

God is Faithful, Consistent, and Keeps His Promises

DARRELL DELANEY

There is a famous gospel song called *I Trust You, Lord*, by Donnie McClurkin. In this song it asks: what if life is not going so well, or the way we expected it; will we still trust the Lord? By the end of the song, the answer is yes. In this series finale, we want to talk about our God being faithful when we are not, how his character of covenant keeping can encourage us, and finally, help those who are struggling with trusting in hard times, coming up in this episode of *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 have talked about how God shows up in miraculous situations and intervenes when it seems like there is no way out, but we also talked about situations where God doesn't actually show up immediately and exactly when we want him to, and how we walk through that; and in this episode, we want to talk about how to encourage each other and remind each other of God's faithfulness, and his character, and his ability to keep covenant promises, and what do we do when we need that encouragement?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and so, right; this is the third episode in this short, three-part series; and indeed, we have been focusing, Darrell, on sort of what God does and so forth. Sometimes he will intervene, sometimes we have to stick with him even when it seems it takes him a while to intervene, to do something. The storms of life come, as we talked in the last episode; but now, making just a little bit of a slight turn, to sort of say: But this nature of God's character...how is that good news for us, given the fact that God is always faithful; we humans, not so much, not nearly so consistently. We can be pretty fickle, we get flustered, we get confused, we wander, and that is something, actually, Darrell, that we see a lot of examples of in the Bible, unfortunately, and primarily with God's own people.

DARRELL DELANEY

Ironically, the ones who are supposed to be the example, Scott, we see these situations that prove themselves time and time again, and there is a particular story in the book of Judges about the life of Gideon, and how God uses this story to show us the inconsistencies of his people. They enter what I consider to be called the stupid cycle, their stories start very similar, Scott. 1) The people are unfaithful and they live evil in the eyes of the Lord. 2) They are attacked as a punishment because God harkened back in Deuteronomy 28: If you obey me, you will be blessed and things will come to you, but if you disobey me, you will be cursed and the other countries will come in and oppress you. So, they are reaping that, and so, in their disobedience, they see these countries coming in...these Amalekites and these other *ites* come in and attack them. 3) Then they repent. 4) God sends a judge, and they remain faithful through the life of the judge, but once that judge dies, they go back through the cycle again; and this happened for centuries, over and over and over again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; that is the sad refrain in the book of Judges, Darrell. Everybody did what was right in their own eyes, you know. The judges would come and straighten things out, but it never took...it never lasted very long. Gideon is certainly one of Israel's best judges, but you know, Darrell, there is a well-known story involving Gideon that sometimes I think we maybe don't interpret quite correctly.

DARRELL DELANEY

Judges 6:33-40: Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. ³⁴Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. ³⁵He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them. ³⁶Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— ³⁷look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." ³⁸And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day, he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

SCOTT HOEZEE

³⁹Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew." ⁴⁰That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry, all the ground was covered with dew. So, put out your fleece, right? This is something that has sort of become a saying...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, if you want to sort of discern God's will put your fleece out, which you know, maybe the first time Gideon put the fleece out it was okay, although even he says: *If you will save Israel as you have promised, but still, give me a little sign. Okay; so God does it, and then to come back and say: Not quite good enough yet, God. One more. Let's flip the challenge of the fleece. This is actually not something to emulate, I think. It probably shows a lack of faith.*

