
God's Perfect Peace

SCOTT HOEZEE

We often think that to have a sense of peace in our lives, we need long periods of stability and calm. Peace comes over us when we have a secure job that we keep for years. Peace is having a nice house, where you are comfortable and you can call home for many decades. Peace is having a secure investment portfolio for your retirement years, years that you also hope will be calm, stable, steady; but can we have peace when any or all of those things are threatened? Can we have peace in the midst of instability and change, and even grave uncertainty? Today on *Groundwork*, we will explore what it means to experience the peace of God, even when the times of our lives are anything but peaceful. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is the middle program...program two...of a short, three-part series that we are doing on God's faithfulness through change. In the first program, we thought about God's presence in our lives when storms come, and also how God sometimes...like Jesus calming the storm in Mark 4 that we looked at in that first program...how sometimes God intervenes to head things off, but there are other situations or storms or circumstances that can linger for a while, and then the question is: Then what? Where is God and can we feel any sense of peace when the storm doesn't lift right away?

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when there are no quick fixes, Scott, like what you are saying, then the question is how do we find the strength to say it is well with our souls, even though it isn't well circumstantially at that moment; and I think that is the question we are going to address today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

At Calvin Seminary, Darrell, where I teach preaching, my colleague John Rottman and I use a book [by a colleague of ours named Paul Scott Wilson] called *The Four Pages of the Sermon*.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, I remember that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

You do! Yes, there you go; and so, you know the first two parts of the sermon deal with what we call trouble; and first we look at trouble in the text. So, we are preaching on a Bible text, what is going on in the text? Is there a crisis? Is there a sin? Is there a question...a tension? What is up in the air in the text that is bringing the people in the Bible story a sense of dis-ease, a sense of discomfort...that is Page 1 of trouble in the text.

DARRELL DELANEY

When we start looking at Page 2, which is trouble in the world, we see that there is a thread that goes from the scripture and the time that they were actually having their trouble, that there is a trouble that actually we

are going through right now...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we go from the exegesis to the hermeneutic almost because we haven't gotten to the application section yet, but when things feel uncertain, or things that are happening...what's going on in our world...what's going on in our lives? That is the trouble in the world that we need to look at.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And basically, there really is no situation faced by the characters of the Bible that we don't still face today, and it is just a matter of naming it; and sometimes, to help our students think through trouble, we sort of say, you know, every time you get up to preach, you are going to be preaching to at least some people who are having some kind of trouble in their life, and we sort of give them a list: What brings us a sense of dis-ease? What brings us a sense of discomfort in our lives? Well, here is the list: Sickness and disease; unemployment and economic difficulties; terrorism and violence in society; family dysfunction and divorce; natural disasters and accidents; racism and sexism; wayward children and fractured friendships; death and loneliness. These are common human experiences for Christians, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

When you said that, Scott, I thought about anxiety and depression; addictions; and abuse and neglect; and these things that we have experienced. There was a wise man who once said this to me, Scott: If you haven't experienced any of these things, just keep living...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because life circumstance...the human experience...is going to definitely hit you from one time or another in your season of life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it has a way...when it does...it has a way of causing us great internal instability. These are the events and circumstances that can cause butterflies to get let loose in your gut, you know...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nervous stomach. These are the things that wake you up in the middle of the night, or they keep you from falling asleep in the first place, right? These are the things that make us sort of want to just flee to some distant shore; as we say: I just want to get away from it all...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because the *all* of our lives is sometimes not very pleasant. So, these are the things that we all know firsthand, as you just said, if you don't know it yet, hang on...stay tuned...you will, but it is common.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it triggers for me either a fight or a flight or a fright response...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, I have different ways of coping with those things, and if I am honest, some of those things are constructive and some of those things are not constructive. In the situations where times are uncertain, we have our trigger responses, but it is good for us to remember God in those situations because there is scripture that actually addresses how we handle those things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And a text like I am about to read, Darrell, from Isaiah 26, can be difficult to embrace when those kinds of troubles are in our lives, and yet, Isaiah promises this in the 26th Chapter at the 3rd verse: You (referring to God) You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. ⁴Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, perfect peace, Scott, in my opinion, is not something that is free of problems, free of trials, free of challenges. It is not something that happens when all the wonderful things are going on. I think this perfect peace is something that, you know, make sure it anchors you in the character of who God is. Now, where I'm from we sing a song that says: He is a keeper; because not only is he...it's a double meaning...not only that he is a keeper because of what he can do for you, but also that he preserves us...he keeps us; and because of his character of having the stability of being consistent, that is where the perfect peace comes from.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and so, as you just said, Darrell, it doesn't mean that all your troubles dry up instantly overnight, or anything like that, right? It doesn't mean that, oh, now I don't even care that I have cancer...

