

Rejoicing in New Life

DAVE BAST

There is an interesting story in the book of Acts that recounts a conversation two officials in the Roman Empire were having about the Apostle Paul; one of them was the Roman governor, Festus; a governor of Palestine. The other was a local king named Agrippa. Paul had been taken into protective custody by the Romans because the Jerusalem authorities were trying to assassinate him, and Governor Festus was explaining to King Agrippa about this case that he had inherited from his predecessor, Felix. It is clear from Luke's account in Acts that Festus didn't really understand the controversy between Paul and the Jewish leaders. He told Agrippa that it was some sort of religious dispute "about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive." That is Acts 25:19. Well, old Festus may not have understood much of the theological argument between Paul and his enemies, but he certainly got the main point right. It really is all about a dead man named Jesus who we claim is alive.

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 this program is for Easter; so Scott, Christ is risen!

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is risen, indeed! Hallelujah! That is so the essence of our Christian faith; the claim of our creeds; that is the one that everything else hangs on.

DAVE BAST

It is all about a dead man named Jesus who is now alive. Without that, we wouldn't be here. Because of it, we have a story to tell to the nations, as the old hymn says.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we have been looking at a number of the six different passages leading up to this program that depicted the Servant of the Lord, who we Christians believe ultimately was fulfilled in Jesus as the One who was going to be full of the power of the Lord, full of the hope and the glory of the Lord. He was going to proclaim good news to the poor, bring a light to the nations. The Servant of the Lord was going to bring life and renewal, and we believe that ultimately Isaiah's words were fulfilled in Christ.

DAVE BAST

Right; and then, as Isaiah goes on in Chapters 50 and 52, and 53 in particular, he explains that the way this Servant will accomplish His ministry is the very strange and troubling way of suffering – painful suffering – rejection – sorrow – wounding – and ultimately death.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It would be that very Suffering Servant that would enable Him to accomplish the mission of God in the world. So again, we see it pointing so clearly to Jesus; and now, of course, the story doesn't end there, but it goes on as we celebrate Easter with the life and the resurrection power of Jesus; and you might think: Well, how are you going to get that out of Isaiah 53? But that is exactly where Isaiah does go near the end of the chapter; and in fact, after he mentions the suffering and death of the Servant, he mentions His burial as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Here we pick it up at verse 8 of Isaiah 53: ^{8b}For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of My people He was punished. ⁹He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, though He had done no violence; nor was any deceit in His mouth.

DAVE BAST

So clearly, it is again underscoring the fact that the Servant does all this suffering, not because of His own sin, but because of the sin of others.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Our iniquities; our transgressions. He was innocent. He was an innocent sufferer, Isaiah wants to say; and it talks a lot about His burial. It is indeed such a clear prediction of what is going to happen to Jesus. We know that Jesus died on the cross, although He died in a way that they didn't have to break His legs to kill Him like they often did; so He was taken down off the cross, and then one of Jesus' secret disciples – this Joseph of Arimathea figure... and in John's Gospel, also Nicodemus, another secret disciple, perhaps, take the body and they bury it in a tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea – a rich man with his... Isaiah said that he was buried with the rich at His death, and indeed...

DAVE BAST

That is exactly what happened.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is exactly what happened.

DAVE BAST

But that is not the end. Isaiah goes on in the closing verses of Chapter 53 to hint at an even more glorious future for the Servant of the Lord. So listen to this, beginning again with the reading at verse 10:

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer; and though the Lord makes His life an offering for sin, He will see His offspring and prolong His days. And the will of the Lord will prosper in His hand. ¹¹After He has suffered, He will see the light of life and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities; ¹²therefore, I will give Him a portion among the great and He will divide the spoils with the strong, because He poured out His life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You don't usually... Given all the language in Isaiah 53 about death, and now we just saw burial, cut off from the land of the living; that doesn't usually point to the future, and it certainly doesn't point to a bright future or having offspring or future followers; so you've got this paradox – resurrection isn't exactly fully spelled out in Isaiah 53 – but you have this paradox that this person, this Suffering Servant of the Lord who is dead and buried also is going to have a future, and future followers, and essentially future children – spiritual children at least – who are going to find an abundance of life; and that is, again, an arrow pointing to what we know happened in the New Testament in terms of Christ rising from the dead.

