
Waiting for Peace

DAVE BAST

Advent means coming. The Christian season of Advent is four weeks of preparation to celebrate the coming of God into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. At the same time, it is meant to remind us that Jesus is coming again to finish, once and for all, the work of salvation that began in Bethlehem's stable, was accomplished on Golgotha's cross and empty tomb, and will be finally and fully completed when He returns in glory.

Well, today on Groundwork, we want to think about one of the most common Advent themes: Waiting (perhaps we should say, longing) for peace.

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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Dave, we are in program two of a four-part Advent series on the theme of waiting. Our first program was about waiting in and for hope; that we are hope-filled people as we wait for the Lord's *second* advent – His second return – to complete His work; and today we are going to think about what it means to be people who are also waiting for peace.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and that is one of the obvious themes of the Advent season, for Christmas as well. You just have to stop and think about all the Christmas carols that play their theme in variations on the idea of peace – peace on earth; including many of the most famous and beloved carols that revolve around Luke 2:14; that is the song of the angels; the Gloria In Excelsis, as it is known in the ancient Church; where in the King James Version, the angels sing out: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. We still kind of sing that old King James-y Version of that verse.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And, indeed, that sense of peace – and this is what we are going to think about in this program: Both, what did it mean that Christ's first advent – His first arrival – His first coming as a baby in Bethlehem – how did that bring peace? But also, what is left to still anticipate and wait for in terms of ultimate peace; because, as we will note as we go along, the world is not usually, always a peaceful place just because Jesus was born 2,000 years ago; so we will be thinking about that; but in the meanwhile, as we have also been saying in this series, letting Psalm 130:5, 6 set the tone, that what we are waiting for as people of Advent is something that, as the psalm says: My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning; more than watchmen for the morning; and one of the things we are watching... as night watchmen waiting for the eastern sky to pink up and show a hint of the sun coming up... one of the signs of pink we are looking for is ultimate peace and shalom. And as you said, there are a lot of songs and Christmas carols, including one: I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day; and this is by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the lyrics: I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, good will to men; and

that is a significant song because of when he wrote it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; it was December 1863, and it was the depths – the darkest days, really – of the Civil War in the United States – the war between North and South; and Longfellow was picking up on an idea that seems to be driven home every single Advent: The disparity between this wonderful Gospel – this Good News announcing peace on earth – and the lack of peace in our societies; so, we will often hear stories at this time of year of strife in Bethlehem; you know, armed soldiers patrolling, and there is rock throwing and stabbing incidents, and it is just this ongoing, terrible situation between Israelis and Palestinians, even in the so-called holy city of Bethlehem, where Jesus was born; so, we feel this tension.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and it is ongoing. I know when I was a pastor... I work at Calvin Seminary now, but I was a preacher for 15 years, and I know that sometimes, you know, there are only so many texts that you preach on during Advent and at Christmastime, so sometimes I would pull an old sermon out of my file and I would revise it; and unfortunately, just about every Advent, at some point I would make reference to something that was in the news then about warfare and strife, and how the world does not look peaceful. All I had to do when I would revise old sermons was just swap out the current headline for the one that was true four years ago because, unfortunately, it is an unhappy fact that every year Christmas, Advent, are celebrated in the midst of a world at war. It is just a matter of where it is raging the worst *this* particular year; but is an ongoing and very unhappy fact.

DAVE BAST

Well, and then there is the personal level where this is often true as well. We all know people – friends, family, maybe you yourself – who have lost someone dear to them, and the first time they have to go through Christmas again with that missing place, you know – that empty chair. Where is the peace? Where is the joy? Where are all these things when our own situation, our own personal circumstances seem to give the lie to the promises that come to us again and again in scripture. So, it is a real struggle.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sure; and you know, we talk about the big things in the world: ISIS persecuting Christians in the Middle East, let's say, or war, or as you were saying earlier, Dave, conflict right in Bethlehem itself – right in the Holy Land – in the heart of everything where the story of our faith unfolded; but for all of these, sometimes we refer to kind of a Norman Rockwell Christmas, you know; sort of those Norman Rockwell paintings that used to be on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post magazine of this family gathered at a table, everybody smiling; but unfortunately, yes, the lack of shalom – the lack of peace – is often revealed in our families, too, where it is not a happy gathering. There is tension; there is the child who refused to come home this year, or wouldn't even call. A lot of the time, precisely because we have more and more touted – rightly or wrongly – touted Christmas as a family season, families that are in pain or that are dysfunctional feel it more acutely in December than they will in January.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so I think we need to be a little bit careful about how we preach, how we speak at this Advent season – at every Advent season. We need a little more nuance and recognition. We blithely can sing about peace on earth; well, tell it to the people in a refugee camp somewhere in Europe today, or tell it to people who are mourning the loss of a child from one of those campus shootings. So, we recognize that, that the promise of peace comes into a world where it was desperately needed, and the reason Jesus came at all the first time is because of our brokenness; and so, as we celebrate this, we want to look forward as we wait in hope for the peace that is to come by looking at how the Bible describes this peace, in fact.

