
Carrying Jesus' Cross on the Road to Golgotha

DARRELL DELANEY

Some journeys you choose, others choose you. You think you are just running an errand, walking home, minding your business; then suddenly, you are standing at a crossroads with a decision in front of you: Will you step toward someone else's suffering, or will you step away? The stations of the cross show us that following Jesus means facing that choice. Today on *Groundwork*, we walk with him as he takes up the cross and as a stranger is pulled in to help carry it, next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in part four of our seven-part series of the stations of the cross. In episode one, we watched Jesus pray in Gethsemane, surrendering his will to the Father and then be betrayed and arrested. In episode two, we heard the Sanhedrin condemn him and we listened to Peter deny him; even when he knew him, he still denied him. In episode three, we saw Jesus standing before Pilate, being sentenced to death and then mocked and beaten by the soldiers. Today, we are talking about when Jesus is handed the cross and he steps onto the road to Golgotha.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We can pick up...of course, you can read this in all the gospels, but we will start with John 19 and we will begin at verse 6, and then we will jump down to about verse 15 ⁶As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" (Now verse 14) ¹⁴It was the day of Preparation of the Passover, it was about noon. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. ¹⁵But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. ¹⁶Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (Which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

DARRELL DELANEY

So, John is showing here, Scott, a collision of power. We have the religious leaders, who are trying to protect their status; we have political authority protecting his fragile peace, and we have a crowd that is carried along by pressure, fear, and anger; and in the middle stands the one innocent person in all of this. Jesus is being treated like he is the problem and he is being handed a cross like he is the criminal; and that is the unfortunate irony of the situation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we think that back in this day, you know, sometimes we, even today in sort of a literal take on "take up your cross and follow me," we will see these street preachers carrying an entire cross through the city streets. More likely, Jesus only carried the cross beam, right? So, the thing that his hands would later get nailed to; and then that was set up on a pole. So, the upward part of the cross was not the part Jesus was carrying. He was carrying the crossbeam across his shoulders. It was probably still a very, very heavy hunk of wood, I am sure; but you are right. The only innocent person who has ever lived is here treated as the problem. What a

self-indictment of the religious leaders when Pilate says: Do you want me to crucify your king? They say: The only king we have is Caesar.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Wow, what a betrayal, you know; back in that day, they began all their prayers, you know: To the King of the universe. They prayed to their God: The King of the universe. Now, here they say: No; Jesus is not our king; only Caesar is, which was just a horrible thing for religious leaders, of all people, to say; but Darrell, it just shows how far around the bend they had gone in their absolute anger at Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and unfortunately, they are throwing the baby out with the bathwater, Scott, because their allegiance was supposed to be to God alone, and God is supposed to be the king; and Jesus is coming in saying he is the Messiah. Of course, they had an issue with that, but they have thrown away their allegiance by thinking they are punishing Jesus, but they are really forfeiting their allegiance to the one and true God, and that is the problem. And another problem is that we have the Son of God who is in this situation, who is carrying the full weight of human sin and injustice in this situation; and if we think about it, we have harmed one another; we have misused power; we have all turned our backs on God's goodness. I mean, we are part of the people who are yelling "crucify" if we think about it. We are the ones who are walking away from God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, that heavy wooden crossbeam that got laid across Jesus' shoulders that he had to carry...as you just said, it is a symbol of the weight of human sin. It is the weight of all the sum total of all of our sins and all of our iniquities. In the previous program, I think, we looked at something from Isaiah 53. The picture there is that the weight of the aggregate sum total of human sin is so heavy that it crushes even the Son of God; and this heavy crossbeam...literally physically across Jesus' shoulders...is a symbol of the spiritual weight that he is also bearing. And Darrell, so, yes, here is somebody who is innocent being blamed... You know, if you have ever watched somebody else get blamed for something they didn't do, you know, it just feels so wrong.

DARRELL DELANEY

It feels wrong because it is wrong. I mean, when you see a neighbor who is treated as suspicious just because of how they look or what they wear or what kind of an accent they have; or you have situations like where you see a kid who takes the fall for the entire group of friends, it is really interesting that those things are happening when people turn the other way, or when they get complicit in the situations; but the difference here is that Jesus is not dodging the situation, even though he didn't cause it, he is not dodging it. He is going right in; he is taking the injustice; and he is doing it because he is committed to saving the very people who are rejecting him in this moment.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; he takes it; he steps into it; he takes that cross, not because he is powerless, right? But as you just said, Darrell, it is because he is committed to saving the very people who are rejecting him. Think of that: He is saving the people who are doing all this to him; and yes, there is also something here, too though, Darrell. What God is doing just underneath the surface...what God is doing just beyond the horizon of what we can see.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really interesting, because it looks like evil is winning; it looks like Rome is in full power; they are the ones who are going to decide whether Jesus lives or dies; I mean, it looks like injustice is winning; and in the Psalms...in Psalm 37 it says: ^{verse 1 paraphrased} Fret not yourself because of evildoers because they will have their day of account. God will do the justice, he will do the vengeance, he will repay; and this situation, when

it is not happening, it could be looking very discouraging when you are expecting justice to happen and it is not happening; and Jesus is right there in the middle of it, but God is using this to expose and defeat the power; and not of Roman government alone, but of all the sin of all the world. God is using this and turning it on its head to make sure that he gets the glory.

