

Waiting in Hope

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the classic play, *The Iceman Cometh*, a group of drunks live out their lives in a bar owned by a man named Harry Hope. Every day these drunks believe that the day would come when they would turn things around – kick the bottle – lead more productive lives. They hoped for more, and it keeps them going; but then one day someone shows up at the bar and convinces these men that, no, as a matter of fact, they were all *hopeless* drunks, and one by one, the drunks started to die. We cannot live without hope, and so it is no surprise the Bible talks about hope a lot. Advent is also a season of hope; and so today on Groundwork, we will wonder about what it means as people of Advent to live by hope. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and today, Dave, we are beginning a four-part series tying in with Advent, and we are going to wonder a little bit about what it means to wait as Christians. Advent is a season of anticipation – of waiting – and so we are going to talk about waiting in hope; waiting for peace; waiting with joy; and waiting in love. That will be the four-part series.

DAVE BAST

Right; so we are kind of combining two very basic Advent themes: A time of year – a season of the Church year that many people love, perhaps more than any other; and traditionally, in a lot of churches there are Advent wreaths with four candles; and I guess probably they are called different things at different times. There is no one rule about it, but very often they will be identified with these four themes of love, joy, peace, and hope. So we are tying that together with the more basic Advent idea of waiting. It is a season of waiting, preparation, getting ready to celebrate the Lord's coming into our world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is not too difficult to connect the idea of waiting with the idea of hope because hope implies waiting. You are waiting for something; and often we also, when we wait for something, we wait with a great sense of longing and anticipation, and some of that is summed up in a familiar psalm, which kind of sets the tone for this four-part Groundwork series, from Psalm 130.

DAVE BAST

At least the last half of this psalm, where the psalmist writes: ⁵I wait for the Lord; my whole being waits. And in His word I put my hope. ⁶I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning; more than watchmen wait for the morning. ⁷Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love, and with Him is full redemption. ⁸He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Ever since I was a kid and we would hear that psalm read in church with some frequency, I was always struck by the fact that that line, more than watchmen wait for the morning, gets repeated. It is in there twice, just to really get at that sense of longing. I am not going to say it once, I am going to say it twice, the psalmist

said, because it is that kind of longing.

DAVE BAST

Yes, well, let me tell you from personal experience. I actually once had a part-time job as a night watchman...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, did you?

DAVE BAST

When I was in seminary; and would sometimes draw the – I forget – the 11:00 to 7:00 shift or 12:00 to 8:00, one of those – and I am telling you, by about 5:00 in the morning you cannot help but look out the window for those first streaks of gray, and then it turns maybe to rose and salmon and pink, and then the sun in its glory arises. Just imagine in ancient Israel, where it is not sort of a dull, trying not to fall asleep job, but you are on the walls of the city and there is the threat of attack and you are on watch, and it all depends on you. Boy, when the morning comes, what an image for waiting and hoping.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and all the more so if you think back to a day in Israel when they did not have a watch... they didn't have their cell phone to pull out to see what time it was. Time just passed and it was pretty difficult to mark it, probably, in the dark of night; and so, you would watch for that. That has been the position of people – God's people – all through history; and it is also a good... That idea of straining ahead and waiting in hope is really good for Advent. Advent of course... Actually, we always think of two advents in this season...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; the question is, what are we waiting for?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so we remember the waiting for Christ's first advent. Advent is the Latin word for arrival – that is what *advenio* means. So, we remember Christ's first arrival as a baby in Bethlehem.

DAVE BAST

And how long people had to wait for that. You think of a couple of the classic Advent hymns: O come, O come, Emmanuel; and ransom captive Israel; or: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus... It was a long time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; for us, of course, though, now, that is in the past. We can kind of use our imaginations and kind of put ourselves in the shoes of old Anna and old Simeon in the Temple, who see Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple. That is what they have been waiting for. We can kind of imagine that; but the fact is, we don't wait for Jesus' first arrival with hope now because it has already happened. It is that second coming of Jesus – the second advent – that is where the hope comes in; and really, in the Church, Advent is supposed to have that dual focus, but I think sometimes over the years we have let the kind of secular focus on Christmas only swamp our anticipation for Christ's second coming. We only focus on the birth in Bethlehem. Maybe there is a passing reference here or there in a lot of churches during December to the second advent, which is Christ's second coming in glory, but it is not as much of a theme as it used to be, and probably not as much of a theme as it should be, because this is where our hope comes in.

