

Through Christ Alone

DAVE BAST

Human nature being what it is, relationships are often fragile; compromises are rarely easy; breakdowns are distressingly frequent: A marriage goes sour, a family cracks under the stress, spouses are no longer talking, the kids are out of control; as a last resort, everyone agrees to see a counselor for family mediation; or consider another common scenario: Management and labor are locked in a bitter contract dispute; the two sides are divided, far apart in their demands. Bitter rhetoric escalates, charges and countercharges fly, a strike or a lockout threatens; and then a federal mediator steps in to bring the parties together. The world *needs* mediators; and for the greatest need of all, it has one—just one—only one: Jesus Christ. He is our subject 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, we are right in the middle now of a five-part series sort of acknowledging the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation; and so we have chosen to do a series on some of the principal ideas or themes of the Reformation, which are sometimes summed up with the Latin word *sola*—the five *solas*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and *sola* is Latin for alone or only; sort of solo. When we think about a solo, one person singing; and so, there are five of them in the Reformation. We started with how we are saved by faith alone, and then we have also looked at how we find out about our salvation through scripture alone; still to come will be grace alone, and then all things done to God's glory alone; but today, we are going to think about how we are saved through *Christ* alone; and to help us with that, we have a guest here in our studio, Dave, who has been with us before. It is Sue Rozeboom, who is Associate Professor of Worship and Theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. So, welcome Sue.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Thank you. It is a delight to be with you again.

DAVE BAST

We are so happy to have you back; and especially to talk about this idea of salvation through Christ alone—Christ only—*solus Christus* is the Latin phrase that was used; and really, that became a very significant and important idea at the time of the Reformation because other things were kind of getting in between people and Christ, weren't they?

SUE ROZEBOOM

Well, yes; I mean, one way to think about it is that the Reformers saw that maybe the Church was thinking too much of itself. So we are in communion with God through Christ alone; and while the Church is Christ's body, the Church not ought to draw so much attention to itself and its practices that it begins to point more to itself than to the one to whom they are to point, namely Christ.

DAVE BAST

Yes... So, it is almost as though the Church, and this can happen in any age, was sort of drawing power to itself, and creating a kind of mindset in people that unless you went through us—our instructions—our rituals and our worship—you were out of luck; you had no access to God. So much so that it was obscuring Christ and faith in Christ.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Right; it was something of a power play, but then also undermining the lavish degree of God's grace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, mediated through Christ, and that is one of the main things we want to talk about; and I think maybe just as we get into this subject we should maybe just remind ourselves that when we talk about the work of salvation through Christ alone, that does not mean that the Father and the Holy Spirit are not intimately involved. The work of salvation is the work of all three persons in the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Certainly we do not want to get the idea that the Father was angry with us and so the Son had to appease him and say: Daddy, calm down. I will take... No; they were working in concert all along. So, although we say in Christ alone, it is through the Father and the Spirit alone—through Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—all working together in concert to bring about our salvation. It is focused on Christ because he is the one who became incarnate: The Son of God; but it is all three of them.

DAVE BAST

Maybe we can dig right into scripture on that point because there is a great passage from one of Paul's letters, I Timothy Chapter 2:1-7 that has a key phrase in it. So, Paul begins by urging his readers, including us, to pray for our leaders in government—those who have authority—and he says:

³This is good and pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. (And then this verse especially) ⁵For there is one God and one mediator between God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

So there is that idea: He is the one mediator—Jesus Christ—between God and humanity.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You talked about this in the opening of the program, Dave. We have some experience with mediators today: Federal mediators, family counselors to mediate among tensions between parents and children; but this is the ultimate mediator—the ultimate go-between—where Jesus kind of is the bridge between humanity that has fallen away from God due to our sin, and God. God is holy, we are not. Who can bring us back together?