SCOTT HOEZEE

On the surface, it looks like all the wrong people are in charge; on the surface, it looks like all the wrong things are winning the day; but as you just said, behind the scenes, God is in control and he is moving all of this toward a conclusion that will bring, not death, but life; and you know, we have to wonder, too:

Everybody around Jesus in this scene is reacting to him. The leaders want to get rid of him; Pilate wants to manage him; the crowd wants to be done with him; nobody wants a savior who will also be Lord over their priorities; but really, Jesus is undoing all of that. He is carrying the cross; he is challenging every attempt to keep him at a safe distance; he is saying: If you want to stay close to me, you are going to have to walk this road, too. There is no way to follow Jesus, Darrell, even to this day, without going the way of the cross.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and that is an invitation to examine ourselves, when his presence confronts our comfort or our wanting to control things. We know that when he carries a cross in our sin and our shame and injustice, we know that is a moment that changes us.

In the next segment, we want to talk about a man who is pulled into that path and ends up closer to Jesus than he ever planned; and his name is Simon. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, John has shown us that Jesus is carrying the cross out of the city, because they gave him the cross to carry, but another gospel writer tells us what happens next. In Mark, we are going to see what happens when the weight becomes too much for him. So, let's pick up in Chapter 15 at verse 21. It says: A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they (the soldiers) forced him to carry the cross.

So, Simon is actually passing by. He doesn't have anything to do with any of this, and maybe he is on his way to sell goods at the market, or maybe he is just in Jerusalem for the festival; but he doesn't wake up in the morning planning to be a part of this situation...this execution detail that he has been pulled into. But he is being grabbed and being included.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; he is from Cyrene, which is in North Africa. It is curious, it just struck me now when you were reading that, that Mark says this Simon of Cyrene was the father of Alexander and Rufus. You sort of say: Why would he bother to put that in there? Who are Alexander and Rufus? But is it possible, Darrell, that the early Church readers would have known who Alexander and Rufus were? Is it possible that Simon became a leader in the Church; and maybe his sons were leaders; so, to the people who first read Mark's gospel, they know these people. So, maybe this moment...this unplanned moment, as you just said, Darrell, Simon is not a volunteer here. He did not come to Jerusalem to help carry a cross for somebody, but he gets pulled into it and maybe that led to good things, and Mark wanted to be sure to include his name and the names of his children here as well. So, there he is, minding his own business probably...Simon. The soldiers grab him. Maybe the flat side of a spear nudges his shoulder to tell him to get with the program. Rome points a finger and suddenly Simon is standing face to face with some condemned man. So, he goes from an observer at the edge of the crowd to an active person who has that heavy crossbeam on his shoulders, since Jesus was not able to go much farther; and Simon is carrying the cross *for* Jesus; *like* Jesus; in imitation of Jesus; all of that.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, it is interesting that he has been put...or being volun-told, if you will, into this situation. You are going to help; you are going to get up; you will do what we say; we have the authority to make you do it; there are consequences if you don't do it; and in this situation, it is really...it is uncomfortable for Simon, because it was not what he was planning to do.

There have been situations in our lives, and they may not be as severe as this, but there have been situations in our lives when we feel like we are being dragged into someone else's situation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you know, a phone call interrupts dinner and suddenly you are driving to an emergency room. A text message comes in late at night and you realize somebody you love is not okay. You didn't plan on it; you didn't ask for it; yet, that moment you have a choice: Will you stay at the edge or will you step in and help carry the burden? Again, Mark records Simon's name, and even the names of his sons; and again, very likely this encounter with Jesus on the road would mark Simon and his children for the rest of their lives. It is what Jesus had already said about discipleship. Let's remember what Jesus said in Luke 9:23, 24:

²³Then he (Jesus) said to all of them: "Whoever wants to follow me must say no to themselves. Then they must pick up their cross every day and follow me. ²⁴Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."