Before we do that, though, here is a word about a special resource from Words of Hope; a Christmas devotional that can be yours for the asking.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to Groundwork, and this the second part of a four-part Advent series on the theme of waiting and of longing. What Advent reminds us of is that we live between the two advents of Christ; we live between the Bethlehem advent of the first arrival of Christ as a baby in a manger, and now we are waiting for His second advent – His second coming – as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords on clouds of glory; and what we are focusing in on this program, Dave, is how what we are waiting for ultimately in waiting for that second coming is for the fullness of what we talk about already at Christmas, which is peace on earth; and I think exploring a little bit about what that means is what we want to do in this segment.

DAVE BAST

Right; the angels sang about peace; that is the promise, but peace means a whole lot more than just the absence of war; and if we come to understand the fullness of the biblical teaching about shalom... you probably know that is the Hebrew word for peace... I think it will fill our hearts with joy in the expectation as we wait for this to come, and not just wait but work for it as well.

So, probably the best place to look in scripture for the meaning of biblical shalom or peace is in the book of Isaiah.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Isaiah Chapter 65, and listen to these words that begin at the 17th verse of Isaiah 65, where God reveals to Isaiah:

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth. The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind; ¹⁸but be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating, for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight. ¹⁹I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in My people. No more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. ²⁰No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days or an old person who does not live out a lifetime. For one who dies at one hundred years will be considered a youth and one who falls short of one hundred will be considered accursed.

DAVE BAST

²¹They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²²They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of My people be, and My children shall long enjoy the work of their hands. ²³They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord, and their descendents as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, here is a prophecy that, as always with prophecy, we talk in theological terms about the prophets like Isaiah, that there are multiple horizons of fulfillment. So there is a sense in which here Isaiah is talking about the restoration of Israel after the Babylonian exile; that Jerusalem is going to be rebuilt. The people will return to the land. So, that is sort of like a first-time fulfillment; but ultimately Isaiah is looking forward to the whole restoration, and you can hear that a little bit in what comes next in Isaiah 65, when Isaiah writes: ²⁴Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear. ²⁵The wolf and the lamb shall feed together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox. They shall not hurt or destroy on all My holy mountain, says the Lord. That is not going to happen right away when Israel returns from exile. Now he is looking farther and farther down into the future.

DAVE BAST

And with this moving symbolism. There is another chapter in Isaiah earlier in the book that describes this peaceable kingdom, as it is known, where even the wild animals – somehow their natures are transformed; and again, it is imagery – it is symbolic; we are not sure exactly how that works out, or will work out, but this is another familiar passage from Isaiah:

^{11:6} The wolf will live with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the goat. The calf and the lion and the yearling together, and a little child will lead them. ⁷The cow will feed with the bear; their young will lie

down together and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸The infant will play near the hole of the cobra and the young child put its hand into the viper's nest. ⁹They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

That is shalom; that is the picture we are given in scripture of this beautiful time of restoration, reconciliation, all things transformed, all things made new.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I can remember somebody saying one time that the wolf will lie down with the lamb, but the lamb probably won't get much sleep. This is looking forward to a time we can hardly imagine of true shalom; and here is where the pop conception of the word peace is often wrong. So, right, we think peace is only no war, or we prefer peace and quiet; we just think peace is peaceful: It is so peaceful here...

