

What You're Wondering (Part 2)

DAVE BAST

When we asked what you would like to hear about on Groundwork, the response was clear: Jesus. Since our purpose in digging into scripture is to lay the foundation for our lives, we are happy to share even more about the One who is so fundamental to our faith. So join us to see what scripture says about Jesus and how we can grow in relationship with Him. Stay tuned as we discuss Jesus Christ on Groundwork today.

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, in every one of these Groundwork programs that we do throughout the year we always invite listener response. Contact us. There are a variety of ways to do that: Old-fashioned letters, which are pretty rare these days, but also e-mails and Facebook and all the other kinds of social media contacts that work for Groundwork.

Scott Hoezee;

We have had a number of questions from Brittany, from Corry, from Vernie, all asking more about Jesus, and wanting to hear more about what the Bible's witness to Jesus is. Who is Jesus? How do we relate to Jesus? So, in this program we are going to talk about Jesus and who He is and maybe what some of the alternative versions of Jesus that are floating around society and why most of those are inadequate; and then we also had a question that we will get to in the second segment about where in Jesus' ministry do we see grace and mercy? What about the grace and mercy of Jesus? And then, ultimately, in the third segment we will talk about talking to Jesus through a listener question related to prayer. So, that is kind of the roadmap for this particular program.

DAVE BAST

And nothing could be more important – nothing, as I said in the top of the program, could be more fundamental in the sense of foundation – that is our tagline that we came up with years ago when we developed this programming concept of digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives; but even within scripture, there is a foundation principle, and that is none other than the person of Jesus. In fact, so many times He compared Himself to the stone or the cornerstone that the building is built on; and Paul says in I Corinthians, I think it is, that the Church, meaning all Christians collectively, are built on the foundation of the Apostles, but Jesus is the chief cornerstone. So, it is the apostolic witness to the person and work of Jesus that is at the bottom of everything, and with it you are a Christian; without it you are not.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that is also why we do have – and just for our listeners to remind you that you can go to our website: groundworkonline.com, and there you can find the archive of all of our programs. You can search them by keywords and the like. There is also a way to subscribe on our website so you get an e-mail every time we post a new program on groundworkonline.com you can receive an e-mail to be reminded of new material; but if you go there – if you go to groundworkonline.com, we do have a number of series, Dave, that we have done in the past; Christmas programs based on John 1: Jesus as our light, and talking about the incarnation of Jesus and our rebirth. We have done a series during the season of Lent about Jesus going to

Jerusalem from the Gospel of Luke, so that is another series that we have done.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and one of my favorites is a series we did recently on images for Jesus throughout the scriptures; so, Jesus as the Word of God and Jesus as the Lamb of God, the suffering servant, the wisdom of God, the image of God. In fact, that last one comes, I think, from Colossians 1, if I am remembering correctly...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Where Paul says: He is the firstborn over the whole creation. Well, let me, here, I have that; I turned up that passage. Let me just read it, because there is no clearer statement in all of scripture about the supreme importance and the identity of Christ; not only His person but His role in the world and in the Church; so, Paul writes:

1:15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation; meaning He has the position vis-à-vis the universe of the firstborn. So, it does not mean He is the first creature; it does not mean He was born, since He has always eternally existed as God, but it means that He is the one who is put in charge as the firstborn son was in a Jewish family; and then Paul goes on to say: ¹⁶In Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. ¹⁷He is before all things. In Him, all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the Church, the beginning and firstborn from among the dead, so that – and this is the great phrase – in everything He might have the supremacy; or as another version has it: So in everything He might be preeminent. So, yes, ask your questions about Jesus because He is first in everything.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there, right there, I think, Dave, if somebody wanted to say to either one of us: What is the most important thing to believe about Jesus, or what distinguishes Jesus from any other figure of history? I think what you just read from Colossians 1 gets at that so much; that Jesus does need to be more than just a really good moral teacher, right? There are some people today who say: Well, yes, Jesus was a very good man. He was only a man, and He was a really smart teacher...

