

God Always Cares and Never Leaves

DARRELL DELANEY

Throughout the course of our lives, we go through various changes; whether it be graduation from school, moving from home, or getting married, we encounter changes. Sometimes those changes are things we call storms, the challenges that life sometimes brings with it. Whether good changes or storms, we know one thing is for sure, change is inevitable, but our God is constant. In this short, three-part series, we plan to talk about things that happen in life, and where God is in the midst of all these things. Sometimes God intervenes, and sometimes he doesn't. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we plan to look at God's unchanging character, as well as his sovereign decision to comfort, encourage, and act on our behalf. Stay tuned.

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 we are excited to kick off a new series, Scott. It is called: Change is inevitable, but God is constant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as you just mentioned, Darrell, it is a fairly short series. We are just going to do three programs on this; and in each of them, as always, we will dig into the scriptures from both Old Testament and New to see where the promises of God are, that God is with us in all the seasons of our lives, including, as we will reflect on in this one, in some of the stormy seasons; and through it all, we are hoping that this will provide great comfort for us, and for all who listen, because that is what the faithfulness of God is, it is a profound comfort.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is not like we don't have a shortage of transitions happening all around us. We have had a whole lot of things going on. We have had political challenges, we have had racial tensions, we have also had the pandemic that swept the world; and it has been really crazy to see that even one of those things could have been crazy, but we had all three at once; and so, during these times, it is actually a great opportunity for us to remember that God is constant, even in these times of uncertain change.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, when things like the pandemic back in 2020 and 2021...you know, when those things happen, one of the things we all noticed, and we almost all commented on is that it seemed like everything changed. You could do almost nothing the way you did before...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Whether it is getting groceries, or worshipping in church, or almost everything you did changed. That was definitely one of the storms of life, right? But those storms come all the time. Sometimes they are not on a global level, but on a family level, on a congregational level, on a personal level, these things happen.

DARRELL DELANEY

I was thinking about when you said that, not only did we have these big, global changes, but we had personal storms as well. When that pandemic was going on, it was hard for us to visit loved ones, we couldn't be out of town, everyone had to wear masks all the time. It was just crazy how all these things kind of zapped us at once. So, I was thinking about how times are changing. I brought back this song from Bob Dylan that is called: *The Times They Are a-Changin'*. It came out in 1964, and a lot of people...even though it was before my time...there were a lot of people who recognized that song. They saw in different parts of history that would emerge during the civil rights movement, or even when Apple Computer was first established in 1984, because, you know, Steve Jobs was a fan of Bob Dylan, and so he would use this to help people to think differently, and things like that. So, I am not trying to plug Apple as an advertisement, but I am just trying to let you know that there are different epochs in human history in the United States, and this song kept popping up because change itself actually helps us to think about things that are different, and we have to wrestle with what is going on inside of us when those changes happen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And God's faithfulness is such an important part of scripture, too, Darrell, because, you know, when you think about change...times are a-changin'...it was almost sometimes as though change became inevitable when you tried to follow the ways of God. So, Abram was an old man already. He was pretty rich, living over there in Ur, and he had lots of land and cattle, and God comes to him, and the very first word God speaks to him is: Go!

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That's the first thing God says: Go; and what does *go* mean? Change. And Abram would never be really settled down again. In fact, many years later when Sarah dies, he has to negotiate with the Canaanites to buy enough property to bury her, because he still didn't have any land; and then the Israelites end up in Egypt, and they leave Egypt and they wander. Then they settle in the Promised Land, and then they go into exile, and they come back. The story of the Bible is one of change; and that is maybe why, Darrell, that there is a whole book of the Bible called Lamentations. Some think it may have been written by Jeremiah, it comes right after Jeremiah in the Bible. I am not sure if Jeremiah wrote it, but it is a book of lament, and one of the things that is lamentable is how changeable our lives can be.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, Scott, when we think about change, I don't think we vocalize what happens internally with us, but we are stretched, we are challenged, we are sometimes pulled to what we would consider our wits end. It just pushes us out of our comfort zone, because we have like a regular rhythm that we like to do things in, and it has us ask a lot of fundamental questions: Where is God? What is happening? What are we doing? And God himself has shown that he has been very faithful out of human history. His character lets us know that he doesn't change.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And, as you said, Darrell...you hinted at it just a minute ago...you know, there are times in the midst of change that we wonder: Am I going to make it? Are we going to make it? Are we going to get through the pandemic? Are we going to get through this period of political turmoil? And the Israelites wondered that, too; but in the middle of that book of Lamentations, or near the end of it, actually, in Chapter 3, you get this verse...22 and 23 of Lamentations 3:

²²Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

It kind of reminds you of a hymn.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It comes right out of that text.