DAVE BAST

Or it is when your spirit is calm and relaxed within you. You are not anxious or worried – that is peace – peace of mind.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Shalom, as Neal Plantinga has also pointed out in his book: *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*; shalom is so much more robust for the biblical prophets, and ultimately for all of us who have our hope in the Lord, as we talked about in the first program; and the shalom we are waiting for is more active. It is not just a lack of conflict; it is not just being peaceful and content; it is more active than that, because what shalom is, is the webbing together of all people and of all creatures into mutually edifying relationships; we are all doing what we can to help everybody else flourish; and that was, of course, one of the great things that was lost when the fall into sin happened. It was not just Adam and Eve who were naughty, the whole creation fell with them, and one of the things that fell away when sin came onto the scene was flourishing – everybody's ability to live to their fullest potential, which is why in that Isaiah 65 passage, Isaiah talks about babies won't die; old people are going to just keep living out full, full lives; that is the flourishing that God wanted, and shalom happens when we are all helping each other flourish. I am not worried about me, Dave, I am going to help you flourish. I want you to be well. I want you to live long; and you are going to do the same for me, and we are going to do it for the animals, and the animals will do it for each other; and it is all going to build up into this wonderful world of delight, which is what God intended in the beginning.

DAVE BAST

Yes, you mentioned Neal Plantinga and his book: *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*; that is the world as we inhabit it now, a world marked by sin and its consequences. Shalom is the way it is supposed to be, as he writes. I have a passage from that book in front of me. Let me just share with it. It is largely saying what you have just been saying as well, Scott.

The prophets kept dreaming of a time when God would put things right again. They dreamed of a new age, in which human crookedness would be straightened out, rough places made plain, the foolish would be made wise and the wise humble. They dreamed of a time when the deserts would flower, the mountains would run with wine, weeping would cease, and people could go to sleep without weapons on their laps. People would work in peace and work to fruitful effect. Lions could lie down with lambs. All nature would be fruitful, benign, and filled with wonder upon wonder. All humans would be knit together in brotherhood and sisterhood, and all nature and all humans would look to God, walk with God, lean toward God, and delight in God. That is a beautiful thing. That is the way it is supposed to be. That is shalom.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a wonderful, wonderful picture, and it is all through scripture – all through the Old Testament, but also right straight into the new. In our prior program in this series on hope we read the Romans 8 passage about Paul saying the entire creation is straining forward to be renewed into just this kind of world of shalom; but that is still coming; so in the meanwhile, what does it mean to be people who are leaning toward shalom? We will think about that in 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, and we are finishing up this program, Dave, of digging into scripture on the theme of shalom; and it is an Advent program, and one of the themes of Advent... I mean, we talk about hope, joy, love, peace. We had hope in the first program, now we are thinking about peace, and peace in the robust sense of shalom; which, as we said in the last program, is an active... We often think of peace as kind of a passive thing; nobody is hurting anybody; everybody is being quiet; but shalom involves a lot of activity. We are doing things to help all creatures, all living things, all people, all races, all nations; we are actively doing things that will lead to flourishing.

DAVE BAST

Right; and one of the things that I hope will come out of this whole series of programs is that waiting does not mean inactivity or passivity in any of these contexts, whether it is hope or joy or peace or love; we actively wait for these things, which means we also work toward them. To wait for peace to come – peace is the promise – it is the song of the angels – it is the message of Christmas: Peace on earth because of Jesus' coming; but in order for that peace to be made real, He had to die...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

And then He rose again, and He is going to return. Ultimately, only He will bring peace on earth finally; it is not going to be due to our efforts, or building some human utopia apart from the work of God; but in the meantime, God expects us to be working toward it. He has given us His Spirit. He inspires us with this vision and He wants us to be taking active steps toward the building of shalom on earth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and there is a well-known saying in the Church that if you want peace, then work for justice. It reminds me of a song. It is a fairly recent song, but it is becoming increasingly popular. It is called: The Troubles of the World, and the song sings about for the troubles of the world, O Lord, we pray for mercy; and then the chorus of the song is: We pray for peace... and then it says something to the effect: We pray for peace, the kind of peace that comes through seeking justice.