DARRELL DELANEY

No.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; that is not what we mean by perfect peace, but we mean that there is something underneath you that holds you up, even when nothing else seems to be coming through for you. You have this perfect peace, and it is instructive, Darrell, that Isaiah says: Who gets this perfect peace? Those who trust in you (God), and then he makes it to a command. He says; So, you keep them in perfect peace because they trust in you. Next verse: (4) So, trust.

DARRELL DELANEY

Trust.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, now it is a command—it is an imperative, because trust is a tricky thing. Trust is what you do when you *don't* know one hundred percent something for sure.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, if my son...he is 13 now, but when he turns 16, we are going to turn the keys to the car over to him, and I'm not *sure* if he is able to understand all the rules and be safe, but I *trust* that he will or I wouldn't have given him the keys...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

I sit in this chair; I trust it is going to hold me up. I don't know until I actually sit. So, it is kind of a tricky thing, but you can base it on the character of God because his character is sure. Now, because God's character is sure, you can be encouraged to trust in his character and his ability to come through.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; he is the Rock eternal, as Isaiah 26:4 says, so when we put our trust in God it is a sure thing, for one thing, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it brings us that peace...a peace that passes understanding, to quote a New Testament line, a peace that you really cannot explain. I mean, I think people who have been in tough circumstances, and yet who testify...we talked in the first program of this series about the power of testimony in the Church. When somebody testifies that: I just knew God was with me even though my child was desperately sick in the hospital. It was three in the morning, but I could feel the prayers of God's people, I cannot explain it, I cannot explain it, but I had this larger sense of peace. That is quite an amazing thing, but let's think a little bit more about this peace, both in terms of what it is, but also what it isn't. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are in program two of a three-part series on God's constancy...God's faithfulness through the changes of our lives; and we just had that verse from Isaiah 26, Darrell, that God keeps in perfect peace those who trust in him; and that perfect peace that people...we were just talking about people can testify to this, though they cannot explain it. It is one of the greatest things ever; but you know, in our lives, in discipleship and in the Christian faith, the more wonderful something is, the more there is the possibility that somebody will try to counterfeit it, and that can be true of peace as well.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, our enemy is always trying to counterfeit or bring a cheaper, generic version of what God offers in the excellent and pure forms; and so, the Prophet Jeremiah actually speaks on this. In the 6th Chapter of Jeremiah. I am starting at verse 13. It says: "From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. ¹⁴They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this is a counterfeit kind of peace. This is a cheap kind of peace. Jeremiah, specifically here in Jeremiah 6, is lamenting the lack of covenant faithfulness, particularly in the leaders of Israel, but also in the people of Israel, and the leaders in particular...and this is just before the people are led into exile, right, because of their breaking covenant with God...so, the leaders of the people are trying to cover up their own sin, their own corruption, by saying to the people: Shhh, oh, don't trouble your little heads about us. We've got this thing. We are peace, peace. Everything is fine. We are following God, you are following God, it is all good; but it was all fake.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is actually patronizing to the people to tell them there is peace when there really isn't peace, and it is painful because you cannot build your faith on that. So, then when we have these situations where we have funerals and they say: Oh, he's in a better place, or she's resting now, those things are true, but when you say them in a situation that I am not feeling peaceful in, then it doesn't really help me to hear those words because I still have to work through what it means for my faith and for my transitioning journey to find the peace that God is trying to get to me in troubling times.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you cannot really have the perfect peace that Isaiah talked about if you are living in disobedience to God. Perfect peace comes to those who trust in God, and if you trust in God, you obey God and you follow God's ways. That wasn't happening in Jeremiah's day; but then, you are right, there is, at verse 14 of Jeremiah 6, that they "dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious," or I think some translations say: They dress the wound lightly. It is sort of the idea that, you know, there is a real wound here...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, somebody is bleeding bad, and you come up with a band-aid and say: Slap that on. And the guy is still bleeding, right? You are dressing the wound lightly. You are treating it like it is not serious when it clearly is. Again, in Jeremiah's time, that was in terms of, you know, covenant breaches and faithlessness on the part of people; but, you know, as you just said, Darrell, sometimes *we* dress people's wounds lightly. We try to kind of take one of those yellow smiley-face stickers and just sort of plop it on top of somebody's pain as though what they are going through is no big deal, so just be calm, be at peace. Put on a happy faith, as some church signs sometimes say, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Be as happy as the praise team looks this morning. You know, if you've got problems...you know, we talked in the first part of the program about trouble...don't take it to church with you, hang it up with your coat in the lobby and then come into church happy. That is fake peace, because that is like trying to take a shortcut to peace.