DAVE BAST

Another prophet like Muhammad and Buddha and whatnot.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, He had a way with words and so, yes, you could learn things from Jesus. No, it is not enough. So, here in the passage you just read, here is the First Century, only a couple decades maybe after Jesus' ministry, and Paul is making these huge claims as to who Jesus is. He is basically saying He is God, and He is the supreme, preeminent one over all creation. So, what is one of the most important things to know about Jesus? Well, that that is exactly who He is, that He is the Son of God, He is God, He is part of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and if He is not that, then what He said or His way with words or His being a wise teacher does not matter much, because then He is just a face in the historical crowd and there is nothing particularly important about Him.

DAVE BAST

Well, and the reason we believe He is all those things is because He rose from the dead. I mean, that is the clincher; that is the great event that declared to the world, really; to all those who will listen and look, that He is who He said He is, and He was who He claimed to be; and that is the witness of the Apostles that gives us this. So, if you don't believe that, you have no reason to believe them when they report on His words and His loving acts and all the other stuff as well. It all hangs together. It is either true or not.

Courtney Jacob, who is our producer, throws us these questions and she included some little interesting things in the outline for this program about Jesus, and one of the things she asked us to reflect on is: What is your one-minute elevator speech about who Jesus is? Which I thought was really interesting, and as I thought

about that, what immediately popped into my mind is the Christian symbol, the fish. You will sometimes see that on cars, and then sometimes you will see another one mocking it, you know, as people like to take potshots at us, but the fish was an ancient Christian symbol because it was an acronym: *Icythys* – that in Greek stood for: Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior. That is my one-minute elevator summary of who Jesus is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and if you could unpack that and unpack each of those letters of that Greek word for fish, that really, really would get at it, and you are right, Dave, that the key is that God raised Him from the dead, and the New Testament is quite clear in saying that was God's stamp of approval on everything Jesus said and claimed to be. That He was one with the Father and that He was here to bring us to God and to forgive our sins; and His resurrection was God the Father's way of saying: That is right. That validates absolutely everything, and that is the power of God at work in our world today.

DAVE BAST

Well, next we are going to focus on a request from a Facebook friend named Paul to hear more about the grace and mercy of Jesus; but first here is a word from one of the founding organizations of Groundwork, ReFrame Media, about another way you can dig deeper into scripture on a website called: *Think Christian*.
BREAK:

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 doing a program of listener questions. We just talked about Jesus generally in terms of what makes Him the preeminent one in all of history; not just a good man; not just a good teacher, but the Son of God who has preeminence in all things, as the New Testament says; but now Paul, a Facebook listener, also wants to know: What about the grace and the mercy of Jesus? Where do we find grace and mercy in the ministry of Jesus? Years ago, I wrote a book called *The Riddle of Grace*. One of the things I found in researching that book is that actually the word grace, which in Greek is *charis*, and we get charismatic and charisma from that in English – that word is all over the place in Paul, and to a large degree in Peter, James and John in their letters; but it only occurs like maybe once in the Gospels; so the word for grace does not come up in the Gospels – almost not at all; but, why then did Paul and Peter and the others later write so much about grace? Because all of the stories about Jesus bristle with grace and mercy, and that is sort of where we need to dig into if we want to talk about how was it that Jesus was gracious and merciful, and how did that become the foundation for the whole doctrine of salvation by grace alone?

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely. You mentioned Paul and how it is all over... He says this fantastic statement in Titus Chapter 2, where he says: For the grace of God has appeared; and he is talking about Jesus, but he personifies Him as grace; and it is, it is seen in almost all of his words and actions. Grace, condescension, without compromising holiness; you know, Jesus could be tough, too, when He came up against unrepentance and pride and hard-heartedness and hypocrisy; but most of all, to people who were ordinary and hurting, it was all about compassion and grace. You know, if you really want to dig into that, the best place to go is the Gospels and the person of Jesus.

I remember years ago I ran across the suggestion that if you are meeting with a person who is interested in Christianity, what do you tell them? Where do they start? And it used to be people would say: Well, tell them to read the Gospel of John. I don't think that is a good idea because John is pretty deep and John is pretty theological. John is wonderful and rich; but then I ran across someone else who said: No, tell them to start

with Mark.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, go to Mark.