DAVE BAST

Right; here are, I think, the key phrases from those closing verses. Isaiah writes: He will see His offspring... So, somehow He is not just alone. He is going to have descendants of some kind in some way, shape, or

form; and He will prolong His days. Well, you don't prolong your days when you are dead. When you're dead you're dead. After He has suffered, He will see the light of life and be satisfied. I think that is maybe the clearest indication that suffering and death will not be the end for the Servant, but that somehow in the power of God He will be restored – He will be granted glory; and in a sense, as a reward for His willing acceptance of His suffering. Well, if that doesn't remind you of the New Testament Gospel and the story of the first Easter, I don't know what would; but just to make it even more clear, we will look at that story of the first Easter in just a moment.

Segment 2

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 today we are at the end of Isaiah 53, the closing program in our series on the Servant Songs of Isaiah; and in this second program devoted primarily to Chapter 53, we have seen how Isaiah shifts his attention from the suffering and the death – the vicarious sacrifice of the Servant of the Lord – to His future – to His vindication – to His prolonging of life – to His seeing light once again, and enjoying even offspring or a community.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that brings us right into the New Testament, where to a person Jesus' family and His disciples looked at Him dead on the cross and said: That is it. That is the end. End of story. We had hoped He would be the one but He wasn't. And just like Isaiah 53, oddly enough, turns from death to life, from darkness to light, the Gospels do, too. Let's hear these familiar words of that very story from Luke Chapter 24:

¹On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright, the women bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; He has risen!"

DAVE BAST

It is interesting, you know, in other of the Gospel accounts, the angel appears to the women at the tomb, and the first thing he says to them is don't be afraid.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; that is almost always an angel's first line because they are kind of frightening – real ones – not Hollywood angels that are kind of cute, but real angels are scary.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and you can just imagine... I think one of the things to do with this story is to try to put yourself into it and imagine – it isn't too hard – what was going on in the hearts and minds of those women.

Scott, as you well know, people who don't believe in the Christian faith, who don't believe Jesus is Savior and Lord, have to do something else with the resurrection story; and probably the most common attempt to deflect it in some way or to reinterpret it is to say that it is sort of a projection of the faith of the first Christians. They loved Jesus so much; they found Him so meaningful in their lives that they kind of went back and retold the end of the story as if He didn't die, but somehow He lived on.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is not at all what Luke presents. You know, I love the question the angel asks: Why do you look for the living among the dead? If the women really had to answer that question, they would have said: We are not...

DAVE BAST

We are not looking for the living, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are seeking the dead among the dead. Jesus is dead. But He is the living now, and He is not here; and you know, sometimes when we are at funeral homes, and maybe we have young children... Maybe Grandpa or Grandma has died and the body is there; but we will say: You know, Honey, Grandpa is not really here. He is with Jesus. He is with the Lord. Well, the angel said: He is not here; but they didn't mean it that way. They meant He was not there at all as a body, as a soul; He was now a living being again, and living beings don't hang out in graves, so He was gone.

DAVE BAST

His body was gone, that's what they mean; and here we can connect it, I think, with what we said in our opening segment about Jesus' burial. Why does Isaiah prophesy His burial? Why does the Christian faith make so much of His burial? In fact, we put it in our creed. In the Apostles' Creed, which is very spare... It doesn't have extra words; it doesn't multiply its phrases...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It skips over the whole ministry of Jesus...

DAVE BAST

Yes, it just says He suffered and died, but it makes a special point of saying He was buried, and so does the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:3, where he summarizes the Gospel: He was buried. Well, I think the reason is for the same reason that Luke emphasizes the empty tomb: He is not here. It is to show: A) He really died, and: B) He really rose. We are talking about His body being transformed. That is what Easter is all about.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is, of course, a key, key article of our faith; Dave, you just said if you don't believe in the resurrection, you've got to do something else with all this; but indeed, it has often struck me that if you watch a newscast on the Friday evening of Good Friday, the newscaster will say: Today the Pope in Rome celebrated a special mass because this is the day when Jesus died on the cross. Two days later watch the newscast on Sunday and they will say: Today the Pope in Rome celebrated a special service for Easter because this is the day when Christians claim Jesus rose from the dead. So they will treat His death as a fact, but not His resurrection, because that is such an article of faith that you only know by believing the testimony of the women, believing the testimony of the apostles, and having all of that also, above all, sealed to your heart by the Holy Spirit.