SUE ROZEBOOM

Well, and it is even not just bringing us back together, but we could even understand there being some kind of mediation before we fell apart, if you will—before the fall. So God is God, holy other than us, but God created us and gave us life in order that we might be in communion with God; and he said: Here is how to live joyfully into that communion. Live this way; but of course, we failed, and we did not live the way that God invited us and graciously provided for us to live; but then, God did not just abandon us. God said: I will restore this communion. I will take it upon myself to restore this communion; and typically there is this way of talking about other...or many of the world's religions, that it is humankind's striving to attain communion with God, and that the uniqueness of Christianity is God's having created us for communion with God, and God therefore seeking us out for communion with God; but that communion could be possible only through one who is both God and human, like us, to enable us to enjoy that communion with God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, even in the Old Testament people sensed after sin that there was this gulf; and there is this passage in Job—the book of Job—Job Chapter 9, where Job is sensing this gulf between God and us, and Job says at one point... You know, he is trying to figure out why all these terrible things happened to him, and at one point in Job 9:32 he says:

God is not a mere mortal like me, that I might answer him; that we might confront each other. (And then he says) ³³If only there was someone to mediate between us; to lay a hand on us both; ³⁴someone to remove God's rod from me so his terror would frighten me no more.

So Job is sensing something is wrong...

DAVE BAST

The need for a go-between really, yes. So Sue, if I could paraphrase what you said: In a sense, many of the world's religions are humanity's search for God, but the story of the Bible is God's search for humanity, and it involves more than just dealing with our sin...yes, that has added a complicating factor, but even without that God would somehow have to come down to us...

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes.

DAVE BAST

To bridge the gap or the gulf between us.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes; and what you had offered, Scott, reminded me also of the Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai...

Scott Hoezee: Oh, right.

SUE ROZEBOOM

And God says: I will speak to the people; and then there is thunder and there is lightning, and they are *terrified!* I mean, this is the great and terrific God, and they say to Moses: You...you go speak to God for us and then tell us what...

DAVE BAST

There is another mediator, in a sense...Moses is a mediator.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Exactly; so all of those figures in the Old Testament, and even the whole system of sacrifices and Temple practices and so on, all of those things are pointing forward to the person of Christ, in whom our communion with God is concentrated, if you will.

DAVE BAST

You mentioned Temple practices. I think of the great Day of Atonement when the only day of the year when anyone was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, where the Ark representing God's presence sat, and it was the High Priest, and tradition says they tied a rope around his ankle in case he was overwhelmed and fell down dead in front of the holiness of God, so they could pull him out again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because no one else could go in there.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SUE ROZEBOOM

And yet, everyone else *was* in there with him...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Through the priest.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Through the priest because he wore this ephod...this some kind of garment...and all of the tribes of Israel were represented on that garment. He carried the people of God with him into the Holy of Holies...

DAVE BAST

The presence of God, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we had in the Old Testament some anticipation of this. We just mentioned Moses, now the High Priest; but these were people, and the ultimate mediator, we think, had to be more than just human. He had to have something else going. He had to have a very specific combination, and we are going to think about that next.
Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today joining our conversation is theologian and professor, Sue Rozeboom. Sue, once again, thanks so much for being part of this program with us.

SUE ROZEBOOM

It is great to be here. Thank you for having me.

DAVE BAST

So, we are just talking about Jesus being the only mediator...the only go-between...bringing together God and humanity; not only dealing with our sin but also kind of bridging that great gulf that lies between an infinite, almighty God and we mere creatures, we poor little human beings crawling around here; and we brought up the idea that Jesus really is the perfect mediator because he is unique in his nature.

SUE ROZEBOOM

It is because he bears more than one nature. The Christian Church has long confessed that Christ is both fully human and fully divine; and that is one of the mysteries that we simply assent to; we simply give the limited capacity of our mind over to, that this one person could be both fully human and fully divine; but it is because of that identity that he is able to afford for us communion...full communion with God again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is a rider that very often in Christian history and Christian theology we have to do a lot of both/and thinking. Either/or usually is the path of the Pharisee...

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Is God one or three? Yes, he is both one and three. Is Jesus one person and has two natures? Yes, both...you have to affirm both, and orthodoxy and right Christian teaching usually calls us to embrace these paradoxes—these things that are seemingly opposites. So Jesus was born as a human being, a real human child of Mary; and yet, as you just said, Sue, we believe that he was fully as human as you or I, and yet he also was fully as God as the Father and the Spirit; and as he had been *before* he became incarnate in Mary; and let's think a little bit, Sue, why did he need both? So, we were just talking about Moses and the priests in Israel. They were mediators, but they could not get us all the way home with salvation; so why did Jesus need both, full humanity, full divinity?

