right. So, he is giving them peace in the upper room, even though it would be quite a while before they would really fully feel it and experience it. They were about to go through the worst day in their lives, too. I mean, it was bad for Jesus, certainly, on Good Friday, but it was horrible for the disciples as well. You think of that story on Easter afternoon, those two who were walking to Emmaus and they said poignantly: We *thought* he would be the one...

SCOTT HOEZEE

We *had* hoped, yes.

DAVE BAST

We *had* hoped, yes; but, the peace is nevertheless real.

You talk about in the face of death and in serious circumstances, it reminds me of a story from my own family history. My mother died when I was a little boy. My father was a pastor, and he preached a sermon later on called Formulas for Stress and Strain, which actually, he got the title from an engineering textbook he happened to see in a bookstore window; but his text was Isaiah 26:3, in the old King James: Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon Thee. It helps our sense of peace to focus away from our circumstances and shift the gaze of faith to God; and especially to the promises of God, which run throughout the scriptures. So, we lay hold on those promises and accept that they are true and trust them, and then the peace will – as Paul calls it, the peace that passes understanding – will keep our minds and hearts in Christ Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think it is important to note, too, that none of that means that we are starry-eyed or shunning of the earth or of earthly things or not mindful of tragedies that happen on this earth. No, no; part of the peace stems from our knowledge that none of that bad stuff will have the last word, and that even now, in the trials of life, there is something deeper at work that is going to say: You know what? Those things do not have the last word, and by grace I know this. Again, looping back to old Simeon in the Temple; so here he has predicted to Mary: This child is going to cause some problems; the rising and falling of many in Israel. A sword will pierce your heart. But Simeon, on that same day, said: O, Lord; now I can depart in peace. I have seen salvation arriving. Things are going to get better, and that is the kind of peace we are talking about.

DAVE BAST

So, the peace is real and it is deep and it is found in Jesus; but in what sense does he promise, not to bring peace but conflict; that is what we need to wrestle with next on *Groundwork*.

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. We have just left the idea of the peace that Christ brings, which is real and deep and profound. It is peace with God. When your relationship with God is restored through Christ, you end up living with the grain of the universe – I love that analogy. Even though you may think your life is great and everything is cool and you do not need anything; you are actually living against the grain and eventually you are going to get splinters when you are living apart from God; but that is restored, and things sort of slot into their proper places when you experience peace with God through Christ. That comes subjectively into your life eventually on the deepest level despite the storms that may shake it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that is the perspective of faith. That is what the eyes of faith will show will you; and as we said right near the end of the last segment, we do not ignore nor downplay nor belittle the tragedies of life. We read the same newspapers as Christians as everybody else; but, we also see beyond the headlines; we see the reality behind the reality of the nightly news to know God is at work and God will not let these terrible things have the last word. So, that is the good news, right? Salvation.

DAVE BAST

But now, what is he getting at when he says: I came to bring conflict? We have to take that up, too, and deal honestly with that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think here we get at something that – and we will talk about this, maybe, in a few minutes – this may count as a neglected theme in the Church today; but as wonderful as salvation is, as wonderful as our personal piety and faith is, as wonderful as our inner security – we have our only comfort in life and in death, as the Heidelberg Catechism says – we have that as believers; that is great; but what had to happen for all of that goodness of salvation to take place? Well, what had to happen was God had to parachute his only beloved, holy, eternal, begotten from the Father before all ages Son, and parachute him into a world that was very, very messed up. In fact, “messed up” is way too trite a way to put it. It was entrenched in evil.

