

Waiting with Love

DAVE BAST

Are you good at waiting? I am not, which is why I always jump around at the supermarket trying to guess which checkout line will be the quickest. I seem to get it wrong most of the time. Waiting isn't easy for most of us; especially when we are waiting for something really big, like the birth of a child or the birth of the Christ child; but there is this one thing about it that can make waiting easier. It helps to pass the time if you have something interesting and important to do while you are waiting; and that is just what Jesus has given us while we wait for His return, something important to do, and Advent is the perfect season to focus on it. 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, at last we have arrived at Christmas. This is the last of four programs in a series for Advent. A series that follows the theme of waiting – waiting, and the words that we associate with Advent and Christmas: Hope, joy, peace, and finally now love.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What we are going to talk about today is the thing that Jesus expects of us in the meanwhile, right? So, we are Advent people, which means we live between Christ's first advent, the one in Bethlehem, which is the main focus of most people, and even most churches during December, but also, just as importantly, in fact, we are waiting for His second advent – for the second coming of Christ, and we live between the two advents. The question is, what are we supposed to be doing? We are waiting, yes. We have talked about waiting with hope and with peace and with joy and so forth, but Jesus expects us to behave a certain way while we wait. We are not just twiddling our thumbs. We are not just biding our time. We are supposed to be active.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and actually I thought quite a bit, not just about the main words, but I thought about the prepositions that we use to connect the waiting and the word; and in this one, it is not waiting *for* love, but waiting *with* love. I think that is an important distinction. We are not waiting for love to come into the world, because love came down at Christmas, as the phrase says, as the song says. God showed His love for us in coming into the world and taking upon Himself our human nature. The thing about love is that it is not just flowery words or love letters that you send out that make a difference. It is what you are actually willing to do – what you are actually willing to give; and thus we celebrate at this time of year God's greatest gift of all, His gift of Himself, because if you are a Christian, if you hold to the historic Christian faith, then you believe that the baby Jesus was not just a cute story or a nice little child, but that, in this deepest of all mysteries of the Christian faith, in that child the infinite God of the universe became a man.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For God so love the world, John 3:16 – perhaps the most famous Bible verse in the world – for God so loved the world that He sent His Son; and He is, indeed, the incarnation of all the love of God, which is why, of

course, all the spiritual forces – the devil and his hosts who oppose God, opposed that birth. You know, the Christmas story we never read is in Revelation Chapter 12, where we are told what Luke 2 looked like from the perspective of God and the devil, and there the writer of Revelation depicts the woman giving birth with a dragon right there, ready to eat the child the moment He is born, and the dragon is the devil, and the child is safely spirited away in Revelation 12; but that is because the devil is hate and God is love, and Jesus is the incarnation of love; and now that He is here, we are to be people of love: “A new commandment I give you, Jesus said right before He died, “that you love one another.” It is a simple commandment, but as we have said on other Groundwork programs, it is not rocket science, but it is tough to do and tough to live out; but when it comes to being people of love, it is not enough just to talk about it, right? Sometimes, as they say, oh, it is the thought that counts, but that does not really work with love.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right. Can you imagine coming home on your anniversary and saying something like, “Honey, hey, happy anniversary; I love you so much, I thought about taking you out for dinner, but I decided I would rather stay in and watch TV.” I don’t think that would work. No, it is not the thought that counts, it is the deed – it is the act.

You know, you think about the giving of gifts and Christmas, it has obviously become so much a part of the season, and I suppose it originated with the wise men – the Magi – again, that familiar part of the Christmas story as they come and they offer gold and frankincense and myrrh to the child; so now we get into the habit of making Christmas this big commercial extravaganza and all about gift-giving and receiving; and once again, it is not even really a matter of dollars and cents or a matter of presents and parties, but it is the resolve to live the imitation of Christ, as Thomas à Kempis famously said in his classic devotional work. We live in imitation of Christ. The gift that God wants us to give is the gift of our self – the gift, first, of our heart. What shall I give Him, poor as I am, sings the little boy in the carol: If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; but what can I give Him? I give my heart. As we give Him our hearts, He wants us to turn around and give that love to a needy and broken world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right. Love in the New Testament is never a concept. Love is a person. Love is Christ, and He is the one who will say: Greater love has no one than the one who lays down his life for his friends, which is exactly what Jesus is going to do; so, love always involves sacrifice in the Christian context; it always involves service and humility, but above all, it always issues in actions – in loving actions; and the reason for that, of course, is we take our cue from Jesus, whose ultimate action was to lay down His life. When that child was born in the manger, and Mary, I think, knew this, and if she didn’t know it, by the time she encountered old Simeon and Anna in the Temple, when Simeon said: A sword is going to pierce your soul, Mary; this child is destined to die. That is going to be His ultimate act because He is love incarnate, and that sets the tone for all of our living now while we continue to wait for His second coming.