DAVE BAST

Yes; well, and here is another thing to think about, as someone has pointed out, nobody would celebrate Good Friday if there had not been an Easter.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sure; and we wouldn't call it Good.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I mean, the only reason Jesus is remembered... the only reason His death is so significant is because He rose again three days later. If He hadn't... if He had stayed dead... if Isaiah 53 ended with the stripes, the whole thing would fall apart. He would just be another Jewish pretender who was executed by the Romans.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in fact, in the Christian tradition – and I am pretty sure I am remembering this right theologically – in the Christian tradition we have never said that Jesus the Son of God raised Himself. We always say the Father raised the Son back to life because that was the Father's stamp of approval on His entire ministry, including His death, leading up to that point. By raising Him back, the Father validated everything Jesus ever

said; every parable, every miracle, every prediction Jesus made; the resurrection is the Father's "yes" to the work of the Son.

DAVE BAST

And it is also God the Father's stamp on the authenticity of the Gospel offer, namely that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus; namely that His death was our satisfaction; it did pay the price; it did satisfy the justice of God. However we want to describe that, and the Bible talks about it in many different ways, but all that Isaiah says about His suffering: By His death He justified many, says Isaiah. Well, the resurrection confirms that; that that is actually true. That is the way it works. That is what happened; and so, everything depends on this; and if you stop and think about it, if He rose it is all true. That settles every other question: Is there a God? Which religion should I believe and follow? Who is Jesus? All those questions are answered by His resurrection. If He didn't rise, well, let's go home.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I Corinthians 15, where some of the Corinthians were doubting the resurrection apparently and Paul wrote: If Christ be not raised, then our faith is in vain and we are fools. I mean, game over, right? But not only, Dave, as you just said... Everything you just said is true, that we are reconciled; our sins are forgiven; our iniquities are put away; but the resurrection is bigger even than that. It has cosmic ramifications; and we are going to think about that from the context of Isaiah next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork; and we want to turn back again to the magnificent prophecy of Isaiah. There are a couple of more chapters that would be worthy of their own series of programs, frankly; but we want to just touch on some of the highlights as we think together about more of the implications of the resurrection of Jesus. It was foretold centuries before, along with His suffering and death. It happened; it is confirmed in the historical accounts of the Gospel; accounts confirmed by eyewitnesses who saw it – saw Him – saw the empty tomb – testified to it; and as you say, Scott, we believe it because of their testimony, but ultimately because the Spirit of God convinces us that Jesus is alive; and because He is alive, that has tremendous implications in the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And indeed, if we move over to the next chapter now, Isaiah Chapter 54, Isaiah has this incredible image of Israel, but ultimately we now would say the new Israel is also the Church; so these words have resonance for today. So in Isaiah 54 we read:

¹"Sing, barren woman; you who never bore a child. Burst into song; shout for joy, you who were never in labor because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband," says the Lord. ²"Enlarge the place of your tents; stretch your tent curtains wide; don't hold back; lengthen your cords; strengthen your stakes, ³for you will spread out to the right and to the left. Your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities. ⁴Do not be afraid. You will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace. You will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. ⁵For your Maker is your husband. The Lord Almighty is His name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. He is called the God of all the earth."

DAVE BAST

So originally these words would have been spoken to the exiles in Babylon and they would have been another promise of return, of restoration; but of course, as we have said repeatedly, prophecies in the Old Testament had multiple fulfillments. They looked at a series of horizons; the immediate one in the context of Old Testament Israel, but ultimately to the Church, and even to the end of the world and the restoration of all things with the return of Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you have that image here that God is your husband now, and certainly that carries into the New Testament, where the Church is the Bride of Christ, who is the Bridegroom.

DAVE BAST

So the Suffering Servant in His life and death and resurrection – His new life – will mean a restored relationship with God for the people of God; and it will mean increase; it will mean growth. This wonderful picture at the heart of the passage that you read: Lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes, says the prophet. In other words...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a camping image.