DAVE BAST

One of the interesting things – and I think you pointed this out on a program a while back, Scott. It struck me and I have been thinking about it since. It seems almost as though it was harder for God to redeem the world than it was to create it in the first place. When he created, he just spoke and it happened. He said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. But when it came to redeeming this world after it had rebelled against him; after it had fallen into sin and the sin of his first children really permeated the whole creation; it was like a stain somehow spreading out and even affecting the physical order, so that things are really, really messed up and set against the good purposes of God; to redeem it, he had to come in person. It was not enough just to speak the word.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think it was my friend, Neal Plantinga, who pointed out once that John 1 tells us that the word of God, whom we now know incarnate as Jesus, was the one who did all the speaking in Genesis 1. He was the word of God who spoke creation into being. Let there be – let there be – let there be light – boom, light. Let there be water – boom, water. Great! But that same word did not accomplish redemption until on the cross he had said not, “Oh, let there be salvation done,” no, he said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” and he shrieks in dereliction, and only then is redemption somehow accomplished. So, what is the difference between the Son of God speaking in creation, which looked easy, and the speaking in redemption, which

looked terrible, but what that speaks to is the reality of the Devil; the reality of sin and evil as something that really turned this world upside down in a way that God was not going to be able to take care of it with a snap of his fingers.

DAVE BAST

So, the conflict that Jesus brings is not really intentional on his part; it is not like he loves it; like he wants to divide people and make people unhappy and bring more suffering; but it is a byproduct of his presence, of his assault on the forces of evil in a fallen world. Jesus cannot help but bring conflict. It is not his primary intention, but it is a consequence of the fact that he is going to tackle evil and the Devil head on, and that is going to make a lot of people really, really mad.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I was in Hungary recently, and we went to a Holocaust museum and were reminded of a lot of the terrible things that happened in World War II. Sometimes when we think about Hitler, or we think of the Nazi war machine, it is like staring evil, a concentrated form of evil, in the face. But what we forget is that, although that is a concentrated example of evil, that same evil is sowed like a bad weed all throughout the soil of this creation; and that is what Jesus came to root out, and it had sunk deep roots; it was not going to come out easily; and so, of course, there was going to be conflict because Jesus was the center point of it all, and what you made of Jesus – you accepted him, you are going to find peace. You do not accept him, you are not going to be just passive about not accepting him, you are going to reject him; you are going to hate him; you are going to want to get rid of him because his truth or his falsehood is the hinge on which everything depends.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and people not only turn against Jesus and reject him, but they reject the people of Jesus; they reject the body of Christ; they reject the Church. So, when I read a passage like this Luke 12, I cannot help but think of some of my friends from the Middle East, for whom it has been very real that family has been divided and parents have been set against their children and brothers against sisters and husbands...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It happens every day.

DAVE BAST

That happens every day, and I know people to whom it has happened, and it is not because they have set out to be annoying or controversial; it is just because by virtue of the fact that they have become followers of Jesus Christ, non-Christian family members become sometimes violently opposed and lash out, and that is where the conflict comes from.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That's right. I think of that, too, we have had a lot of books written in recent years by what is sometimes called the new atheists, Richard Dawkins and some others like – and sometimes when you read the words of these people or hear them on the radio or in a speech, sometimes they are not just disagreeing with the Christian faith, they are angry about it. They sound just really, really angry; and you say, well, what is the source of that anger? Well, I think the source of it is Jesus, and he is the ultimate dividing line, and if you are on the other side of the line from where believers are, you are going to be very angry. We forget about this, though, in the Church. Not that we want to dwell on this, but we cannot only sing *Amazing Grace*; we also have to be willing to sing *Day of Judgment! Day of Wonders!* We cannot just celebrate, "Oh, Jesus is my personal savior;" we also have to be willing to say, "but my salvation was bought at a price, and the price was one borne of a deep conflict."

DAVE BAST

I want to say one last word here, too, that is both personal and, I think, helpful for all of us to consider. Sometimes there is a danger for us to have the idea, or slip into the idea that you become a Christian to make

everything great in your life and to solve all of your problems. You almost use Jesus as a means to an end rather than an end in himself. His warning: I did not come to bring peace – you know, we have seen – on the deepest level, yes, peace; but actually, if you accept Christ you might have less peace than you had before because he is going to challenge some things in your life. He is going to kick some sleeping dogs in my heart and life that need to be changed; that need to be corrected; and he will not let that go. He is going to bring a little bit of conflict inside us as well because his ultimate purpose is to heal everything, beginning with me and my life, and thank God for that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen. Well, thank you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So visit groundworkonline.com and tell us topics and passages you would like to see us dig into next here on *Groundwork*.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/peace-yes-or-no>

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