DARRELL DELANEY

Jesus draws a line in the sand in Luke 9. He is trying to make sure they understand the cost of being a disciple and a follower of him. He is not saying that you will literally lose your life all the time...there have been Christian martyrs...but he is actually using this as a teaching tool to show them that if they prioritize self-preserving and self-serving, then that is going to be an issue that is going to get in the way of them following Jesus. But in Simon's situation, we see that as a literal carrying of the cross...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is not just a metaphor for Simon of Cyrene. He is actually carrying the cross for Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a metaphor for the rest of us; but, you know, to have the crossbar over your shoulders in that day meant you were under the sentence of death...you are under the sentence of death; and Jesus is saying: You have to live your life as though you are under the sentence of death. You have to live sacrificially for other people. That is what bearing the cross really means. Sometimes people say: Oh, I've got arthritis. That is my cross to bear; or you know: I am a little hard of hearing; that is my cross to bear. No, that is not really what cross-bearing means in Luke 9 and in other places where Jesus mentions it. It is living sacrificially in imitation of the One who bore that literal cross and was under the sentence of death. We carry the cross whenever we say yes to God and it costs us. Whenever our obedience costs us something, that is bearing the cross.

DARRELL DELANEY

It also says to deny ourselves; to say no to ourselves. It does not mean that we hate ourselves...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Or we want to erase our God-given identity when we deny ourselves. It means that we stopped letting comfort be king in our lives, and stopped letting convenience be controlling in our lives. What happens to our reputation...we don't let that make the final decision. When we say yes to Jesus and we walk beside

suffering people, we actually follow in his footsteps and we are making yes obedience in the moment; where it might cost us, we are still choosing to say yes. That is what Jesus did for us. He embodied it in this situation that we are reading about.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and Simon shows that we don't choose the moment, the moment chooses us; and then we have to face that choice: Will I live like Jesus or not? There is a deeper comfort here, too, Darrell. Simon is not just carrying a random burden; he is walking right behind Jesus. The one who is saving the world is right there in front of Simon. For us too, we also do this when we bear one another's burdens. We don't do that alone; we don't do that in our own strength. Galatians 6:2, Paul: Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Because the law of Christ, of course, is love.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, I was thinking about this. Several years ago, when our daughter was going through a situation with her kidney, she had this situation going on while she was in utero, and the doctors said: We will wait until she is born before we address this with surgery; and so, six or seven months after she was born, we had to get her ready for surgery on her kidney; and this was a scary moment for us, to say the least; but our pastor came in and he actually prayed with us while we were in that moment. Now, I could not tell you what he said, Scott, but I could tell you that I felt that he was helping carry that burden for us in that moment, and that showed me the love of Christ through the pastor, because it was a late-night hour. He came in and he didn't stay long, but the fact that he came over and he made time and he prayed with us was another example of how people can carry burdens by doing a small thing; by going and praying for someone. I am sure anybody could do that. So, it was really, really powerful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; bearing the cross sometimes is dramatic; sometimes it involves a big choice, sometimes it involves a life-and-death choice; other times, though, it is just showing up. It is just doing the right thing, saying the right words; praying with somebody, or sometimes just sitting with somebody and not saying anything is help bearing each other's burdens.

So, station seven here shows Jesus taking up the cross; his willingness to walk into our sin and suffering. Station eight shows a man who was pulled into that path, learning what it is to follow Jesus and to bear the cross with Jesus; and you know, together they ask us when the journey we did not choose shows up at our feet, will we step away from it, or will we walk into it with Jesus? As we conclude this program in our final segment, we will bring this home a little bit and talk a little bit more of what it means to bear the cross with Jesus in our lives. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Again, we have watched Jesus take up his cross, and we watched Simon of Cyrene help to carry it. Darrell, those scenes are not just what happened to them, right? It is not what they are about. They are also about what happens to us when we follow a crucified and risen Lord in our own days and in our own times. The writer of Hebrews gives us one more window into what is happening as Jesus walks that road. So, is here from Hebrews 12:

^{1b}And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we see Jesus is actually walking toward the cross because of the joy that is set before him. He is looking at...not the cross...he is looking at what happens *after* the cross. After the cross is the redemption of the

