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# Encouragement When We Suffer for Being Christians

## DARRELL DELANEY

In a world that often responds to hostility with more hostility, 1 Peter offers a radical alternative: responding to evil with blessing, and living with a clear conscience before God. In this episode, we explore how Peter's powerful message calls us to live counter-culturally, grounded in unity, compassion, and fearless hope in Christ. Join us as we dive into this challenging and encouraging passage and learn how to live out the gospel with boldness and grace, even in the midst of suffering, 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 eight-part series on 1 and 2 Peter. We are going to have five episodes on the first letter, and then in the second we will have three episodes. In the first episode, we talked about Christ being our living hope; and in the second episode, we talked about the importance of living a holy and set-apart life now that we have tasted that the Lord is good. In episode three, we talked about how the holy and set-apart people were called to live a specific way; and today, we are going to talk about what to do in the midst of persecution.

## SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Peter is rolling right along here, and he really opened up the idea of being set apart for God's purposes in Chapter 2; and now, you know, he is going to give significance to living that kind of life, especially in suffering, and especially when we suffer for the Lord's sake. So, he is going to talk about this in Chapter 3, and he is going to have more to say about it in Chapter 4, which will be our next program; but for now, living in the midst of suffering without giving up our faith, that I think, Darrell, is very, very important.

## DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, I think it would be helpful for us to have a definition of what persecution is, and what it means. I think we need to understand that persecution is basically ill treatment on the basis of ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, according to the Oxford dictionary. In this case, Peter is talking about religious persecution, because Nero is not having any tolerance for any Christians in his Roman Empire. The guy even set his own city on fire and blamed the Christians, so that people would despise Christians; and he looked for any and every situation and excuse to torture them and to put them to death. So, they are being persecuted for righteousness' sake, and it is very important for us to note that persecution is not when you do something wrong and you are caught. Persecution is when you live for the right reason and you are still being given a hard time. So, there is a difference in distinction there.

## SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and Peter kind of mentions that throughout this letter: Look, you do something wrong and you get sent to jail; you do the crime, you do the time. I know, Darrell, you work in a county jail, so...

## **DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes.

## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

You do run into prisoners who sometimes just won't own what they did, but when they do, they seem to have a greater peace; but Peter is really talking about people who really...they are in jail for no reason. They didn't do anything wrong except claim Jesus as Lord, which seemed wrong to the Caesar, because Caesar said: I am the Lord. I am *deus et dominus*; I am god and lord of the Roman Empire. So, those who claimed a different God and Lord than Caesar...well, that didn't sit so well; but that doesn't mean the Christians were doing anything wrong. They were not committing actual crimes, and yet, they were suffering. So, we are in 1Peter 3 now, and let's listen to this, beginning at verse 8.

## **DARRELL DELANEY**

It says: Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. <sup>9</sup>Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. <sup>10</sup>For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. <sup>11</sup>They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. <sup>12</sup>For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

So, Peter, again, has been going on and on, really, repeatedly in this letter about how we are to live as holy people, which means we are set apart, and it doesn't matter where you are in life, whether you are a slave person or a free, a husband or a wife, everybody is called to honor Christ in how they live; and here, too now, he is saying: One of the ways you are set apart is that you don't trade insult for insult—you don't repay evil with more evil. It seems like a natural reaction, and that would only be natural in a fallen world, which is where we are; but it is certainly what we see all the time. Peter says: You know what? Snap that cycle; don't even enter that cycle. Stand out by being somebody who says something nice to the person who just really called you a dirty name...say something nice to them. Don't repay evil with evil, but bless them. Again, a tall order, but we hear it elsewhere in the New Testament, too, don't we?

## **DARRELL DELANEY**

We do. When you go insult for insult, when you go evil for evil—tit for tat...where I come from, they call it being petty; you just want to go and be petty back and forth; but you are called to actually bless and not curse, and Paul picks this up in Romans Chapter 12. He says: <sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

And Peter makes this interesting connection that when you overcome evil with blessing, you actually inherit a blessing, even though he doesn't go into the detail of what that blessing is, I think, if I am not going to go back and forth with a person, and I break that cycle, like you said, then my attitude and my heart are going to be in a better place; but if I go down the road with them, my attitude is going to be messed up and I am going to be just as angry and retaliatory as they are; and that is not the light of Christ that he has called us to show.

## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Yes; that is interesting, what you just said there, Darrell. I mean, when we repay evil for evil, and we trade insult to insult, we don't feel better; we just get angrier...