DAVE BAST

Yes, you are going to need a bigger tent. You know, Israel in the wilderness living in tents. Well, your children are going to increase; your numbers are going to swell to such an extent you are going to spread out and ultimately you will fill the whole world. So, you better pitch a bigger tent to hold everybody. It is a beautiful picture, I think, of the mission ultimately of the people of God to reach out and embrace the whole world with the saving love of God in Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And look how quickly Isaiah has progressed here from Chapters 52 and 53, which were mostly about suffering – mostly about death, punishment, being buried – and now we are racing back to life, and He will see the light of life. Many will be His offspring. Now we are in Chapter 54, and it is growing exponentially before our very eyes, and we will get to it in a minute; it is going to go even farther than that when we get to Isaiah 55; but right, first then this idea that this is the mission of Israel, and now the new Israel that is the Church, to continue to spread the Good News and bring more and more and more people into the tent – into the people of God.

DAVE BAST

Well, and you notice it is in the imperative: You need to lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes, says the prophet. There is something we need to do, and it is incumbent upon us to share the Good News with the whole world.

Actually, if I could tell a story – if I could have a couple of minutes of our remaining time, this is a significant verse: Isaiah 54:2: Lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes, in the history of Christian mission, because it was the text of a sermon preached by William Carey in the year 1792. Now William Carey was an English Baptist pastor. He started out as a lay preacher and eventually became a minister; and he was convicted of the idea that Christians should be putting the Great Commission into practice, you know. The Great Commission from Matthew: Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. Well, surprisingly to us, maybe, most Christians, including most ministers of that time, didn't believe in that. They thought: Well, that is something God will do. In fact, one of them once said to Carey: Young man, sit down. When God is pleased to convert the heathen, He will do so without your help or mine. So Carey said: Well, now wait a minute. He uses us. He uses means. He uses human instruments to do His will. So there was a meeting, he preached a sermon on this text, and they launched a missionary society. The first modern English missionary society; and Carey himself went out and was a missionary for the last forty years of his life. It is a great image for what we need to be doing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in fact, I remember a few years ago, Dave, there was... right in the town where I lived there was a... I don't remember if it was a very liberal Christian preacher who didn't really believe in the resurrection or if it was an agnostic... I don't remember; but he was interviewed in the newspaper and he said: I don't believe in the resurrection. These Christians claim they do, but I'll tell you what. If I did believe in the resurrection, I'd

be out on the streets all the time telling people about this amazing thing. Why aren't Christians doing that more often? And it was kind of a shaming moment from an unbeliever to say: Man, if I believed that was true, I would tell everybody. Wouldn't you? And indeed, that is our task – that is our mission – to tell the whole world because, among other things, the whole world and the whole cosmos is involved; which gets us into the very end of this whole section of this seven-part series on Isaiah that we are going to look at; the very end of Isaiah 55.

DAVE BAST

And these are famous verses, but they speak of the power of the word of God as it goes out, how it can transform, how it can bring life, and ultimately transform, not just human beings or human hearts, but the universe, really. So we read:

¹⁰As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth, making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater; ¹¹so is My word that goes out from My mouth. It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹²You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands. ¹³Instead of the thorn bush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown; for an everlasting sign that will endure forever.

The word of the Lord – the Gospel of Jesus Christ we would now say – is going to transform the whole cosmos. It is going to transform not just people and our souls, but our universe – the creation. We are headed to a new creation, and it is the word of the resurrection that makes that possible.

DAVE BAST

And Isaiah just is so beautiful here – the poetry that he writes; and it goes on, if you are familiar at all with the book, into the very closing chapters – there are another eleven chapters after 55 in the book – but just this imagery of a world made new – a world made over. We have talked about some of these passages when we have discussed the biblical concept of *shalom* or peace or wholeness or goodness – the way things are meant to be; and that is the vision that God's word will bring about.

So, you know, it is easy to look at the world and get a little depressed – get a little discouraged – think everything is falling apart – everything is running downhill; but God's word changes all that. That is our hope and that is our expectation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we always like to know how we can help you to continue digging deeper into the scriptures. So visit our website, which is groundworkonline.com and tell us topics and passages for future Groundwork programs.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/rejoicing-in-new-life>

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