What is it? We made reference in the previous segment to Neal Plantinga's book: *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, which is a book about how sin vandalizes shalom – nice phrase there. Sin is the vandalism of shalom; and as Neal details it, and as the biblical prophets like Isaiah and Amos and Micah and all the biblical prophets detail it, what vandalizes shalom – what puts the world off the tracks more than injustice; it is injustice that keeps us from helping each other to flourish. It is when dictators keep all the money for themselves and won't feed their people. It is when we are selfish in our own individual lives, and I am looking out for good old number one and my neighbors, well, they can get their own bread. They can solve their own problems; I don't care. So, it is injustice that breaks shalom, and therefore it is seeking justice that builds it, although, as you were just saying, Dave, we never fool ourselves; we don't think we can build the kingdom; we don't think our efforts are going to trump God's efforts – of course not; but if we are in love with this vision of shalom – if we are Advent people waiting for peace in that sense, then we lean into that; and it is going to dictate how we treat other people; it is going to dictate how we treat our own resources. We will work for justice.

DAVE BAST

You know, John in the fourth Gospel describes Jesus' miracles as signs – signs pointing to the kingdom of God; signs pointing to the shalom God intends; so when the sick are healed, when the deaf and the mute have

their ears opened and their tongues loosed; when the blind are given sight again; when people are released from bondage to the power of evil – to demonic forces – those are signs of God’s peaceable kingdom; and we can be involved in that. We *must* be involved in that, as well as Christians. You know, there are one hundred and one ways you personally can look for how to be a builder of shalom – a witness to shalom – in your home, in your family, in your community. I just think every marriage where there is conflict that has been patched up and restored, that is a bit of shalom.

One of our kids was part of a small group in their church, and they decided that they would clean up a public park in the city where they live; they would take it upon themselves as a small group to go out and pick up trash. That is a sign of shalom. There are just so many ways this can be done, from small to great, you can get involved with a Christian organization that is committed to this kind of ministry.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there are many of them, of course, but as you just said, Dave, there are a million small ways to bring what the New Testament often talks about, especially if you look at II Corinthians, where Paul talks so much about reconciliation, and we are ambassadors for Christ; we are ambassadors of reconciliation because, again, what breaks shalom? Well, people fighting each other; people discriminating against each other; people at odds with each other; that will break shalom every time. So Paul says: Look, Jesus reconciled us to God. He made us one with God. What we want to do is help people who are not getting along reconcile to each other; and we can do that in small ways in our church communities, in our local communities; we can do it in big ways trying to get whole nations to get together and be reconciled to each other; but this is the work. We are people of Advent, and as you said, Dave, waiting sometimes seems passive. We are just sitting around twiddling our thumbs: No, no, no. If we are waiting for peace, then we work for peace through justice, and that is a very active stance indeed.

DAVE BAST

And this is not a liberal or a conservative issue, this is a Gospel issue; this is a New Testament issue. You know, there is an incident in the Gospels where John sends a messenger to Jesus...

SCOTT HOEZEE

John the Baptist, yes.

DAVE BAST

John the Baptist, right; he is kind of discouraged. He is in prison, and he is wondering: Why haven’t I been set free? If the Messiah has come, how could I be in jail when I am His faithful forerunner? And so, the messenger comes and John wants to know: Are you really the guy? And Jesus says: This is what you should tell John. The blind are seeing, the lame are being made whole, the sick are being healed; that is the sign that the Messiah is really there; and that is what the Church needs to be about as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And anybody who has ever talked to our Jewish brothers and sisters about our belief that Jesus is the Messiah – our Jewish brothers and sisters are still waiting for the Messiah – we believe Jesus is the Messiah – when we say that to them, anybody who has talked to a Jewish person knows that one of the first things they will say is: Well, if Jesus is the Messiah, where is His kingdom? Where is the shalom? The world is still a mess. Well, our answer to that is: The kingdom is here. It is within the Church. It is within us as believers. The kingdom comes whenever we as people of Advent who are in love with shalom – when we work for shalom, when we work for justice – there is where you see His kingdom, and it is real and it is active today.

DAVE BAST

Billy Graham tells the story of how once he was approached by a non-Christian who said to him: You Christians had better act more redeemed if you expect me to believe in your redeemer; and that is the challenge for us as we seek to be those who have been redeemed into the kingdom of shalom and who live like it.

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

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/waiting-for-peace>

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