DARRELL DELANEY

It actually can breed an unhealthy sense of spiritual denial, to act like it isn't happening, and to ignore the pain, the sorrow, the grief, the regrets, the disquiet in us, the dissonance that we feel. That is never healthy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, I never, as a pastor, would ever counsel people to just get over it, because I could easily minimize how a big a problem that is for them...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sure.

DARRELL DELANEY

I don't think it is a good idea to minimize people's pain and struggles, and Jeremiah is making it clear that they shouldn't do that either.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We all want peace, but if you go to peace too quickly, you end up hurting somebody probably. If you try to shove somebody to some fake sense of serenity, like: Oh, yeah; no big deal that my husband died; no big deal; turn your eyes on Jesus and the things of earth grow strangely dim... Well, the things of earth have a way of staying fairly bright when we are in the middle of hurt, right? And just looking to Jesus isn't going to make it all better, not immediately. So, we don't want to dress wounds lightly, as though they are not serious; but, let's admit, Darrell, you can see why we are tempted to do that. It is neater...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is tidier, right? Living with pain and still seeking the peace of God, that is messy, that creates a tension.

DARRELL DELANEY

If you are a believer who wants to follow the Lord, you cannot close your eyes and ears to the pain and sorrow. Not only do you feel it, but you also experience it in a community of believers. So, I think lament is the way to go, because in lament you hold two things in tension...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

1) The world is broken, and 2) God is good. So, it is not compromising on any one of these, not that the problems are equal with God, but the point is, we struggle with, okay, these answers are not here right now; and, we are trusting God to help us through a process that we don't get the answer immediately, but we are still trusting in the character and the goodness of God to help us in our trials. That is why Lamentations is a very powerful book to me, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and as we have noted before on *Groundwork*, the irony of psalms of lament is that the psalmists lament God's apparent absence to God's face: God, you've left me, but I am talking to you.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I'm singing about it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I'm singing about it. You know, a friend of mine who died recently was a man who felt everything very, very deeply himself. He also had enormous empathy. I mean, he could feel other people's pain and shared sorrows, but if I shared sorrows with him, every fiber of his being told me he was all there for me. I never once saw him dismiss anyone's pain lightly. He took it seriously; and yet, he had, in a lot of conversations with me when we were talking about heavy stuff, by clamping his hand on my shoulder and saying: Joy cometh in the morning; okay, right? And he was taking that from Psalm 30:5...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

His favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. That is a great line.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, I do want to say this, Scott, that doesn't literally mean in 24 hours...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

You are going to be fine, or when the sun comes up, it is going to be fine, but it is a process that God is walking us through that he can show us peace when it is uncertain, but he doesn't have to remove the problem in order to show us his character of peace; and when we close this program, we are going to talk a little bit more about this angle of peace in a different way, so stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

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

Darrell, let's dig right into a passage that for many of us is about as familiar a Bible verse as we know. It is these well-known words of blessing from Numbers 6:22:

The Lord said to Moses, ²³“Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ²⁴“The Lord bless you and keep you; ²⁵the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; ²⁶the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

DARRELL DELANEY

This one is very familiar to me because at the end of every sermon, I give this blessing to the people. It is pronounced, not from me, it is from the Lord through the preacher, and it is spoken over their lives in order for them to receive the peace in the midst of them going out into the world and being light and being a witness. They are reminded that the peace of God goes with them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A friend of mine used to be a chaplain at Calvin College...now Calvin University...sometimes we had these morning worship services in the Fine Arts Center auditorium...student led services; and there would always be some guys way up in the balcony who would duck out before the benediction because they wanted to get first in line for food for Sunday noon dinner at the commons dining hall, right? And that used to really irk my friend. He said: You know, if the blessing at the end were the only part of the worship service you caught, it would still be worth coming...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because to have these words spoken over you... We call this the Aaronic benediction because it was given to Aaron, who was the high priest at the time, and to his sons, but when I was a kid, I thought it was the ironic benediction. I thought that's what it was, and maybe there is a sense in which it is ironic, right? Maybe there is a sense of irony, because, Darrell, you just said you speak this at the end of all your services and sermons; I have spoken this blessing, I don't know how many times, hundreds and hundreds of times, too, as a pastor,

but every week when we do that, Darrell, as pastors we know this blessing is being received by people who are not in a peaceful place, which we have been talking about in this episode. We are wishing them peace, but we are fully aware that they are not feeling it right now.