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is the interesting thing about it is that he is looking for evidence to go along with his belief so that it can strengthen it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is actually the opposite of what we are called to do; and it reminds me, Scott, of when Thomas...you know, Doubting Thomas...comes to Jesus, and before he sees that Jesus is resurrected, the disciples are telling him: Oh, yeah; we saw him, we ate with him. He is like: (John 20:25) Unless I put my hand in his side or touch his wounds, I won't believe. Now, Jesus gives him everything, but the line he says is: (verse 29) You believe because you have seen; blessed are those who have not seen and yet still believe. So, Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the assurance of things we hope for and the evidence of things we do not see. So, when Gideon asked for things that he needs assurance to go along with his belief, then he is showing a lack of faith, like you said.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, ultimately Gideon, you know, does succeed, although there are two...a little later there will be some more testing and his men will get whittled down to about nothing so that he will see that it was God's power that saved them, not the forces that he had assembled. Unfortunately, that sort of lack of faith, or what did you call it? The stupid cycle?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That goes throughout the whole Bible in the Old Testament. I mean, Israelites completely let God down again and again and again; and this goes on and on; and you know, we could just multiply the stories of all the times God punishes them or chastises them; and then ultimately of course, God's Spirit will leave the temple, and then the people will be carted off into exile in Babylon...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Israel never will quite come back from that the same way again. They will rebuild, Nehemiah and Ezra, but that was sort of the unhappy end of this long, long, long series of faithless acts, of ignoring God's laws, of not listening to the prophets when they chided the people...prophets like Amos and others. That is sort of the sad ending of it. We just cannot seem to get a great faithfulness up and running for more than a few years, or maybe, you know, under David and Solomon, but after that, it is just a seesaw.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know what is interesting to me, Scott, is that the glaring question for me is why isn't God Word enough?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

When he has given all these things that he has said over and over about his character, even in the New Testament; even with us today, as believers, we have the scriptures that are helping us, and we are trying to understand the importance of God making sure we know he is a covenant keeper and a promise keeper; and in the next segment, we will talk about just that, so stay tuned.

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; and we have been talking, Scott, about how God's character is consistent even when our character is flawed. We see that God still remains faithful, even when we do not; and we just talked about the example of Gideon and how he asked for the fleece, and the one day he asked for it to be wet and the next day he asked for the ground to be wet, and sometimes God's Word isn't enough for people, even though God has shown a consistent record of faithfulness; and in this situation and in this segment, we want to talk about God's character, and why covenant keeping is so important to help us and encourage us to believe in him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; because if there is one thing that we just noted in the first part of this program...if there is one thing that is really consistent in the Bible, it is the inconsistency of the people of God...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But the good news is that the other thing that is very consistent is the faithfulness of God, which has been the focus of this series, that change is inevitable, but God is faithful; and God does stay true to God's own self. We can read about this in Exodus 34. You know, one of the sad things that happened very, very soon after a miraculous delivery from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea and all the plagues they had seen before that, is that when the people get a little impatient, they ask Aaron to make them a god, and so Aaron makes a golden calf, and that was the first of many failures of Israel in the wilderness; and yet, God is faithful. So, let's listen to some of these verses in Exodus 34.

¹The Lord said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones (Because Moses had broken the first ones out of anger about the people worshipping this calf; so, let's do it again, God says.) I will write the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. ²Be ready in the morning and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. ³No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain, not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain." (So, Moses chisels out the tablets, he gets up, and then we read this:) ⁵Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. ⁶And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." ⁸Moses bowed down to the ground at once and worshipped. ⁹"Lord," he said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance." ¹⁰The Lord said, "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you."

DARRELL DELANEY

Scott, I really appreciate you reading that because not only does God name his character before Moses, and that is to be remembered about him forever, but also right after he names the character, he makes the covenant...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, his covenant is always going to be attached to his character; and so, that is the thing that I know and that we all should know that is very constant about God, is that his character is not going to change. This is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, who continues to make these generational covenants with his people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; he is the covenant God; and that too comes up all through the Bible. Now, there are two...we always teach our students at seminary that there are at least, you know, two kinds of covenants. The one is called the suzerain/vassal covenant, that is kind of an ancient Near East title, and that kind of covenant is a little bit conditional. It is sort of, you know, God says: I will be your God, *but* you also have to walk before me and be blameless. So, you have to do your part. So, that is sort of an I will do my part, you do your part; but then, the main kind of covenant that we find in the Old Testament is sometimes called the royal land grant, which is a

