
The Son of God Became Like Us

DAVE BAST

A lot of people today have become interested in their family backgrounds, especially because of the availability of private DNA testing through companies like Ancestry.com and 23andMe. Many of us would like to know more about where we come from and from whom; but what about Jesus? Where does he come, and from whom does he come? We will look at a passage that answers those questions and more today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, today we begin a new series of four programs for the season of Advent: traditionally four weeks long, thus the four programs; and the season when Christians think together about Jesus coming into the world, which we will celebrate at Christmas, and his coming again someday to finish the work he began.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Dave, *Groundwork* has been on the air for about a decade...about ten years now...and you and I have been doing it together for most of those years; and so, like a lot of pastors when Christmas and Advent roll around we sort of say: Well, there is only so much material in the Bible that deals with Advent and what we call Christmas. There is really one the one big, classic Christmas story in Luke 2, a little bit in Matthew, nothing in Mark, and really only just high theology in John. So, we also wondered for this series what should we do that we haven't already done before in past *Groundwork* Advent series? So, what we hit on was to sort of say what does the Apostle Paul have to say about the incarnation...about the Son of God becoming human? It is an interesting question, Dave, because some people may know that there have been theologians in the Church who have suggested that because Paul never refers to the virgin Mary, doesn't seem to refer to the Bethlehem manger story, some thing that Paul either didn't know about what we call Christmas, or he didn't care about it...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or that the incarnation wasn't important; but in this series we are going to look at four places in Paul's letters where it becomes clear that the incarnation is, in fact, central to his theology.

DAVE BAST

You know, more liberal scholars have argued that those birth stories that are so precious to us and that we sing about, you know...Mary in the stable and the manger and the angels and the shepherds and the wise men and all the rest of it...were sort of pious little details that the gospel writers invented, and that it is not really important to the Christian faith; but I think we hope to see in this series that is very important, and that Paul also, although he doesn't tell the details of the story...actually, that wasn't his job...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Nor was he there. Remember, he wasn't one of the original...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

Twelve disciples. So, it is the business of the gospels to talk about Jesus' earthly life and death and resurrection, and it is the business of the Apostle Paul to explain their meaning. So, we come to this idea...this doctrine...Christian teaching...of the incarnation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; which literally means to become flesh. John 1:14: The Word was made flesh...[in] *carne*...if you get chili con carne to eat that means chili with meat; and so this is the Son of God made flesh; and we are going to look at some places in Paul. Today we are going to go to Galatians. In the second program we will do Philippians, the third program 1 Timothy, and the final program in this series will be some verses from Colossians; but today, we go to Galatians, and Galatians is an interesting letter for lots of reasons. The centrality of Jesus' sacrifice and the totality of his saving work is a major, major theme in Galatians because after Paul had left Galatia, false teachers crept in and started to teach the Galatians that: Well, Paul told you Jesus did it all, but he really didn't. Jesus got the ball rolling, and he got salvation a good ways down the road, but now you have to follow the law and finish salvation or you won't be saved. Paul heard about that, and he was so upset that the Galatians bought into that, that in this letter he skips the usual thanksgiving section and just starts yelling at them right off the bat in Chapter 1 [Galatians 1:6-7]. ^[3:1] You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? I told you Jesus did it all on the cross. So, the humanity of Jesus and the death of Jesus are central to what goes on in this letter.

DAVE BAST

Right; in Galatians, the issue really is faith versus law. How do you become right with God, in Bible language, justified...made righteous in Christ, and find your way back to God through the Christian life; and is it by faith alone, as Paul insists, or is by faith and then you have to add the law back in? So, it hinges on this question of the law, and in Galatians 3 and 4 in particular, Paul addresses that; and the passage that we have in mind for Advent is from Galatians 4:4-7:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father." ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a child; and if a child, then also an heir through God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So God sent his Son, born of a woman...a little bit of an unusual way to describe it. I don't think most of us go around and introduce ourselves and saying: Hi, I'm Scott Hoezee, and I was born of a woman...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How else would you have come? But Paul makes that point very clear because that speaks to the true humanity. He was born just like the rest of us; and in Jesus' case, it does make good sense to point out that he was born the usual way. He had a mother who had become pregnant. We know it was a miraculous pregnancy, and so he was born that way as a true human being...a human being who therefore, you know, could die, and did die for us; but anyway, again, just because sometimes scholars think Paul wasn't familiar