people who don't deserve it. After the cross is the renewal of a world that has been broken. He endures the cross and despises the shame so that we can be brought near to God. So, when we take up our cross, and when we talk about taking up our cross, we are not just talking about saving ourselves; we are talking about trusting and following the one who has already done all the saving.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and when we think about heading toward a cross; when we think about getting to a place of crucifixion, which we are going to get to in the next program in this stations of the cross series, the one thing that I think most people who are headed toward a crucifixion and execution place see ahead of them is not joy; but the writer of the Hebrews said: Because of the *joy* that was set before him, Jesus was able to walk that difficult road to Golgotha and to the cross. That joy was the redemption he knew he was going to work. That joy was the restoration of the creation. We know from John's gospel that in the beginning when God said: Let there be light, that was Jesus—before he was known as Jesus—the Son of God—the second person of the Trinity—who did all that: Let there be...let there be...let there be... Jesus made this world and then he saw it get ruined; but now, the joy that is before him is that world can be renewed and that renewal will come through his death and then through his resurrection. So, Jesus was led along by joy.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that because, I mean, if you look back in the Old Testament it says: The joy of the Lord is our strength; and in this situation, he actually had joy, because he is looking past the cross...if you could imagine the cross right in front of him...and he is looking past it, but he can see the healing, the restoration, and the beautiful relationship that he is going to have with his people beyond that momentary pain; and have an eternal relationship with us. That was worth it for him, and he decided that he was willing to take up that cross and do that. So, I think, too, it is interesting for us as we turn practically in this situation and look at what it looks like for us to take up our cross daily in light of the stations seven and eight. There are three things that come to mind, and the first one is that the cross exposes how we treat the innocents, Scott. I mean, watching Jesus condemned and forcing him to carry the cross confronts the way we participate with blame and injustice, because it would be easy for us to tell ourselves that we would never shout: Crucify; but if we are really honest, we really would join in and pile on those situations. We have done it online and we have done it when we assumed the worst about a person based on a headline. The issue that we have is that we need to remember that we can repent of those ways that the crowd pressures us to go into, but we want to be the kind of people who stand with those who are wrongfully accused.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and it is too easy to stay silent. We see somebody falsely accused...we see somebody getting pilloried on Facebook or social media...we see people's reputations getting ruined by falsehoods and it is just easy for us to say: Well, you know, it's got nothing to do with me; you know, I am just going to keep my nose out of it; I don't want to get involved; but one of the things that bearing the cross means, and especially the cross of an innocent man like Jesus, is that we also need to stand up *for* those who are falsely accused. A second thing: The cross calls us, Darrell, into other people's suffering. Simon of Cyrene could be a symbol of this in what we have looked at from scripture in this program; but you know, we are called to move into other people's suffering to carry a weight that we don't have to pick up, but we do it for others; as we said in the previous part of the program, we bear one another's burdens.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I was watching a movie...it is one of my favorite movies. I won't name it, but I watch a lot of movies...where there is a guy who is walking along the road and he hears that someone is getting robbed, and he is saying in his mind as he sees this, he is trying to keep walking and he says: It is not your concern...it is not your concern...stay on the path...it is not your concern. But his conscience gets the better of him, and he ends up helping this person. Sometimes the Lord will actually prompt you to help someone...to say something...to be present in a situation that is probably not your business. I am not saying it gives you an excuse to get in everybody's business...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But I am saying be obedient to...when the Spirit is prompting you to get involved, the Bible says if your neighbor is hungry, feed him; if you have something to give him, give him. Don't hold back that good, is what I am saying; and that is what you see when the cross calls us into other people's suffering. The other thing that you see...the third thing that you see is that the cross is carried with Jesus and not instead of Jesus. If you remember, Simon is walking right behind Jesus as he carries his part of the cross; and when we carry our part of the cross, we are not taking on the role of *the* Savior...we have a Savior; but we are called to walk behind him so that we trust him that his grace is enough even when we feel weak; and then, even though our small acts aren't small to us, and they are costly to us, but those acts of love can be caught up in the larger work of redemption that Christ is doing in the world. So, he can use our hands and feet.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; we are not Lone Rangers on this stuff; we are not just doing it on our own or by our own strength. We cannot do it on our own strength; we can only do it through the strength of the Jesus who, as we bear our cross, walks next to us. He is with us, even as he was with Simon of Cyrene, literally in that case, physically he was close to Simon, but spiritually he is close to us; and that is a good thing to remember, Darrell, because sometimes it feels like we are carrying the weight of the world, you know; and it just seems like too much. And lately, there has just been a lot of bad news. There is a lot of stuff that makes you sad. There are a lot of situations that have, in recent days, brought tears to my eyes when I watch the world; and just to take that all into your heart, it just feels like it is too much; but Jesus upholds us; Jesus gives us the strength when we feel like we are staggering under a heavy load. He walks beside you, Darrell; he walks beside me; he walks beside all of us, so that when we take up our cross, we are doing it in the presence and in the strength of Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

And not only that, Scott, sometimes he will send a Simon into your life to help you carry that stuff, because we bear one another's burdens in love. Station seven and eight remind us that the way of the cross is not about chasing pain for its own sake; it is about trusting the one who endured the cross for the joy set before him. He invites us to walk behind him in love. As we keep our eyes on Jesus, we say no to the cross fear and that is the kind of discipleship the world can see; so, thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue our journey reflecting on the stations of the cross with accounts of Jesus meeting the women of Jerusalem on the way to Golgotha, and then his crucifixion itself.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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