DAVE BAST

Right; and we want to think today, not just about the Christmas story and the preparation for the coming of the baby – that is a wonderful thing, and we will look at that in the next programs in this series – but today, our focus is going to be on the grand scheme of things, and the salvation that we still wait for, waiting in hope, and how those two things are so intertwined that you really cannot do one without the other.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, again, Dave, in the Church we kind of do have one without the other if we only focus on Christmas in the sense of the baby in the manger in Luke 2. That is, of course, incredibly important, and that is the key focus of Advent; and we do get to Christmas, where we celebrate the birth of Christ; but there is a reason why in the Church, too... and if your church follows the Common Lectionary, then the first Sunday in Advent always has a very non-Christmassy reading. It is one from the Olivet discourses, where Jesus is predicting the end of the world. So, the end of Mark, the end of Matthew, the end of Luke, where Jesus has those discourses... and that is usually the reading for the first Sunday in Advent to focus us on the second coming of Christ; and again, as we have said, that is where the hope part comes in.

DAVE BAST

You know, the promise of God goes all the way back to the book of Genesis, where the Gospel first appears in Genesis 3:15, I think it is, where God says to the woman: You know, you are going to have pain now and sorrow, but one day you will bear a child – your seed – your descendant – and the serpent will bruise His heel, but He will crush the serpent’s head; and that was what launched the whole project of hoping and waiting for the Messiah; and the fact is, the serpent has not yet been destroyed. He has been wounded, he has been defeated at the cross and by the resurrection of Jesus – that inflicted a decisive defeat; but the battle is not over, and the final victory has not been won; and that is what we wait for and that is what we hope for; and to that idea of waiting and hoping we will turn in just a moment in more detail.

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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are in this first program of an Advent series about waiting – Advent waiting; and in this particular program, we are focusing on waiting in hope, and before we go much further, let’s just sort of define the word *hope*, and we will connect it back specifically to Advent in just a moment; but hope is that something, that force inside of us that believes that something better is coming. Something is going to come that is going to make the future different and better than what the present moment is.

DAVE BAST

Right; hope is forward looking, that is the essence of it. Somebody has said that hope is faith focused on the future; so, you believe that something is going to happen, and you are waiting for it as you are hoping, and that is the intertwining of those two ideas of waiting and hoping. So even just to take a very basic, everyday example: You have arranged to meet a friend for lunch, and you get there and the appointed time comes and they are not there yet; you are waiting, you are hoping, and finally, hope dies when you decide: Hey, she forgot; or: He is not coming; and so then what do I do? Well, you get up and leave, too. You no longer wait when you are no longer hoping; but as long as you are waiting, it is a sign that you still have hope. That is how they work together.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And hope keeps you going. Wasn’t it Emily Dickenson who called hope the thing with wings, or something like that. There is that idea of movement. Hope is what keeps you sitting there at the restaurant while you are waiting for your friend; or another everyday example: Let’s say you are in a job that is not very fulfilling. It is just not tapping your gifts, but you have the *hope* that you are going to get a promotion someday, and it will be a much better thing when you get the promotion; so your hope for the promotion is what gets you out of bed every morning. You put your clothes on and you go to the office or you go to the shop, wherever you

work; it is not very fulfilling, but you have the hope that you are going to get promoted. If you do your work diligently and well, you are going to get promoted, and the hope keeps you moving forward.

DAVE BAST

Right. Well, we read one great passage about hope – waiting in hope – and that was Psalm 130. Here is another from the New Testament; maybe the most famous passage to my mind about hope in all of the New Testament. It is from Romans 8 beginning at verse 18, where the Apostle writes:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. (In other words, for the final consummation of salvation.) ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope; ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning, as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved; but hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

DAVE BAST

And imbedded in that passage is a beautiful example of another common experience that illustrates the nature of hope: Pregnancy; as you wait for the birth of a child, you are hoping and hoping about what that child may be, and it gets you through the terrible experience, so I am told, of childbirth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you need something firm in you to have hope, and in this case, what Paul is saying in Romans 8 is that our hope is founded on the promises of God, and we have a deposit – kind of a down payment of that – the firstfruits of the Spirit. So we have the spirit in us now, and that secures God's promises; and it is the promise that leads to the hope.