DARRELL DELANEY

I mean, in those lines of that song: *Great is Thy Faithfulness*: There is no shadow of turning with thee, thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not; and that is specifically that verse you just mentioned that came from Lamentations; but in that where it says there is no shadow of turning with thee, it is just interesting how that came from James 1:17:

¹⁶Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷Every good and perfect gift comes from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

So, it is showing a consistency in God's character that we can pretty much build on, and hold onto in these uncertain times that you are talking about.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, there is another verse from Malachi...and again, a lot of these prophets were in the time of the exile, or just after the exile, and the Israelites surely must have wondered when they were carried off into Babylon in captivity: Has God changed? Well, no. They were the ones who changed. They disobeyed God. That is why they got, you know, sent into exile for a while; but the prophets want to say to the Israelites: God hasn't changed. So, Malachi 3:6, where the prophet says, speaking for God here:

"I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. ⁷Ever since the time of your ancestors, you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty.

So, I am not changing. I am still here. Come back to me, and things will be well again because the God you are going to come back to is the same God you walked away from. I don't change, you do, but I am still here for you because I still love you.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is great to think about that when things are going great, Scott, but when things are hitting the fan and they are going really badly, this is the time that we actually need to trust in the Lord. So, we are going to talk about how the Son of God intervenes in situations that seem tumultuous to us, coming up next.

Segment 2

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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are talking about God's constancy through the changes of our lives, and as you said early in the program, and maybe into the introduction of the program, Darrell, some changes in our lives are good.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We graduate, we get married, we have a child. These things introduce major changes in our lives, and sometimes challenges come with them, but they are good things. But you also mentioned that some of the changes in our lives are things that we refer to as almost like a storm has come upon us.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, those are things that interrupt the natural order of things, and how our rhythms go; and so, anything that brings a change, whether it be good or bad, we have some challenges on how to navigate them sometimes. There is a particular story that we would like to look at here from Mark Chapter 4, where Jesus literally calms a storm; and so, I will read it here. It says:

³⁵That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" ³⁹He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. ⁴⁰He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" ⁴¹They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Very interesting passage there from Mark 4, and there is a line in this, in verse 35, that near as I can tell, basically no one is sure what it means, because we are told that the disciples, you know, this is actually in verse 36: They leave the crowd behind, right? And they take Jesus along to the boat, and then there is a line: They took him "just as he was". Nobody knows what that means. What do you mean, just as he was? As opposed to what? I don't know what it means either, but I kind of have this funny feeling that what Mark is conveying there is that Jesus was with them in the boat, just as he was, which is the Son of God, right? And they have already seen him cast out demons in Mark's gospel, they have already seen him do great miracles. They should have known that with Jesus in the boat, they were going to be okay, right? And sometimes the boat is used as a symbol for the Church, but they should have known that "just as he was" meant they are going to be okay. Instead, they think he doesn't care, and then when he does calm the storm, they are like: Wow; who is this guy? It is like: Where have you been? He has been showing you this ever since Mark 1.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know, what is crazy about that, Scott, is that I looked at verse 35, and he said: Let us go over to the other side. He didn't say: Let's go under. He talked about going over to the other side, and the Father had a mission for him on the other side. We know he goes to the demoniac on the other side, and he knows his mission, and he is sleeping. He is resting in God's plan for his life and his mission, but the disciples are seeing the circumstances around them: the wind, the waves, and they are taking on water. So, they ask this very interesting question: Teacher, don't you care if we drown? I don't know about you, Scott, but I felt sometimes in my life that where is God in this? Why are all these things happening to me? Have I done something wrong? Do I need to repent? Do I have not enough faith to make it? The circumstances, they just pile on me so that I feel like, oh, I am drowning in this situation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I was being a little hard on the disciples a minute ago, but on the other hand, I am those disciples...you know, hello God, are you paying attention to what is going on down here? Do you see what has happened to my kid? He is in the hospital. Do you see what is happening to Mom and Dad? Do you see what is happening with these racial incidents in our society? Hello; are you paying attention? Don't you care that I am hurting? Don't you care that I am in distress? We have all prayed that prayer. Even as Jesus didn't immediately rebuke them for that, I think that God understands that when we are in a scary situation, when we are really frightened, it is sort of natural for us to sort of say: God, are you watching? Don't you care? Could you do something please? Heal my child. Help Mom and Dad. Bring us peace. Don't you care?