DARRELL DELANEY

What I normally say when I talk about that is that it is a faith statement for those who are not receiving the manifestation of the true peace. The deep comfort that comes with that peace that we are pronouncing over them, if they are not experiencing that in their lives currently, then it is a faith statement, where you speak those things that are not as though they were; and it helps them to actually have hope for the week, even though last week could have been very intense.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; as we have just said, you can have this...what Isaiah called in the 26th Chapter that we looked at earlier in the program...you can have this perfect peace even in the midst of difficulties that don't lift right away. Joy may come in the morning, but it can be a distant morning; but it is also instructive that the last word of this benediction that many of us have heard and said and spoken over people, is peace, but it is that Hebrew word *shalom*...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which means so much more than just lack of conflict.

DARRELL DELANEY

I have been thinking a lot about this word *shalom*, and the way that I define it is that everything is in its right order. There is nothing missing, there is nothing broken, and everything is whole. Of course, our world is not like that right now, which speaks to the ironic thing that you just mentioned, Scott. So, we are telling a peace...we are pronouncing peace over them in their lives that God gives in the midst of a world that he is not going to pull them out of; they have to go back into this world and be a light and witnesses, but it is ironic because they are not seeing the manifestation of the peace immediately, even though they have this opportunity to be a light and witness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and, it is a reminder. You know, in the first program of this series, Darrell, we talked about prayer and singing, and also meditating on scripture, and we do those things to get some of that stuff deep into our spiritual DNA...deep into our bones; and again, hearing this blessing week after week after week kind of...it settles into you like a happy residue after a while, and you can remember it even when you are not having a peaceful stretch of life; but what is it grounded in? Where do we get this? It is because the Lord makes his face to shine on you...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Lord turns his face toward you; and in the ancient world...in the ancient Near East...if there was a sovereign, a king or a pharaoh or a queen or some majestic figure...if you came into their throne room, you would bow down, you would have your face to the ground in respect and in humility, but if the leader liked you, if the leader wanted to convey...the king or the pharaoh or whoever...that things were good between you, they would cup your chin in their hand and lift your face up so that your eyes would meet their eyes. Their face would shine on you as a symbol of saying: Things are good between us. And this blessing says that is what God does for us, and that is going to be where the *shalom* comes from.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is interesting that you say that because I had an echo from Exodus 33 and 34 when the Bible says that Moses spoke to God as one speaks face to face with a friend; and so, the fact that the intimacy is there and the fact that the peace comes from the relationship and the close proximity of being in the face of God, and the favor that comes upon that, these are the things we draw strength from when we have uncertain times, and when we feel discouraged, that even though those things aren't changing, we have a connection to a God who is intimately involved, looking at us, and definitely connected to us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, the preacher Tom Long once told the story that he was asked to preach at an intergenerational family worship service, and the idea was to hold the service in the fellowship hall, where families would gather at tables laden with all the fixings to make home-made bread; and then once the bread was made, it would get baked; and so, the hall would fill up with the wonderful aroma of baking bread. The preacher would preach a sermon on family unity, and then when the bread came out, they would use it to celebrate the Lord's Supper; and as Tom Long said, it was a great idea on paper, but it turned into chaos. As people began moving the flour around, the whole fellowship hall was a haze of flour dust. Children threw some balls of dough at the preacher that bounced off Tom Long's new suit. The ovens didn't work quite right. It took forever for the bread to bake. So, by the time it was done, families were actually falling apart all over the fellowship hall. Children were crying, it was terrible. The service ended, mercifully. The script called for Reverend Long to utter the words that sounded pretty ironic in that chaos: The peace of God be with you; but he said he was too irritable to say anything else or try to come up with something different, so he just spoke it as written. The peace of God be with you, he said; and suddenly, from the back of the hall, came the high voice of a child, who said: It already is. In the midst of the chaos, the peace of God...it's already here.

DARRELL DELANEY

In the middle of the chaos, we need to remember who God is, and the character that he has. He doesn't have to remove those problems in order to have his character shine through; and so, that is something we can thank God for.

Well, thank you for listening and digging into scripture with *Groundwork*. Join us again next time as we conclude our series about God's constant faithfulness in our ever-changing times.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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