with the details of Jesus' birth, he knew about Mary and he knew that Jesus had been born...that Jesus didn't just appear from out of nowhere.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; you think about the alternatives. I mean, if Jesus really came from God directly, he could have just appeared; he could have gone *poof* and there he was, in the stable, or even on the roads of Galilee teaching and preaching; but no, he came the same way every human being has come into the world after the first pair. He was born in the natural, normal way. He was really and truly human; and it is possible, too, that behind that phrase: born of a woman, Paul is not just thinking about Mary, but he is thinking about Eve and the very first promise of the gospel...the first hint of the gospel...when God said to the woman after the fall and after all the terrible things that followed from sin, you know, one day one of your children is going to defeat the evil one.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes; which is why it is significant that Paul doesn't just say in Galatians 4 that he was born into the world, but rather God *sent* his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law. So he was sent. This was a special mission. He didn't just appear for no particular reason. It is sort of like if you send in a military brigade in Afghanistan, a general will send them for that specific rescue mission. God sent the Son for a specific rescue mission, to redeem us who were under the law, who could never keep the law, so he kept it for us, and died for us to forgive us, to renew us. He did it all, which is Paul's major point in Galatians, and he could do it all for us humans because he was human.

DAVE BAST

That is a great analogy, Scott. It is sort of a rescue mission. It is almost like a military mission. That is actually the idea behind C. S. Lewis's famous space trilogy, we're the occupied world...occupied by the enemy and God is going to invade; but there is one big difference. Because of the incarnation, what we remember is that God didn't just send someone else in the person of Jesus, God actually came himself. It wasn't like a general sending some poor private into harm's way...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He came himself and took on all the dangers and vicissitudes up to death itself in order to save us; and that is the truth that Paul affirms here; but there is more, too, and we want to look at that next. What does it mean to be born under the law, as Paul says about Jesus? So, we will look at that in 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 Scott, today we are in the first of four programs looking at Paul's theology of the incarnation...his take on the whole Advent story of Jesus coming into the world from God in order to save us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we just noted the text from Galatians Chapter 4, where he said that God sent his Son into the world, born of a woman; but then he also adds that he was born under the law; and again, for Galatians this is going to be a major, important theme because, as we said earlier, the Galatians had fallen prey to the false teaching that they had to help save themselves by keeping the law...by keeping the Jewish law. Their males had to get

circumcised, no matter who they were, they had to eat kosher food and observe the law, because by doing that, they would then finish Jesus' unfinished work of salvation. Paul got wind of that, saw red, and fired off a very, very, almost angry letter. It starts out hot in this letter in Chapter 1 [Galatians 1:6-7]; again, even calling the Galatians foolish and asking who bewitched them to betray the true gospel [Galatians 3:1]; and it all has to do with this thing about the law. So, Jesus was born under the law, and I guess we all are, in a sense, right? That we all are born into God's world and are expected to color within God's lines and live happily within God's moral boundary fences, but we don't. We sin; and so, who can keep the law? Well, Israel never did...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They were given the law. They failed over and over and over. Nobody, even the best characters in scripture...Moses or David or whoever you want to name...Peter the apostle even...nobody lived perfectly. Who is going to rescue us from this? Well, somebody who was born under the law but who has the ability to keep it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; so, in Chapter 3 Paul has talked about the consequences of failing to keep the law, and he points out that what the law says is that the one who keeps it perfectly will be right...will be righteous, but if you break the law, you place yourself under God's curse, which is really strong language, even scary language; but that is what the law itself says: Cursed is everyone who does not keep all the words of the law. That is from Deuteronomy. So then he points out that actually Jesus was cursed because he was hanged on a tree on the cross, and the law also pronounces that that is a specific sign of God's curse on a person...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And what is the upshot of it all? The upshot of it all is, in Calvin's wonderful phrase: He took our chains upon himself so that he might release us from them. Jesus came to perfectly obey the law, and even to pay the penalty for lawbreaking in order to set us free. That is how he saves us. That is why it is important that he was born under the law to redeem those who are under the law.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Paul has an interesting take on the law as well, and this has generated a lot of scholarship and even a little bit of controversy in recent years: What was Paul's view of the law? But in Galatians...in Galatians, now, the end of Chapter 3 and the beginning of Chapter 4...we read some later verses in 4 earlier...but Paul says: ²³Before the coming of this faith, (so, faith in Jesus, who did it all for us...before that) we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴So the law was our guardian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith.