DAVE BAST

Well, hey, now that is a great segue because we want to come back to this idea of the challenge to imitate Christ’s love, and we want to do that before we close the program, but meanwhile, we want to connect it to the idea of waiting; and specifically, waiting for His return. How do you get ready for the second coming of Christ? And that is a big subject that has exercised a lot of people and led to a lot of whacky behavior in the course of Church history, but Jesus had some very significant, clear instructions that He gave, and He gave them especially in the form of one of His great parables. So we are going to look at that next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to Groundwork, and this Christmas program, which is capping off a four-part Advent Christmas series focused on waiting; and we are talking in this particular program especially about waiting with love, but in this segment, Dave, I think we want to think a little about the fact of that waiting. Nobody likes to wait, as you said in the introduction to this program, and yet, that is our reality, and Jesus told us that that would be our reality.

DAVE BAST

Well, and we have been waiting for 2,000 years, haven't we, as a Church – as the people of Christ – the followers of Jesus. So, how do you keep fired up for 2,000 years living in expectation? We talked once about being on tip-toes in an earlier program – that sense of expectation of Christ's return. What would you do if you knew that it was going to happen tonight or tomorrow? As the poet John Dunn once asked: What if this present were the world's last night? How would that affect your behavior? What would you go and do? That is a good question.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But I think what Jesus wants us to answer that with is, hopefully, I wouldn't do anything different than what I have been doing all along, because if we heed Jesus' words, then we are supposed to be doing something, which is namely living with and waiting with love all along; and Jesus basically tried to put the disciples on alert to this. This comes from Mark 13:32-35. This is actually a passage that is usually read at the head of Advent, where Jesus says to the disciples:

³²No one knows about that day or hour; not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Be on guard, be alert. You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going away. He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with an assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back.

DAVE BAST

There you go. So, the analogy that Jesus uses is of an owner going away on a trip. He seems to be the lord of quite a great estate and he has a number of servants living there and taking care of the house and presumably the grounds, too; and he goes off on a trip. So, Jesus pretty clearly by this is telling us: You know, I could be gone for a long time. You could have a long wait, in other words; but He is also equally clearly telling us how to go about that wait, and what we should be doing, and He specifically, here in Mark, says, and this is repeated in the other Gospels, too. It says two things about His return. The first is: You don't know when it is going to happen. It is incalculable. You cannot figure it out. Nobody knows the day or the hour. Nobody knows the time, not even the angels in heaven; not even the Son...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is significant.

DAVE BAST

Now, come on, just think about that, right?

SCOTT HOEZEE

I don't know. Now, there is a lot of theological controversy: How could Jesus as the Son of God not know something? We won't get into that right now. It is very likely that as, in His human form while He was incarnate that He self-limited Himself...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So He really did not know; but what that means is, all the people in history who have tried to decode Jesus' words to find out when it was going to happen...