covenant of complete grace. All the gifts come from God's side: I am just going to give you this land; I am going to give you this salvation; I am going to deliver you from Egypt. So, it is sheer grace, and that is going to set the tone for the main covenants in the Bible, all the way until Jesus makes a new covenant in his blood in the upper room on the night of his betrayal before he dies. It is all a covenant of grace. Our God is a covenant God, and that is really good news for us.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I appreciate the fact that you are distinguishing between the conditional and unconditional covenants. The latter form of the covenant you mentioned has to do with God's character and his ability to deliver and save and heal, which is something that we receive by grace; and so, what I like people to know, too, is that sometimes we focus on what we do and what we don't do—what is our faithfulness and what is not—and how some of these problems that we incur we pretty much bring them upon ourselves...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But we have to widen the scope, Scott, because life's circumstances are not always our fault. Life's circumstances are not always our problem or our cause; and yet, our God is still showing the same covenant keeping and promising and delivering and saving in these situations, even if they are not caused by our sin, and I am really excited that God encourages us that way as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and he comes down again and again. He certainly made the covenant with Abraham; and with Abraham we saw both kinds of covenants, but the primary one is what God is going to do. He makes a covenant with Moses that we just read about in Exodus 34, and with the people despite their being stiff-necked...despite...interesting phrase from the Bible...stiff-necked...they are stubborn, they fall into sin at the drop of a hat, and yet God is going to covenant with them, and he is going to stay with them because he is faithful, which is what we have been talking about in this three-part series. He is faithful when we are faithless; or think of

2 Corinthians 1:20, where we are basically told all of God's promises find their "yes" or their "amen" in Jesus. That is just the character of God; and in Reformed theology, you know, it even has to do with why we baptize infants...

DARRELL DELANEY

Exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because you cannot do anything you don't understand, but we think that it is a covenantal sign that God is the primary actor here, and we are the primary recipients; and baptism, whether of an adult or of a child, is a wonderful reminder of that.

DARRELL DELANEY

And when I am preaching, and when we have worship services, I often remind people of that, Scott, that God is the initiator of the conversation of I am going to bless you, I am going to help you, I am going to be there with you, and then when these children grow up and they have their profession of faith, they finally get to look back and see the track record of God's faithfulness, and respond by saying: Yes, we want to love this God; we want to serve this God; we want to follow this God. These are some of the things we are talking about on this side of the covenant, where God is doing what he needs to do, but we also need to talk about the other side of the covenant, because humanity has broken that down, and in the next segment, we want to talk about how God addresses the other side of the covenant, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this, the third and final episode of a short series called: Change is inevitable, but God is faithful; and we have been talking about the covenant, Darrell, for the last little bit, and we talked about how there were two kinds of covenants, and both were active. One is a covenant of sheer grace. God gives it all; but there was the covenant also made with Abraham, which was that first type, what we call the suzerain/vassal treaty, but it is basically: I will do my part, you do your part. It is kind like a bargain, it is a deal: I will be your God, but you must walk before me and be blameless; be holy, for I am holy, as is the theme of the book of Leviticus, which we did a series on here on *Groundwork* a while back; but the other thing we have noted in this program, Darrell, is that that human end of the bargain didn't ever work out so well.