DAVE BAST

Mark is straight forward; it is fast-paced – it moves quickly – and it is all focused on Jesus’ words and actions, and you see it there, lived out.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and again and again in the Gospels, Jesus is extending kindness; but through that, grace and mercy, even if the text does not label it that, to people who nobody else paid any attention to. Jesus got in trouble with the Pharisees and the religious leaders again and again because He would sit down at table and break bread, which was a symbol of unity back in that day; He would eat with tax collectors and prostitutes and the other sinners. He would touch the untouchable. He would touch lepers; and the contagion did not go the other way, the contagion – the healing – was extended to the leper. So, He was always hanging out with the wrong people according to the religious people of the day, but that is because He knew... As Jesus Himself said: Who needs a doctor, healthy people or sick people? The sick people do, and these are sin-sick people; so I am going to show them that God is merciful and God is gracious; and certainly that came out again and again in the parables.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and you mentioned my favorite example; sort of the vignette that shows it all right there. A leper came up to Jesus and said, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean,” You can see a whole lifetime of rejection behind that sentence; and Jesus reaches out and touches him, which was unthinkable, really, because of the contagion and the uncleanness of leprosy; that is the compassion and mercy of Jesus acted out – enacted – which supremely is demonstrated on the cross, ultimately. What Paul calls *the* demonstration of God’s love, in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

While we were... He did not wait for people to clean up their own acts, He moved in with the grace and mercy of God; and in fact, Jesus was so merciful and so gracious and so kind to the people who others in the religious community ignored, that people would sometimes say to Him: We always had the Law; we had the Law of God; obviously You have come to get rid of that, right? There is no more Law? It is just grace? And Jesus said: Oh, no, no, no. Don’t think I have come to abolish the Law; in fact, your righteousness had better exceed that of the Pharisees and the scribes or you will never enter the kingdom of God. Well, of course, it was unthinkable to have more righteousness than these people. That is all they ever thought about was being good. What Jesus was saying is: When I die on the cross, I will become your righteousness. I will fulfill the Law so you don’t have to. The Law does not go away. I will take care of that for you, and then give it to you as a gift; and the gift, of course, is grace.

DAVE BAST

Well, and I think that is what takes us to the depths of the mercy of God in Christ because it is mercy and it is grace without compromising God’s holiness and His righteous character and His commitment to His own Law. I mean, nobody loves the Law more than God – the God who gave it. I read a great line from an Old Testament commentator recently: Nobody loves God’s word more than the God whose word it is. The same thing holds true with the Law. God refuses to just say: Nah, never mind. Here is a do-over. So, He takes it all up into Himself. Only He, you know, had the power and the infinite... words begin to fail us... to do it all; to be gracious and forgiving without denying the reality of sin and the fundamental nature of His own holiness. So, it is all wrapped up in Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the Law, of course, was never an arbitrary set of rules. The Law was the operating manual for creation. This is how life is flourishing – this is how life goes, God says. I made the creation so I know how it works. The Law is just your operating manual if you want to get along well, and Jesus said: I want people to flourish. I want this creation to be all that it was meant to be; and so, Jesus fulfills that in Himself – all that righteousness, all that goodness, all that flourishing of life, and then gives it to us now as a gift after He was then also raised from the dead.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and to me, the great thing about all of this is that it is not just theoretical. We are not just talking about ideas like grace and mercy in Jesus, or ideas about God, but it is all for the purpose of entering into a relationship with Him; because the whole point of Jesus is that God wants us to come to Him, to be restored, to be reconciled, to use one of the great New Testament words, and that happens in Him, and in Jesus we also have an ongoing, deepening relationship with God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that will lead nicely to our next segment, as a listener named Dave from Ontario asked a question more about prayer, and how we can grow in that relationship with Jesus, and we will take that up next.

BREAK:

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork, where today we are answering listener questions, and we got to riff on just talking about Jesus in the first part of the program, which we could do all day every day because so many of our Facebook friends especially said that is what we really want to dig into deeper, but then this question from a Canadian listener; and yes, we are in Canada – we are all over the world on the Internet, but it is great that we are also on the air in Canada – to talk a little bit about prayer. He writes: I wanted to know how to pray and why it is important to pray.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is a wonderful question, and as soon as I hear about why is it important to pray – I being a Reformed Christian – a Reformed pastor – I go to the Heidelberg Catechism and to its last, last part about prayer and the Lord's Prayer, where it says: Why is it important for a Christian to pray? And the answer is: Because prayer is the most important part of the gratitude that we owe toward God for our salvation by grace alone. So in the last segment we talked about how by Jesus' mercy and grace we have been saved; all of Jesus' righteousness has been transferred to our account sheerly by grace; we owe Him an eternal debt of gratitude; and the Catechism – the Heidelberg Catechism says: And prayer is the best way to say thank you.