DAVE BAST

Or the rest of the New Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right. I have used the analogy when I have preached before. I said: Suppose I make it very, very clear to you I know absolutely nothing about trigonometry. What sense would it make for somebody to spend their life reading every sermon I have ever written, every letter I have ever written, and every e-mail I have ever written to learn about trigonometry? I told you, I don't know trigonometry. You are not going to learn about trigonometry by studying Scott Hoezee's words. Jesus said: I don't know when it is going to happen. Therefore, He was not encoding it into His word, so stop looking for it. Jesus here is not telling the disciples to calculate, but rather to contemplate what it means to wait faithfully. He was here, as you said, Dave, it could be a while. He wasn't training short-distance sprinters. Jesus was getting the disciples ready to be long-distance marathon runners over the long haul, and to stay faithful in love along that long haul.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and there is a second thing we could say about this from His teaching, and that is that many of His parables, including this one, stress the unexpectedness of His return. Even if you are looking for it, even if you are waiting for it, it is kind of going to catch you by surprise because it is going to happen suddenly; and so, that also has to factor in. You need to be ready, as He says here, at all times because there won't be time to get ready on the eve of the event. It is not like: Hey, Jesus, could You give me a 24-hour heads up so that I can get my life in order, you know, before You return? No, it does not work that way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, I have often used the analogy, too... I like what you said, Dave. When Jesus comes back, we will be surprised, but it won't be unexpected; which seems paradoxical, but I have sometimes used the analogy, you know, when your kids are little, so maybe you have an 8-year-old son, and your son is in the house and you know he is in the house, but you are sitting in the den quietly one evening engrossed in a good book, and all of a sudden your little 8-year-old comes up behind you and says: Daddy; and you about jump out of your skin, right? You were not expecting him to say that just then, but you weren't blown away that he said it because you knew that he was in the house. We won't be blown away that Jesus comes again because we expected it, even though we might get surprised at the moment, but if we have been living faithfully, neither will we have anything to fear because we won't have to say: Oh, I've been living a spiteful, hateful life for years and now He is back and I don't have time. No, the point is, what it means to watch is not that you scan the horizon with binoculars to see when the clouds of glory will come. What it means to watch is to watch your life and to be a person of love.

DAVE BAST

Right; well, let's listen to another parallel parable from the Gospel of Luke, from Luke Chapter 12, because Jesus amplifies this a little bit, this idea of watching that you just mentioned, Scott. So, He says this. Again, it is the same context of instructions to the servants just before the master goes away for what they are supposed to do while they are waiting for Him to return.

³⁵Be dressed, ready for service, and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him. ³⁷It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when He comes. ³⁸It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. And then a little bit later: ⁴³It will be good for the servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns; and He speaks about the instructions that He has been given; so, three times there in Luke 12 Jesus uses the phrase: It will be good for the servants whose master finds them, what? Watching, ready, doing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is finally what it means to wait with love, as we are focusing in this program; that in our church communities, in our friendships, in our families, that we are day by day acting like we know that the Lord is near, both in the sense that, of course, the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, so the Lord is near to us at all times; but His second coming is near; and of course, for any one of us, the moment of our own deaths is also going to be our encounter with the risen Christ immediately; and so we live every moment – we wait for Christ's

second coming – His second advent – with an awareness that Jesus left us with some marching orders, and that is to be like He was, which is loving, giving, serving, and therefore doing what the master would have us to do, and not doing the opposite.

DAVE BAST

Well maybe we could just take a few seconds here and say a word about the signs of the times because a lot of people get exercised about that. Are we living in the end times? Does the Bible point these things out? The fact is that whenever the Bible talks about signs of the end, it mentions things like natural disasters and warfare and people falling away from faith that have been true in every age.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, sounds like history.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly; the signs of the times are the course of history, right. So again, these are not clues to let you know: Hey, you don't have to worry about it because you are not in that time period yet. No, we are all supposed to be watchful, which means, as you pointed out, Scott, I think a good way, watch yourself, you know, watch your own life, and be ready. Not by selling everything that you have and turning into some kind of survivalist, a commune, or putting on white robes and sitting on a hillside – Christians have done that, incidentally, in the past when they were stirred up and thought Jesus was about to return; but it means to keep close accounts with God. Keep your relationship with Him in good working order and be about the business that He wants you to do.

So, let's just come back to that idea with the time that we have left. We will go there in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we are concluding this Christmas and Advent series and program thinking about what does it mean to wait; and Dave, you were saying at the close of the last segment, what does it mean to be faithful in the everyday? That is why I love going back to Luke Chapter 12, where Jesus tells this parable and makes an analogy of the faithful servant who has been put in charge of the house while the master is away; and then in verse 42, after Peter says: Well, what is that going to mean?