He goes on to say when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the law. The point being...so, he calls in the Greek that the law was our guardian... *paedagogus*. When I preached on this years ago, Dave, I sort of...that literally can mean a teacher, a guardian. I compared it to like a babysitter; that we have this babysitter of the law that kept us until we could mature in Christ, right? So, what Paul is saying is that the law was never actually meant to save us. God knew that the law all by itself was never going to save us, because as sinful people, we were never going to be able to keep it. Only the coming of God's Son would see the law kept perfectly; and then we get credited with his righteousness...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We get credit for what he did right. So, the law just sort of kept us in check...kept us safe like a babysitter until our older brother, Jesus, could come.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and actually, kept us in check, but also sort of led us in a certain direction...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Because in the ancient world, first of all, there wasn't universal education...there weren't public schools everywhere. If you were wealthy enough to be able to educate your son, and basically only sons were educated...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DAVE BAST

Then you would send him to a private tutor or a teacher; and to get him there, you didn't do that yourself, you had a slave called a *paedagogus* —a guardian or a leader or a teacher—who wasn't the actual teacher. His job was to convey the child safely to the teacher. In other words, to the destination where he had to go; and Paul says that, in a sense, is the role that the law plays. It guides us and kind of guards and protects us, but it also is driving us to look for an alternative...another source of being right with God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And that, namely, is Christ. So, the law, if we consider it in its gospel usage, it is to show the need of the gospel...to show us that we really have no alternative. We had better find another savior because we cannot save ourselves.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Paul says this in Galatians...he certainly says it in Romans that you are not supposed to look at the law and say: Oh, there is my salvation if I just keep it. You are supposed to look at the law in despair. You are supposed to look at the law and say who will save me from this wretched body of death?

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I cannot do it.

DAVE BAST

It shows us the sinfulness of sin, he says in Romans.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes, it convicts us; and that is sort of one of its main purposes. So, God knew all along that we were going to have to get saved from somebody coming in from the outside to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. The whole history of Israel shows that no amount of striving is ever going to get us over the finish line if it is all about us. If it is up to me, that is not gospel...that is not good news, that is bad news.

DAVE BAST

You know, there is a story in Genesis 15, a very strange story, where God causes Abraham to fall into a deep sleep. He has cut up these animals for sacrifice, and then God moves through the middle, and it is a covenant-making ceremony; and the idea is if you don't keep the covenant, you are going to be like those animals. You are going to be chopped down. Abraham doesn't walk through it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

One of my favorite pastors loves to refer to that story, and what he says is: You know what? In Christ, God keeps his end of the covenant and he keeps our end, too, for us...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Because we couldn't do it; and that is exactly Paul's point here. Jesus keeps our end of the deal to make us right with God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, that is a lot to digest, but in this Advent series, there is one more thing we want to observe as we close out this first program of our Advent series, and we will do that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are looking at a passage specifically from Galatians Chapter 4, where Paul talks about the incarnation; how Christ came from God, was sent by God, was born of a woman, assuming a real and full and complete human nature in order to do something to save us; and that something was to take on the obligations of the law, to keep them perfectly, to fulfill for us all obedience to the divine law, even to the bitter and shameful death of the cross is the way one old liturgy puts it; and then to pay the penalty of the law...the curse...becoming a curse for us, all so that we could be set free, and not only sort of set free and made right with God, but made something even more, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; we moved from slaves to heirs...to children who have the privilege of calling God Abba, Father, which, as a lot of pastors have pointed out and many of our listeners have probably heard this in some sermon or another, it is sort of an intimate term, like Daddy...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That we are admitted to the family now; not as slaves, but as children, as co-heirs to everything that Jesus inherits, because he is the Savior; but now we inherit the same thing, principally of course, that is eternal life; but also again, that privilege of being able to be in God's presence without fear. One of the things that happened when Jesus died according to the gospels is that the curtain that separated out the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple tore from the top, so we knew who was doing the tearing. God tore open that curtain so that now all of us have access to the Holy of Holies, and all of us can feel comfortable in God's presence because we are with Jesus. When I preached on this idea years ago, Dave, I mentioned that when I