## **DARRELL DELANEY**

Right.

## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Because then they are going to give it right back; and so, now, not only have we not made the situation better, we have made it worse...we have made it much, much worse, because now we are going to go down a

path that leads nowhere good; and it is the path that the world beats a way down all the time, right? You know, they tempt us to join in on that, but Peter here is saying what Paul said in Romans 12, and that is, basically, don't do that. Of course, both of them...both Peter and Paul...are taking a page from the Sermon on the Mount, which we have mentioned before. Peter sat there with the other disciples and heard Jesus say: Matthew 5:11 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

What Jesus is saying there, Darrell, is basically: When you suffer because of me, then you are suffering the way the prophets suffered, because they spoke the Word of God to people who didn't want to hear it. You know, they wanted to hear what their itching ears desired to hear: Hey, prophesy nice things to us. No; I gotta tell you God's truth. Well, that is when prophets got beat up. So, that happened to the prophets; it happened to Jesus, and so Jesus says: When it happens to you because of me, rejoice; because it tells you you are on the right track, and great is your reward.

## **DARRELL DELANEY**

And being on the right track is really powerful because of the one who taught them that. Jesus also is persecuted; Jesus also is rejected because of the righteousness that he is called to live by; and that is what Peter is trying to get to these gentile Christians; but in just a minute, we would like to say a lot more about this passage. 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, we are in 1 Peter Chapter 3 right now, and we can see echoes from other parts of scripture that Peter is talking about, leading all the way back to the Sermon on the Mount; but I also found it very interesting that he picked up Psalm 34 in this passage as well.

## **SCOTT HOEZEE**

And Psalm 34, if you look it up, it is a song of thanksgiving; it is like many of the psalms, attributed to David...attributed...we are not one hundred percent sure of this, but it is attributed to David after he was delivered from a dangerous situation, and whether that is really specifically true or not, Psalm 34 certainly sounds like it could have been written by somebody who was thanking God for delivering him from a dangerous situation. Psalm 34 praises God for his protection and encourages all the righteous to trust in God, to live righteously, and to speak peace and to seek peace. The verses Peter quotes specifically, which is Psalm 34:12-16, are called righteous living with a promise that if you live a righteous life, you will always experience God's favor and protection.

## **DARRELL DELANEY**

So, this is, right here, what I was thinking about when you were reading that, Scott, where you were talking about referring to Psalm 34, is that there are times in this world, where we don't see from this side of heaven God intervening divinely, saving and helping us; and if David wrote that, he is talking about a situation that God had delivered him from. There can be times where we don't see from this side of heaven when God delivers. There could be the person who does end up dying for their faith, or does end up going through great trial; but the point of the psalm is to trust in the God who is able to deliver; whether he delivers or not is up to him; but we are called to build a relationship in the midst of trial...in the midst of suffering...to trust God and know that he is able to deliver us no matter what the circumstance is.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Yes; Psalm 34 is one of those, and there are a lot of them in the Hebrew Psalter...what I kind of call a sunny-side-up psalm: Everything is coming up roses for the people of God; trust God and he will deliver you every single time. You know, you read that and it is like, really? But that is where I think, Darrell, it is always important...and whatever we think about the psalms, we have said this here on *Groundwork*, you know, you have to read any individual psalm in the context of the other one hundred forty-nine...

**DARRELL DELANEY**

There you go.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

And a third of the psalms in the book of Psalms are laments, for those times when people who did live righteously did not receive God's protection, at least not right away. So, you know, we want to be a little realistic that, yes, it is right to live righteously in any event, and we can expect that in the longest possible run, God will always deliver his people, but that is not to deny that there aren't rough seasons. And again, who knew that better than the people to whom Peter was writing this letter, because they were suffering right in the midst of a rather fierce program of persecution by the Roman Empire.

**DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes; and it is true that Peter is making sure that they keep the main thing the main thing; and the main thing is that the God who is the living hope is their actual encouragement and strength and resilience that he can give them in the midst of that. Regardless of the circumstance, trust God and he will be with you. I think we need that today...not just them back then...we need that today, Scott. When trouble comes our way, when people disrespect us for being a Christian, or they exclude us from things they are doing, trying to cancel us or discriminate against us because we are worshipping God, guess what? We are in good company. Jesus said it happened to the ones who came before, it happened to him—Jesus himself. It happened to Peter, who is writing this letter. It has happened to the Christians who are receiving the letter. So, we are in good company when we suffer for righteousness' sake. It doesn't feel good, but we are not alone; that is what we need to remember.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Whether or not we can, at any given moment, see...actively see the intervention of God, or the protection of God, we have to believe that God is with us; and that, you know, I mentioned a minute ago, Darrell, that a third of the...that is almost fifty of the one hundred fifty psalms are lament psalms; and of course, the great irony of all this is that all the lament psalms lament God's absence to God's face, right? I mean, they are still praying *to* God: Where are you, God?