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that sometimes our popular culture and our movies kind of give us this impression that Jesus, the Son of God, is Superman, and that he would jump in at the nick of time to intervene before the tragedy, before the emergency, so that it doesn't happen, to prevent problems, to prevent circumstances; but I had to learn when I was a kid that Jesus is not Superman, and that there are situations that actually will happen. There will be

trying times that I have to go through in my life, but it doesn't mean that God isn't able to save; but sometimes he does divinely intervene into things, but then, he doesn't always divinely intervene in things; but in this situation with the disciples, Jesus directly addressed the problem and brought the peace that they needed.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They had the Lord of creation in the boat with them, and you know, two chapters on in Mark's gospel, in Chapter 6, a story almost identical to this is going to happen after the feeding of the five thousand; and in that case, Jesus is not in the boat with them initially, but he walks on the water, they think he is a ghost, he hops in the boat. Once again, he stills the storm. The second time now, and they are still amazed, right? And then, Mark has an interesting line in Mark 6, (verse 52) that the reason they were still amazed is because their hearts were hardened; they had not understood about the loaves. In other words, in the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus just revealed himself as the great shepherd of the sheep, that he is the Lord of creation. He can take a couple fish and five loaves and feed five thousand people with them. If he can do that, he can calm a storm, right? But they didn't understand. They still weren't making the connections; but thankfully, we have their honest testimony in something like Mark's gospel so that we can hopefully make the connections that, if Jesus is in the boat with us, somehow, some way, he is able to speak a calming word...not always immediately, and he doesn't head off the storm in the first place. It doesn't mean he sent it either...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But he is here, and that should give us comfort.

DARRELL DELANEY

Also with that, Scott, there are two extremes that some believers fall into. They either believe that God is directly involved in everything...he is helping me find a parking space at the mall...or he is not involved in anything, and then that means that we are left to our own devices and we have to figure it out because he is not paying attention, he is not intimately involved in our lives. I don't think it is either/or in that situation, but in the times of trouble, we are really asking the question: Where is God, and how is he involved in this situation? We know that he is not the author of evil because in James it says that he is not a tempter; he is not the one who brings evil on you, nor does he tempt anyone; and the good Father brings good gifts from above. We do need to understand that he is directly involved, and he cares enough to do something about it in our situations and problems.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; he is not aloof, right? He is not afar off, even though Jesus is asleep in the boat...you gotta love that, right? I mean, the storm isn't bothering him...but even though he is asleep in the boat, he is still in the boat, and he is available to them; and that is something we need to remember, too. Whether the storm is calmed immediately, as here, or we have to ride it out for a while, God never leaves us. He is always in the boat with us. He has promised that: I will be with you always, surely to the end of the age, Jesus said at the end of Matthew's gospel. He is always in the boat with us. So, as changeable as our lives are, much though we don't like storms, the comforting presence of God with us, and God's ability to step in and bring relief, is a great comfort; and as we close out this program, Darrell, we want to talk a little bit more about that, and about how we can learn to cope with those storms, knowing God is with us, but in different situations, how can our faith be bolstered? So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so far in this episode, in this three-part series about God's constancy through the changes of our lives, we have talked about change in general. We talked about God being unchangeable—God is the same—and we just looked at a story, and we are reminded of some other similar stories of storms...literal storms...on the Sea of Galilee; but now, we want to think a little bit about how, knowing that Jesus is in the boat with us, as we just said, knowing that God doesn't change, knowing that God can and often does intervene, how does that encourage us in different parts of our lives and of our walks of discipleship?