was a student at Calvin College back in the 1980's, every once in a while a professor would invite me to have lunch in the faculty dining room, and whenever I did that, I always stayed really close to the professor because if anybody looked at me like: What are you doing here? I wanted to be able to say: I'm with him...I'm with him.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, that is what we are like in God's presence. We don't belong there normally, but we are with Jesus...we're with him...he brought us because now we belong.

DAVE BAST

One of the struggles I think we all face as Christians is to get it right about our relationship with God. We are often, most of us, I think, conscious of our failures and our stumbles and our falls and our ongoing sinfulness: Yes, yes, yes; God must really hate me; God must frown on me; he is going to punish me for doing that or the other thing; and it so hard for us to get through to this gospel truth that, no, no, we are his child now. You are his child through Christ...through what Christ has done for you, and through the Spirit of Christ that he has poured out for all who are in him.

You know, Scott, I am old enough to remember the Kennedy presidency, and I remember in particular a famous photograph...it became famous...that was published first in *Life* magazine; and it showed the president in the Oval Office. He was leaning against his desk, his head was sort of bowed in thought, and an aide was standing beside him giving him some kind of briefing; but under the desk, you could see his little son John playing at his feet. That is a perfect illustration of what we are now. We are not the aide, who is kind of nervous and briefing God in our prayers, we are that little child who is loved by his father...her father...and who can look up and say: Daddy, here I am. What a wonderful truth, to be able to feel that and know that consistently is so comforting, I think, and encouraging for us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We did a series on *Groundwork* a while back, Dave, on biblical images for the Church, and the family of God was one image that we looked at in that particular series; and indeed, we are a family, and probably the most famous verse of Galatians comes in Galatians 3, basically verses 26 through 29. This has sometimes been called the *Magna Carta* for the new humanity in Jesus, where Paul makes it clear that Jesus has torn down everything that could keep us from having fellowship with God, but Jesus has also torn down all the things that keep us from having fellowship and unity with one another.

So, it goes like this, from Galatians 3, beginning at the end of verse 26:

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

DAVE BAST

You know, Paul isn't saying here...we mustn't hear what he is *not* saying. He is not saying that who we are doesn't matter, specifically, as men or women, as white or black, as Western or African or Asian, as slave or free...because, you know, high-class, lower-class, rich, poor; those differences do still remain, and we can celebrate our own cultures; but they don't really matter as far as being in Christ is concerned, and as far as relating to God is concerned. This is the ultimate human ideal of diversity within unity, and equality despite our differences. We are all accepted in the beloved, as the letter to the Ephesians says; and we are all one in Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, when we think about Advent, and when we think about Christmas, this is the good news. This is what the Son of God sent to the world, born of a woman, born under the law; this is what we celebrate at

Christmas. You know, Christmas has become known as a family time, but we also know that can be a two-edged sword because some families are broken, and there has been divorce and there has been dysfunction and there are children who refuse to come home even for Christmas. So, the family aspect of Christmas can sometimes be a heartbreaking reality, but take heart even if that is you. The good news of why Jesus came is that we are all family now. We are all in the family of God. That is what Christmas is all about. That is why Jesus came, and for that we say thanks be to God.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with us today on *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we study Christ's incarnation through the words of Philippians Chapter 2.

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