DAVE BAST

I wait for the Lord and in His word I hope, says the psalmist; and that is what Paul also draws attention to. As you just said, it is the word of God, or to put it another way, the promises of God that we found our hope on. That is the thing; you have to have some realistic expectation in order to keep on waiting; and for the believer, there is nothing more powerful than the promises of God driven home by the Spirit of God. I think of another great Old Testament example: Abraham, who is really called the father of the faithful because he is the prototype of the person who just trusts in God's promises and keeps on waiting; and of course, for Abraham, the promise was: You are going to have a child; in fact, you are going to have a lot of children. They will be so great in number, they will be like the stars of the sky or the sand on the seashore; and in Genesis 15 there is just the classic instance of this, where God comes to him and repeats the promise, and Abraham says: Wait a minute; I've been waiting all these years, and now we are too old, and it is going to be a servant in my household who inherits; and God says: No, no, no, no. It is going to be a child of yours...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, just what I said.

DAVE BAST

And then in Genesis 15:6 – one of the great texts of the Bible – Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. That is what hope is. It believes God's promise even when it looks like it is maybe not coming true.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But what is interesting about Romans 8 is that, of course we think of hope in terms of people, right? Abraham, you were just saying, Dave... but Paul says there is hope in the creation itself – in the non-human creation, God, Paul says, has sown a seed of hope; and the creation itself knows that the world is not the way it is supposed to be; there is decay, there is extinction of species, there is pollution. The world itself is suffering, but it has the hope that that is not going to be the last word; and in verse 19 of Romans 8, Paul uses a Greek word – it is the only place in the whole Bible where it occurs, and I know what it is: *apokaradokia*, and it means...

DAVE BAST

Say again?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, *apokaradokia* is the Greek word. It means to crane your neck. So, what Paul is saying is that the whole creation is on tippy-toes, straining forward, craning its neck, looking to see what is coming next; and what is coming next will be the full coming of Christ and His second advent, our redemption as God's children; and the creation, in some sense, Paul says, the non-human creation knows this somehow. It is a very mysterious passage here, but it is not the only place where Paul talks about the creation that way; and so, hope is what keeps the creation going. It is certainly what keeps us human beings going; if we believe in God's promises, then we are like those watchmen in Psalm 130, watching for the morning. So, it is very interesting that Paul is saying the whole shebang – the whole creation – somehow has hope, and that is what keeps us moving.

DAVE BAST

Well, he personifies creation here, and it is actually the universe that is the woman who is pregnant and in the pains of childbirth – the labor pains – and who is groaning; that evocative phrase. It is not only that they are standing on tippy-toes looking for the future, but they are groaning with labor pains, and you can hear creation's groans in all the suffering that fills the world, you know – a destructive hurricane, the pain of cancer, just the entropy, where things are running down and wearing out and nature itself is being destroyed; and so we are all longing for this future that God has promised, and we are looking for it – we are hoping for it; but the question is, what does that look like in day-to-day life? Perhaps that is where we should spend a little bit more time before this program closes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But first, here is a message from ReFrame Media about their Today daily devotional.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork, where today we are beginning a series of programs for Advent on the theme of waiting, and in particular today, waiting with hope as we look forward to God's complete redemption, not only of ourselves individually, or not even as a community – the Church – but His redemption of the whole creation, which is groaning in childbirth, as the Apostle says, as it waits for its redemption.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And indeed, that passage that we just read in the last segment, Dave, from Romans 8 reminds us that we are people who are waiting in hope, and one of the reasons we believe Jesus will come again is because He already did come once; and so, God will complete His work. In fact, we said in the first segment that the Church today sometimes ignores that focus on the second advent, focusing only on the Bethlehem birth and the Christmas stuff and everything that even the wider secular society focuses on during December; but we need both because if Jesus is not coming again, then His first coming doesn't mean much either. If He was just an ordinary baby born 2,000 years ago, and that is sort of the end of the story, then it is just all Hallmark sentimentality during December. It doesn't mean anything. He has to be coming again or otherwise the first

birth – the first advent – does not mean anything either.

DAVE BAST

Well, and here is a further point that needs to be stressed. If it is only about individuals – about us and Jesus – that does not quite suffice either, because it is a cosmic affair that we are involved in.