DARRELL DELANEY

Both of the storm passages that you mentioned, Scott, are stories to us and they are metaphorically extended to our times, but I have found that in times of uncertainty, it might be very helpful, and I know it has been very formative for me to return back to the basics; and so, there are a couple of things I thought were very important and formative to me. One of them is, of course, prayer. I am not going to tell you anything new here. This is a reviewing of things that we have had held dear for years. I always start my prayers the same way, Scott. My prayer starts by saying: God, I thank you for being in complete control of every situation. You are not in heaven twiddling your thumbs wondering what is going to happen next, but you know exactly what you are doing, you had a date on the calendar for this very moment; you are the author and finisher of my faith, and also the sustainer of it, and you are faithful to complete the work you started in us. Now, that is laden with scriptures that are very dear to me, and they anchor me because it helps me to remember that God is in control, and that before I even ask for anything, to recognize that God is above all of these things that really are perplexing me, and that he can help.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, we often think of prayer or worship or our singing...we often think of it as only expressive...we are expressing ourselves. That is what we do when we pray. I am expressing myself to God. That is what we do when we worship, we express our praise; but one of the things that we often talk about at the worship institute that I am associated with at Calvin University is that prayer and song and worship are not just expressive, they are also formative...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In other words, how you pray and how you hear others pray forms you as a disciple; and so, Darrell, to pray the way you pray...to pray those words that you just mentioned, and you do that on a regular basis, that gets down in your bones, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that starts to form how you see the world, and how you see God in the midst of change.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that happens in the public assembly. That also happens when you read God's Word; and so, scripture is another way for us to be formed, and literally reoriented, retrained, and reminded of God's character when we look at verses like Jeremiah 29:11 that says: "I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "The plans and the thoughts I have for you. The plans for peace and wellbeing, and not for disaster, to give you hope and a future."

Like God is saying that to Jeremiah to remind him the plans are not done yet, even though you guys are in exile; and we may feel exiled by our problems and our situations; and even if we don't know the plans, we know the planner, and if the planner has our best interests at heart, then I think we are going to be okay.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, meditating on scripture and a verse like that one, or so many other verses, you know, where we are encouraged to train our eyes on Jesus—keep our eyes on God—those things are in scripture; the Holy Spirit got those things written down for lots of reasons, not least of which is that we can rehearse them...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We can revisit them; we can read them slowly and aloud in our devotions; so this, too, gets down in your bones. How many people have testified through scripture memorization...one of the first programs we have done together on *Groundwork*, Darrell, you talked about how important scripture memorization has been to you. Sometimes when you don't have access to the Bible, these verses come back to you, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you are reminded of God's presence; and great hymns and songs come back to you. I mean, the first time I ever had a CAT scan, I had always heard people in my congregation tell me: You know, sometimes I sing in there, or the songs of the faith come back to me and I am not so scared to be in that x-ray tube. It happened to me, too, when I had one done one time. It is like, wow, that really does help.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If that stuff gets deep in you, then God's constancy and his abiding presence with us in the boat, to use the image from the previous segment, is so rich.

DARRELL DELANEY

When you have songs that are rich in lyrics, that are laden and undergirded by scripture...I was thinking about: A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing...and then, songs like *Hold to God's Unchanging Hand*, which specifically talks about how time is filled with swift transition, but we need to build our hopes on things eternal by holding on to God's unchanging hand. They remind us of God's character. They remind us that he is never going to leave us nor forsake us, and that his character is eternal; and we have these things to remind us, even when we cannot pick up our Bible because we are in a situation, we can be encouraged.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think we can encourage each other in the church, too, Darrell. I think one thing...you know, in our Reformed tradition, we have had a tendency that only the preacher does most of the talking in worship, right? You are rarely...in the old days in particular...you rarely heard from anybody else, but there is such a strong component to testimony...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To hearing others testify to God's faithfulness through their storms, and how God intervened in their lives, or how God assured them of their presence in the wee hours of the night when their child was sick in the hospital. We hear each other's testimonies, and that, too, builds us up.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, at Madison Church, where I am pastoring, we have a time in the service that is called Joys and Concerns, where people can celebrate and thank God for how he has brought them through situations, but also, they can share their prayer requests. When the body of believers of people get together, we can encourage one another in ways that will be very edifying to one another; and this is the thing that I think is most important for us to remember is that God is able to intervene in practical situations.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God is constant...our lives change, but God does not change. He is always with us. He has been there in the past, he is with us right now, and he will be there in the future, thanks be to God.

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we seek to better understand the nature of God's peace, and through this study, reaffirm again that God remains constant in our lives no matter how crazy, painful, or upside down the situation and changes of our lives feel.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, and there you can share what *Groundwork* means to you. We would love to hear suggestions for what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

Groundwork is a listener supported program produced by ReFrame Ministries. Visit reframeministries.org for more information, and to find more resources to encourage your faith. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee.

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