DAVE BAST

Yes: Hey, You talking to us, Jesus, here? I love that from Peter.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And He said: Yes.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I am talking to you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And He answers – Jesus answers now in verse 42:

Who then is that faithful and wise manager whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? ⁴³It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. ⁴⁴Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. And what I love about that line, Dave, is it doesn't get more mundane than that. So, Peter says: What does it mean to be... are you talking about us? Yes, I am talking about you. What does it mean to be faithful the way you are talking about while we wait? And Jesus says: When it is suppertime, feed people. It's like, that's it? That is the analogy? When it is suppertime, feed people? When it is breakfast, fry an egg? And Jesus is saying: Yes, those ordinary acts of faithfulness and being a good steward in the house, feeding people when it is dinnertime, that is what I am talking about. It is surprisingly simple. You would think He would say something like: I want you to go find,

you know, a way to found world-class clinics and solve all the problems... No, Jesus says: When it is time to eat, feed people.

DAVE BAST

Well, again, put yourself in the parable, because that is what Jesus always invites His hearers to do; and quite clearly, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then your place in the parable, my place in the parable, Scott's place in the parable, is as the manager. We are the stewards of the household because we have been given a great privilege, and with it a great responsibility. We are the people who know. We are the people who have been given God's word. We are the people who have received the Gospel. We are the people who have been given the faith to believe it; and as Jesus says elsewhere more than once: To whom much is given, of them much will be required. With great knowledge, with great possessions, comes great responsibility to use those things; and relatively speaking, compared to the rest of the world, we are rich. So, yes, we are the manager. He has put us in charge, and our charge, as you said really beautifully is to just do the simple, mundane thing that will take care of our fellow householders – our fellow servants.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Alas, though, Jesus also knows that there will be a temptation to go another way because He also says in verse 45: But suppose the servant says to himself, "My master is taking a long time in coming, and then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; and unfortunately in the history of the Church, this has happened, too. Different Christians, Christian leaders, congregations, who knows what... we have sometimes sort of said: Well, He's not looking right now... God is not looking. He is probably not going to come anytime soon, so I am going to take what I can get here. I am going to skim off the top. I am going to live for me – look out for good old number one; and Jesus is saying: Don't ever, ever do that. Just stay faithful because that is what I am looking for whether I come sooner or later, in your lifetime or not in your lifetime, just keep feeding people at the proper hour and don't indulge your own wishes because you think nobody is looking and nobody is coming anytime soon.

DAVE BAST

See, the thing about a steward is, a steward has been given certain things. They are not really his. We sometimes pay lip service to that idea. I was just talking to somebody the other day, a person with great wealth, and he said: Well, it is not really mine; it is God's. It was given to me. And he meant it. That is a wonderful thing; that is a great attitude, but a steward can also be tempted to take what has been given to him or her and just kind of use it to, hey, enjoy yourself. That is what happens to the fellow here; and while we often shy away from the more negative aspects of the Gospel and of biblical teaching, Jesus is pretty clear here that there is bad news for the selfish, just as there is good news for the faithful because He goes on to say: What is going to happen? Well, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him, and at an hour he is not aware of. Remember, we said it is going to be a surprise? He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

We don't want to end there, but there is a real note of judgment that runs through Jesus' teaching. Nobody talked more about judgment than Jesus did. If you are self-righteous, if you are self-satisfied, if you are self-indulgent, if you think everything you have is just for you to have a good time, watch out! Watch out; because God will come in a surprising way, and He will come at the end of the world, but He may come before that just for you, and you are not going to want to face Him if that has been your attitude and behavior.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So Jesus was aware that we would be, indeed, Advent people eventually; living between the first advent and the second advent, and the need to wait with love – the need to imitate the master at all times, not calculating the odds of His coming back today or tomorrow and adjusting our actions accordingly; no, we live with a certain watchfulness. We live with a certain awareness that at Christmas love came down...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And love came down to sacrifice itself; and Jesus did through the death and resurrection; and now, as we wait, we wait with love because we are the people of that master – we are His advent people.

DAVE BAST

I like to think of Ebenezer Scrooge as a great Christian model for us. You know, he was totally transformed, and it says at the end of the story, as he turns into this generous, giving, serving, helping the poor: No one knew better how to keep Christmas than old Ebenezer Scrooge, so they said; and so they should say of us.

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 into the scriptures. So go to our website, groundworkonline.com, and suggest topics and passages for future Groundwork programs.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/waiting-with-love>

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