**DARRELL DELANEY**

Where are you?

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Where are you, you know; you are so far away; and yet, I am talking to you. So, here too, Peter is saying: Look, in the midst of everything you are going through from the Roman Empire, remember that God is with you and he will not abandon you; and the fact that he doesn't always intervene as quickly as we want, doesn't mean he is not there with us.

**DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes; and Peter keeps continuing to talk about these kinds of things, and how it affects our practical life. When he picks up in verse 13, it says: Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup>But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." <sup>15</sup>But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup>keeping a clear conscience, so

that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup> For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Exactly; this is a great case for what theologian and former Fuller Seminary president, Richard Mouw calls Christian civility...

**DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Right? Too often, when Christians are defending their faith, or pushing back against critics, they do it in a hostile way; and what Peter is saying here is no; be polite; do this with respect; and that only shows more and more your good character, so that if people want to try to speak against you, they are going to come up empty handed; and we saw that earlier in this letter, too. So, we have hope in Christ to keep us courageous; to keep us on our feet; but also, to continue to be Christlike when we do all that, which would certainly mean, at the bare minimum, being polite and respectful and gentle.

**DARRELL DELANEY**

Polite, respectful and gentle is very, very important. Even though there are real threats in the world in which Christians live, he is calling them not to fear those threats that could take the body. We just have to remember that Christ is the key to our courage to face opposition that we face in this world; and when we do that, although we are treated harshly and unfairly, it is easy for Christ to give us the strength to endure in those situations; and that would definitely be worth it in the long run, because then they cannot slander you...

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Right.

**DARRELL DELANEY**

They cannot maliciously say: Oh, you did this stuff. You didn't listen; you were bad; and all of those things. They cannot come against you, because you gave them nothing; like you said before, no ammunition to slander God's name.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Exactly...exactly; so, Christ is with you, so be like Christ, even when you are... Nobody likes to be disrespected. I don't like to be disrespected...

**DARRELL DELANEY**

I know I don't.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

And nobody likes that. Nobody likes to be needled and be pushed, and it is so easy to just want to lash out when that happens; but no. Be like Christ, who suffered for righteousness' sake, who did nothing wrong, even though he suffered for it. Be like him; endure, rejoice. God is there with us at all times. Christ says: I will never leave you; I will never forsake you; and he means it, especially in times of hardship, loss, pain and persecution.

**DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes; and he gives us the strength and encouragement that we need when we are suffering in his name; and I believe that Christ wants us to know that, in the midst of that. As we close out this program, we want to make sure we get into some practical application. So, stay tuned.

*Segment 3*

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and Darrell, we have covered a lot of ground here in 1 Peter Chapter 3, but there is a little bit more to go here at the end of 1 Peter 3.

**DARRELL DELANEY**

So, picking up at verse 18, it says: For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. <sup>19</sup>After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— <sup>20</sup>to those who were disobedient long ago, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup>and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Drinking from a fire hose here. Peter has so much to say in this theologically rich passage, Darrell. We are not going to get to everything in this segment yet, but you know, the New Testament writers...once they realized that baptism was going to be the key initiation rite to become a new creation in Christ, they started to see foreshadowings, hints and whispers of baptism all over the place. So, Moses’ little reed basket in the Nile River...

**DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Became a metaphor for baptism. Noah’s ark, here in this passage becomes a metaphor for baptism, being saved through the waters. The *Belgic Confession* calls Jesus our Red Sea...

**DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Because the Israelites were kept safe when they walked on dry ground through the Red Sea when they were leaving Egypt. So, baptism, you know, we see hints and whispers of it all over the place, and here he thinks of Noah and how Christ was working already back then.