SUE ROZEBOOM

Well, you know, the catechisms, these documents that were frequently drafted during the Reformation to help people understand some of these very questions can be very helpful, actually, because they give us just tight, pithy responses to those sorts of questions. So, the Heidelberg Catechism for instance asked exactly those questions: Why must the Savior be truly human and truly righteous? And there is an understanding that God's justice demands that humanity has sinned; therefore, humanity must ante up, if you will.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Must ante up and pay for that sin, to some extent. So, he needs to be fully human; but why then true God? Well, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, so that by the power of his divinity he might actually withstand the price required.

DAVE BAST

Wow, yes.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Namely, life. In the garden God said: Eat of that tree and you will surely die. Someone who is divine can defeat that penalty of death.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so he had to be part of the guilty party, that is us...

SUE ROZEBOOM

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He had to be human. God was not going to punish some finally, so they had sacrifices of lambs and bulls and doves in the Old Testament, but that was not us. Ultimately, it is us; human beings in the cross hairs. We are the guilty ones, so Jesus had to share that lot with us. He had to be...

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

One of us...he had to be considered...even though he was sinless...he had to be considered as essentially one of the guilty party; but as you just said, Sue, if you are only human and God brought down all of the wrath of sin on him, he would just be squashed like a bug. He had to be fully divine to be able to withstand that; and as you said, Sue, emerge on the other side of death still alive.

SUE ROZEBOOM

And what is so profound about God's grace is that God said: I will do this myself. I will bear the weight of what is required to restore communion between us.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, if God does demand this punishment for sin, at least we can acknowledge and recognize that he steps up and pays it himself.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes.

DAVE BAST

He does not inflict that on some total foreign entity or outside being. So, just this profound truth—depth of truth—that Jesus is the only appropriate one to be the go-between...to be the mediator. That is what we are saying when we say salvation is in Christ alone; but let's talk a little bit more about that *alone* part. Why is it that so often people want to add something to Jesus? And in fact, that was kind of going on at the time of the Reformation, wasn't it? That people were calling on all sorts of others to help them, or somehow they had this sense that Christ was too remote. We talked about the Church having to come in and fill that, and the saints were often called upon.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes, right; again, one of the ways that I have come to think about it is at the time of the Reformation, as I said before, the Reformers were concerned that the Church was calling too much attention to itself, rather than to the one whose body the Church is; namely Christ. There tended to be elaborate rituals or elaborate practices, some of them summoning the saints, some of them regarding the priest as almost like another mediator between the people and Christ himself; but we see the Reformers trying to push against the Church thinking too much of itself. That is not to say we shouldn't think highly of the Church at all; after all, it is Christ's body...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SUE ROZEBOOM

But at the same time, recognize that it is Christ himself who is speaking to us in the proclamation of the Word; it is Christ himself who is baptizing us with the waters of baptism; it is Christ himself who is offering himself, profoundly, mysteriously, at the table; Christ himself who gives himself to us for life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he is therefore... And you know, the one book in the New Testament that does the best job of connecting all the dots between the rituals of ancient Israel and the final reality in Christ is the book of Hebrews, and in Hebrews Chapter 2 we read:

¹⁴Since the children have flesh and blood, he (Jesus) too shared in their humanity...^{17b}in that he might be our merciful and faithful High Priest; but then, too, what you were just saying, Sue, in terms of where does our confidence lie? Is it in the priest? Is it in the Church? Is it in the saints? No; it is, as Hebrews 4 says: ¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great High Priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess; ¹⁵for we do not have a High Priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

That is Hebrews 4, and that is in Christ alone. Again, he is all our confidence.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, we don't really need another priest; we don't really need another go-between. If we want access to God's grace, all we have to do is approach him through Jesus, who has already done it all; and again, the Church, I think, has a tendency to get above itself a little bit...that is kind of what we have been saying...and to see itself... I think at the time of the Reformation, maybe the biggest problem that the Reformers recognized, beginning with Luther, is that the Church claimed to have a corner on grace, and it alone could dispense it; and so, if you want grace, you have got to come through us—through our appointed means. Again, biblically that was kind of blown away by the ideas of the Reformation.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Well, and the passage that you read, Scott, also invites us to think deeply about our participation in Christ's priesthood. So, another phrase that was tossed around at the time of the Reformation, or that we *presume* was tossed around at the time of the Reformation, was the idea that the priesthood of all believers; which is not so much a priesthood of you and you and you and you individually, but of all of us unto one another participating in Christ's priesthood before the Father; and so, not to think too little of the Church, but to think of the Church aright in terms of we are a community, being all in Christ—in Christ alone; therefore, siblings of one another, and encouragers of one another.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is exactly right; that is who we are, but there is a question, I think, we could wonder about to bring it up to the current day. So, these were a lot of issues going on five hundred years ago, but what about today? Where are people at today in terms of how they think about the Church, being one with Christ, looking to Christ alone? What are some of the struggles people are having about that today? As we wrap up this program we will ponder that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee.