DAVE BAST

Well, that is a great place to start. There is so much we could say about, not only what is prayer and how do we understand it better, but how do we pray? Wow, this program has a couple of pretty big topics; the first one being Jesus, the second one being prayer. A friend recently put me on to a sonnet by George Herbert, the great 17th Century English poet and pastor, lived a short life, died in his mid-thirties, but this wonderful Christian poet who has a sonnet about prayer published in the last year of his life, where he uses – I counted them up – twenty seven different words or images that describe prayer. Some of them are quite elliptical, some of them quite profound, but he calls it the Church's banquet. It is how we get by from day to day. It is the food of our souls. Just as you need physical food, prayer is what nourishes us spiritually. He calls it later on exalted manna; but also, an engine against the Almighty. It is a means of actually moving God, as hard as that may be to fathom: How could we move God? But He tells us: Just come to Me and ask and it will have an effect. So, all of these wonderful incentives to pray that speak not only of what it does for us, but how it affects God and how it deepens our relationship with Him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think that is the key, right? We all know, if we pray for something, we do not always get what we had hoped for. The answer is not always yes; and those are some of the mysteries of prayer and why some prayers seem to be answered and others don't, and we don't even have time to go down that road. We have done that in other Groundwork programs. We have done some programs and series on prayer that you could also look up on our website; but the one thing when Jesus talks about it – and I remember the writer, Frederick Buechner, emphasized this very often – the one thing that Jesus emphasizes again and again whenever He talks about prayer is that the main thing about prayer is that you keep at it. All right? You just keep at it, and why. Well, because that is, as you just said, Dave, that is the thing that sort of cements our relationship with God. If you have a relationship with somebody, you talk to that person, and you are eager to talk to that person. If your spouse is out of town, you are eager for the e-mail, you are eager for the phone call; and if you are in a place, as I was recently, when I was in Africa, where I could not make phone calls to my wife, and was dependent on e-mail, you miss that. I missed hearing her voice. When we are in a relationship with somebody, we talk; we communicate; and with God and Jesus, prayer is that communication; and so, Jesus said the main thing about prayer is that you keep at it. Why? Because it keeps the relationship of love between God and us alive.

DAVE BAST

One of the most famous verses about prayer is Luke 11:1, where the disciples come to Jesus and say, "Lord, teach us to pray." It is Luke's introduction to the Lord's Prayer, then, which is kind of a model or a pattern prayer. You start with God and His glory and His name and His kingdom and then you move on to your own needs. That is a great pattern; it has never been bettered as a model; but we all need help with it, we all need instruction with it, no matter how long we go in our pursuit of Christ or in our experience of the Christian life; but there is no real secret here. You just have to do this. You know, all my life I have realized I need to have regular daily devotions. I need to open the Bible every day. I need to pray. Sometimes it is just listening. It is not necessarily the words that are even that important, but the regular practice; and it is really only recently that I have gotten a little more consistent with this. I won't say I've gotten better at it, but consistent; and it is a wonderful thing to do; and do it in the morning. Carve out the time, whatever it takes, where you sit apart for a while and you enter the presence of God and you listen to His word – you kind of ruminate on it – you meditate on it – you memorize it – you speak to Him. It ain't rocket science, but you do have to do it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then you keep it alive all day long. I was impressed, too, by people who have really emphasized that little Jesus prayer, so short: Jesus Christ, savior of the world, have mercy on me, a sinner; and people who are really good prayer warriors, as we sometimes call them, pray that multiple times all throughout the day, while they are sitting at a traffic light or just while there is a quiet moment in the office or something, just to repeat that little Jesus prayer; again, just keeping that connection and that relationship with God alive on a constant basis, it really does draw us closer to the mind of God and keeps that relationship of love that we have received by grace going.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I will give George Herbert the last word: Prayer can lift us even into heaven. He says it is the Milky Way, the bird of paradise, church bells beyond the stars heard, the souls' blood, the land of spices something understood. It is a great mystery, but it is true. So, pray.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and as we have said in this very program, we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into the scriptures. So visit our website, groundworkonline.com and suggest topics and passages or questions you would like us to talk about next on Groundwork.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/what-youre-wondering-part-2>

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