DARRELL DELANEY

Humans often fell short, and even before they went into the Promised Land, they made promises and oaths. You know Joshua, he is like, you know, you are not going to be able to serve the Lord; and they are like yes, we will; yes, we will; and they were adamant about it, but it didn't work out. History shows over the centuries that they were unfaithful; and I have heard a saying, and many people have heard this saying. The saying is: If you want something done right, you've got to do it yourself; and God has seen that his people are just incapable of keeping their end of the covenant, and so God wants to be their God...he wants them to be his people, but he has to address that situation; and so, we see in the passage of Isaiah 53, where God addresses the human side of the covenant, and what needs to happen there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this is a well-known text from Isaiah. We very much see it as a messianic text, a text that foreshadows and points forward to Jesus. So, Isaiah says: ¹Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? ²He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. (But now this part): ⁴Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him [God], and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Isaiah is foretelling the life of Christ. We understand he is the suffering Messiah. So, now God is addressing the other side of the covenant, Scott, because he knows that people cannot keep this covenant, so he has to literally incarnate and take on human flesh and become the human part of the covenant and live the atonement life and pay the price for us in our stead and for our benefit, which is the crazy miracle about it, that we get to receive the benefit and not the punishment. So, though, we see Christ jumping in and intervening and doing the other side of the covenant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; Christ has to do two things. He has to get punished for our failures, and he has to do it right on our behalf. He has to make it right for all the places that we went wrong. I think we sometimes glide over this part of Isaiah 53, but there is this interesting thing: So, we are going to get this messianic character. He is not going to be very attractive, root out of dry ground, you know, all that familiar stuff; but then there is the part in verse 4 where Isaiah says we consider him punished by God, stricken by God, and afflicted. In other words, we look at the suffering of the Messiah and say: Boy, God's mad at him. He must have done something wrong; God is punishing that guy.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But then Isaiah says: No, no; he didn't do anything wrong. That is your sin he is getting punished for. That is your transgression he is getting pierced for. It has nothing to do with him, it has everything to do with you. He has taken your place.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am actually grateful that he did take my place, because there is no way I could have lived up to God's righteous standard and God's righteous law, and it also shows how bad God wants us to benefit from the covenant blessings that he wants to give us. So, he not only makes the promise from the one side, but he jumps in and lives the perfect life that we couldn't live, dies the death we couldn't die, and so we get to benefit by faith—which is actually the next passage we are going to get into—we get to benefit by faith this gift of grace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God's faithfulness extends to us, and it had to be because here is the truth from Ephesians Chapter 2: ¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of the world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. (And then verse 4) But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

DARRELL DELANEY

The grace gift that we are given here, that we received by faith, is how we access the covenant promises that God was already giving to us or already reaching in our direction to do; and because Christ has afforded us this opportunity, it doesn't matter how much faithlessness we had before anymore, and God is not keeping score: Okay, you have six million four hundred thirty-seven transgressions that you are going to have to pay for. No, Christ has already paid for them, past, present, and future; and so, we can actually take comfort in the fact that we now have access to the blessings, the promises, and the faithfulness that he promises people all along. That is a relief to me, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it should be a relief to all of us. It is one of the things that we wanted to accomplish in this series was to, you know, remind ourselves that God is faithful at all times. Certainly, he was when it came to that salvation you were just talking about.

One of my high school teachers used to make the analogy about a dog. He said: You know, if your dog is on the other end of the room, if he is sick...if he is not feeling great...you can call him...you can whistle [whistle sounds] come on, come here...and you know, the dog might be sick, but he will be able to come over to you. If the dog on the other end of the room is dead, you can call and whistle all day long, he ain't going to move. The dog is dead. That is what Paul is saying: You were dead in your transgressions...dead is dead; which means, you know...an undertaker friend of mine says: You know, dead people...you have to do everything for them. They just aren't very helpful. You have got to move them, and so forth. You were dead, Paul says; now that is bad, right, but God is rich in mercy and he made you alive. That tells you it is all God because dead people don't help themselves.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know, it is beautiful, and I want to extend that motif, Scott, that God is the one who brings dead things back to life...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when you are going through things in life, even if it is not connected to your faithfulness, if you have had life hardships, and you have had broken relationships, some of those things have died. Some of the grief and

loss that you carry, anxiety that you carry, come from life's hardships and changes; and we serve a God who can bring those dead things back to life. It is really exciting that God is calling us to remember his character and remember who he is when we have hard times. That was the point of this whole series, Scott, that change is inevitable, but God is constant, and we need to remember his faithfulness is coming through each and every week, each and every day, so that we can have hope and strength for tomorrow.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; as we have mentioned before on *Groundwork*, kind of a well-known line from the writer Samuel Johnson, that we need more often to be reminded than instructed...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And this series has been a big reminder to what you just said, Darrell: Remember, remember, remember, God is faithful; he's got you; he's got our backs; he's got this thing; and that is our great comfort, thanks be to God.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com. Share what *Groundwork* means to you and give us some suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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