**DARRELL DELANEY**

It is so powerful because Peter, by the power of the Holy Spirit, really goes back and interprets history that happened way before he was born. I mean, the Spirit gave him insight to make what was happening make sense, and inspired him to give a context for the suffering that people are going through by connecting it to Christ’s suffering. The suffering that we go through, Scott, is never pointless, especially if we are doing it for the right reasons. I mean, God has a better benefit. He is also going to use it to redeem and make a message known for those; and when Christ died... Also, this part where it goes below...where he goes underneath and he goes to talk to those who are imprisoned. It reminds me of the *Apostle’s Creed*, where it says: He descended into hell, and he went to preach that to those who were born during the time of Noah. It is really crazy how Peter would know that. If he wasn’t inspired by the Spirit, there is no way that he could have made that make sense.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Yes, Peter is the one who sort of plays with this image. Sometimes we call it the harrowing of hell, where the idea is that in between the crucifixion and the resurrection, Christ actually descended to the dead—to this

maybe like some holding cell, where good and bad people were there, and he proclaimed the good news of what his death that had just happened means; and then he, you know, he led captives in his train, Peter will say in another passage. We don't know how literally to take that. Some parts of the Church take that very literally; others take it a little more metaphorically, but the idea being Jesus saves. His salvation is available for everyone. Jesus saves potentially everyone—those who believe in his name and in the power of his resurrection will be made alive again.

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

And then, Peter talks about the baptism that you just mentioned earlier. It is important for us to note that baptism...of course, according to Reformed theology we know baptism does not save...but baptism is the covenant that God makes with his people, even when they are infants and we sprinkle them with water, it is a reminder that God has initiated this relationship; and then later on, we make profession of faith, saying: Oh, God has been loving me this whole time? Yes, I want to live for him; yes, I want to respond to that grace and mercy in my life.

So, I think it is more important to understand that he says it saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and so, that is a marker for those who come from other traditions that say: Yes, I believe in Jesus and this is how I want to live for him; and so, the process of actually being regenerated and actually being converted could take years. You see people and sometimes you feel like they are going way off, and you are wondering what is happening, but God is the one who knows the date on the calendar when they will come to their senses and follow him; and that process could take a while; but water baptism is designed to remind us that the old life is washed away, Scott, and the new life is upon us.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Exactly; and in the Reformed tradition, we have always kind of danced a fine line here. We don't think that baptism is instant regeneration...that it automatically saves you, no matter what happens; but on the other hand, we don't think it is merely symbolic either. The Holy Spirit marks that person. It is a sign, but also a seal...

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

There you go.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

It's a seal; and the person who is marked by baptism can never lose that mark. We believe that. Even when they have turned their back on Jesus...sometimes for a season, sometimes for most of their life...they are still marked. That baptism left a mark that God can see, and you know, God will know what best to do with that fact, but we do believe that it changes us. It makes you a part of the covenant people of God, and that is a very, very powerful thing, which is also why, Darrell, it is so important for all of us to remember our baptism.

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

Yes, it is.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

You know, in a lot churches, especially in the children's worship program, rather than celebrating their birthdays, they are always reminded to celebrate the anniversary of their baptism...keep remembering your baptism and be thankful...remember your baptism and be thankful.

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

It's a beautiful thing. Dr. Sue Rozeboom...who we have had on this program before...she is a professor at Western Theological Seminary. When I was in class learning about worship and sacraments, she used to grab this bowl and fill it with water and spread the water on the class and say: Remember your baptism; remember your baptism; and it was a reminder of the beautiful promises and covenant that God has made with us; and it is an identity marker. This is who we are in Christ. We have been cleaned in our conscience and now we are

ready to serve him. It is a beautiful reminder, and we try to do that every time we have communion and baptism at church.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Exactly. Well, let's wrap it up. What have we seen here in 1 Peter 3, and so far through the first three chapters of 1 Peter? Well, one, Darrell, we are encouraged to live the way Christ showed us to live. We live a set-apart life in imitation of Jesus Christ and of his character and of how he responded to threats, how he responded to criticism, we live like Christ.

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

And we are also called to trust God in the midst of suffering for his name's sake. Persecution is when we go through things for his name's sake; and God can strengthen us, even in hard times...even in the ones who are killed, we have actually seen that God can strengthen and give them the resolve to never give up their faith.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Exactly; and third, we are reminded that we are not alone when we suffer for Christ. There have been a lot of martyrs. There is a whole book called: *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. A lot of the people who died in the early centuries in particular, including basically all of the apostles, but Christ is with us in the midst of that. So, when we suffer for Christ, we suffer *with* Christ. We participate in his sufferings and he stands with us in that.

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

And Peter makes it clear that the world is not always going to want to hear these things, and we live contrary to those who think that that is bad, but in those times of suffering and persecution, we can find hope and strength. Thanks be to God.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we conclude our study of 1 Peter with Chapters 4 and 5.

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### **DARRELL DELANEY**

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