SUE ROZEBOOM

And I am Sue Rozeboom.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we were just saying, Dave and Sue, at the end of the last segment, where are people at today? What are some of the tensions that people have today in terms of seeing Christ alone as the bridge between us and God, between sinfulness and salvation?

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, we quoted earlier...Sue, you quoted from the Heidelberg Catechism, that great document that is dear to many of us; and it has another question about Jesus the mediator, the only savior, where it asks now: Are people who are kind of adding on to Christ or trusting in other things, maybe it is the saints or maybe it is their own good works, are they really putting their faith in Jesus alone; and it answers: No, they are not really doing that...and I love this phrase at the end of that answer: Either Jesus is *not* a perfect savior or those who in true faith accept *this* savior have in him all they need for salvation; and that is really I think what we are getting at, isn't it? We have in Christ all we need.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Absolutely; we have in Christ all we need for being returned to full communion with God, and the assurance of that after this life we will enjoy that communion with God in Christ—with Christ—more fully than we can possibly imagine attaining to it here and now.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think of...right there, Sue, is I think an interesting issue for today; where there is another way you can downplay Jesus as the mediator, and that is to think: My communion with God has never been ruptured in the first place, right? I mean, there is an old story about a person, a well-known skeptic, who on his deathbed somebody said: Have you made peace with God? And he said: I wasn't aware we had quarreled. And I think a lot of people...there is this movement of what the author Christian Smith has coined: Moral therapeutic

deism, where a lot of people think that God is just sort of a kindly old man upstairs who is not that upset about our sins, is not really appearing in our lives; you know, just be good, go along to get along, live and let live and God will reward you with heaven. So, if anything, today is obscuring a focus on the need for Christ. It is not that we are looking to saints or other go-betweens, it is sort of some people seem to think: I don't need a go-between in the first place.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes; we almost need to get over ourselves, as it were, and realize, you know we are not going to just casually walk into God's presence one day standing on our own, because it is only in the person and work of Jesus Christ that we have any standing before God at all.

DAVE BAST

You get this feeling that people kind of think they are doing God a favor, you know, by thinking about him; as if someday they will stroll in and say: Ta-da; here I am! Don't you just love me, God?

We talked at the beginning of this program about this vast gap, or this great distance that needs to be bridged.

SUE ROZEBOOM

Yes; and that, it seems to me, would be to presume on God's grace, and to rather thumb your nose at Jesus, like I didn't really need you. I could have been good with God without you.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I mean, just think about that for a minute, that last thing you said, Sue. If we are good with God on our own, then the whole undertaking of Christ becoming a human being—the incarnation—the atonement—it is all for naught; it is all unnecessary. I mean, who would dare to say that?

SCOTT HOEZEE

But some people unfortunately do, and some of us who still preach sin and insist on having a confession of sin as part of our worship, that is seen by some as kind of a downer, it is going to turn people off, lets all just all be happy; but the only way we can really acknowledge the majesty and the gravity and the utter, astounding grace of what Jesus did is if we do acknowledge our sin was so bad that was the only thing that could possibly have taken care of it. So, we are not being grim; we are not being just downers when we talk about those things. We are appreciating and trying to help others appreciate the majestic work that only Christ could do. Only Christ alone could be the mediator between us and God.

DAVE BAST

Well, thank you, Sue, for helping us to think about salvation through Christ alone; and thank you for listening and digging deeper into scripture with us today on *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast along with Scott Hoezee, and today our guest, Sue Rozeboom. We hope you will join us again next time as we study the biblical passages that led the Reformers to declare salvation by grace alone. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to let us know what scripture passages or topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

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Printed on March 14, 2025