You know, the background to Paul's teaching in Romans 8 is the biblical idea that sin – human sin – has affected the whole cosmos. It has thrown things into disorder and disarray, and that redemption has to apply to more than just humans as well. Redemption has to filter out, not just through people, but into nature itself, and reverse all the consequences, the dreadful consequences, of the fall; and if that is not true, you really have no hope at all and no alternative to cynicism and ultimately to despair.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right; and so, as opposed to that, we are people of hope, Advent people of hope; and we wait for it patiently. Patience is also right in the neighborhood here, as Paul wrote also in that passage in Romans 8. So we wait for it patiently, and boy, there is great power in the idea of hope because it is a tough world. I mean, who would stick with the Christian faith in a world of cancer wards and child abuse, natural disasters, broken homes, if we didn't have hope that the headlines of the day are not the end of the story; we would curdle into cynicism and despair, or we would become hedonists – pleasure seekers, you know – and well, there are a lot of people like that in our society who have given up on any ultimate hope, so live for the moment; amass riches, eat, drink, be merry; stuff yourself with the goodies of this life because once it is over it is over; they have no hope; but hope is what keeps Christians moving forward and doing the work of the Lord.

DAVE BAST

But, hope has to be grounded. I think if there is one thing we have tried to say in this program it is that you need something to base your hope on. It is not mere wishful thinking. In fact, that is a pretty good exercise. Think about the difference between wishful thinking and real hope, and the difference is, it is grounded in something. So we have talked about the word of God – the promises of God. That is the ground of our hope. We have also mentioned the Holy Spirit as the one who fills our hearts...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, the first fruits.

DAVE BAST

Right, exactly; and I think the other thing we would say as Christians is that it is the resurrection that really is the basis of our hope. You know, if you just look out into a world that is broken and fallen and filled with pain and death, and you don't believe that Jesus actually rose from the dead, you have no other option if you are a thinking person than to say, you know, like Mark Twain did in one of his blackest, darkest moments: The world is filled with a myriad of men. They struggle for little, mean advantages; and then they die, and it is as if they never were. That is despair.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, the non-believing world – people who do not have the gift of faith – who do not believe in God's word – wishful thinking is exactly what they accuse us of; prayer is whistling in the dark; it is just pie in the sky by and by; you should just accept your fate that you are going to die someday and that is going to be the end of the story; but that is because they don't have the hope – because they don't have the word of God.

So, right; you mentioned the resurrection of the body. Jesus' resurrection is what grounds our hope, and the reality of that is sealed into our hearts by the Holy Spirit; and that is why, again practically speaking, what does it mean to be people of hope? It means you are able to stand at the grave of a loved one, committing that loved one's body to the ground, and still be able to say: I know my Redeemer lives; still be able to say the Apostles Creed, that I believe in the resurrection of the body, including *this* body that we are now lowering into the ground six feet under; that is what keeps us moving forward as Christians.

So we grieve, and maybe we grieve even more than some people over the brokenness of the world because we know as Christians more than non-Christians do how wrong it is, but we don't grieve as those without hope, as the Bible says.

DAVE BAST

Right; and it means also that we endure. A great New Testament word: *hupomoné* – you stick to it; as Hebrews 12 says: You keep running with patience – with endurance – that is sometimes translated patience – with endurance the race that is set before us; and that reminds me of Martin Luther's great line. Somebody asked him: What would you do if you knew the world would end tomorrow? And Luther said: I would go out and plant an apple tree, or I would go out and hoe my garden. You know, you just keep doing what you keep doing, and you do it because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain – another great line from the Apostle.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is why Christian people are the ones in history who have established the most hospitals, the most abuse prevention shelters, the most hospices. Christians work to protect the environment.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Like Luther's line about the apple tree, because we believe and we have the hope, along with the rest of creation, as Paul wrote in Romans 8, that this world does have a future; and so it is worth investing in it.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is what hope does.

DAVE BAST

That is such a great point; because the world itself has a future, we are people of Advent hope. We wait in hope, and because our hope is founded on the promises of God, who kept His promise the first time, we believe He will do it again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we always want to know how we can help you to dig deeper into scripture. So visit our website, groundworkonline.com, and suggest topics or passages to dig into next on Groundwork.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/waiting-in-hope>

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