

God's Plan and Spiritual Blessings

DARRELL DELANEY

Do you remember a time where you learned about something new, and it left you so excited you couldn't wait to learn more? We often witness this sense of wonder and hunger for more in kids. My kids love the Marvel Avenger series. They have seen the movies, but they still like to read the books, they still pore over character dictionaries and play Avengers in the backyard or with their Legos. They just cannot get enough. The book of Ephesians is like that for Christians. When we hunger to know and understand more of what God has done for us, studying Paul's teaching to the Ephesian Christians offers a wealth of theological teaching and guidance for applying what we believe in our daily lives. Join us as we begin a study of this faith-enriching book next. 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 Scott, we are starting a brand new series on the book of Ephesians. Ephesians has six chapters, and that is how many episodes there will be. So, we will have plenty of time to look into what this book offers. There is so much good stuff in it theologically; there is good stuff in it practically; and Paul wanted to make sure the church in Ephesus was able to live this faith out and understand why.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we will see in this episode, and probably in all the episodes, Paul, I think, really wanted to get the Ephesian Christians kind of jazzed up...to get them excited...to make them enthusiastic about the faith...to make them deeply convicted of how much God did for them; and as we read it today, it ought to have the same effect in our lives. So, we don't just study this just to sort of get information, because what we are going to read, already in this first chapter in this episode, should energize and jazz us, too. That we should really be excited and convicted all over again of what a wonderful gift God has given us through Jesus Christ.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the church in Ephesus, which is in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Paul spent three years there preaching and teaching the gospel; and they were in a pagan world. They had a whole bunch of wild things going on. Think of Las Vegas times twenty-five. This is what is happening: a lot of idolatry, a lot of temple worship, and it looked like darkness was winning—it looked like evil was winning—but, you know, if the Ephesians were like: What do we do about that? Well, Paul says: First you need to understand what God has done; and then once you understand what God has done, you will know what you need to do. In this situation, Paul is not addressing any controversies like he does in Galatians and Colossians, and even in Corinthians we did a series on earlier. He is actually able to paint a panorama for them: This is what God has done; this is what God has planned; and you get to sit in and understand what the grace and the power and mercy have done for you in the first place.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A lot of people have noted that Ephesians and Colossians are pretty similar—they are laid out pretty similarly; but you are right. Unlike 1 Corinthians, where Paul is clearly responding to a whole bunch of questions and problems...

DARRELL DELANEY

This is what you wrote me about...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; here, he is just going to take off; kind of go right back to the beginning of how we can understand our salvation. So, let's begin with Ephesians Chapter 1. After the initial introduction, we start at verse 3, where Paul writes:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

And so, Darrell, I mean: Wow! The language here, lavished, and you know, just every spiritual gift and all things are being reconciled. Paul is not pulling any punches here.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a beautiful thing, because he is laying out the plan that God had, and that word that you said: *predestination*. It still got to me because it is a very rich word in the Reformed tradition; and we don't have time to get into all of what it means because they have been arguing about this for millennia about predestination, God's election, and free will; but suffice it to say that God chose before the creation of the world. So, it is really important for us to understand that before he said: Let there be light, he was solving the redemption problem of the fall before he created everything. I love that, because God is not reacting, he is proactively involved in all of creation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, exactly at what point did predestination become a problem? But it has been, right? I mean, a lot of people kind of think the theologian John Calvin invented predestination or election, and it has become this controversial thing. Well, how come God would choose some and not others; and yes, as you say, the arguments go on and on. I don't know how we turn predestination into a problem, because here Paul is celebrating predestination as that plan...that eternal plan...and guess what? We are caught up in it now, too. For Paul, predestination just means: Yes; glory be to God! It wasn't a problem for him.

DARRELL DELANEY

No, it wasn't a problem for him. He is trying to help them to understand that God had a plan to set something in place to redeem everything and all creation in what the King James Version calls: the fullness of time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, this was the particular time when the Gospel of Christ would go out, and these Ephesian believers would be affected when they caught that by faith; and Paul wanted to comfort these believers, because they've got the Greek goddess Artemis, also known as Diana; they've got many different cultural things going on. They've got the *agora*—the market; they've got cultural challenges in this seaport city, but they need to

realize that there is an anchor; that God is actually involved in a plan to redeem all of the stuff that they see every day that is pressing in on them, trying to change their core being; and God gives glory out of the great lengths that he goes to to save people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; as you were just noting, Darrell, Ephesus was one of those cities in the ancient world that was kind of a crossroads...a major seaport, very metropolitan, we would say...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Very eclectic; and religious ideas were a dime a dozen, right? There was this giant statue of Diana, or Artemis, in this city—a huge temple dedicated to her; and so, you know, it was one of those environments where people would say: Well, how can we know it's true? I mean, everybody has their own religious opinion. There is this religion and this religion. Maybe one is just as good as the other. Paul is saying: No; all of that stuff has just sort of popped up; people made it up; people come up with new ideas every day. The truth of what saves you has been planned before the creation of the world...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And God was ready when the time was full to send Jesus Christ so that, as Paul says, he could then lavish grace on us...we will talk more about that later. He is going to lavish grace, and he is going to make known to us the *mystery*. Paul likes to talk about the *mystery* of it all; and there were probably a lot of mystery religions then, too; but Paul is saying: Look; in the marketplace of religious ideas that floods Ephesus all the time, as you said, here is the anchor that holds. This is your salvation.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, we have been talking about God's redemptive plan that started before the foundation of the world; and coming up in the next segment, we are going to explore this further. 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are in the first chapter of Ephesians—a six-chapter book—and we just talked about how God's glory, God's plan, the fruition, the execution of God's before-the-creation-of-the-world plan, and we get to be part of all that, Paul tells us.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, let's dig right back in. Right here in verse 11, it says: In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with the seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

As we said before, Scott, God has strategically planned to have every part of this redemption and predestine happen, not just to affect creation, but to affect us as well; and we can take hope in that, because I think of people who...you know, our friends, our loved ones, even some of the people who are enemies, we pray that they become saved. We don't see them going in the direction of salvation, and we lose hope sometimes because we are looking at the temporal; but God has what was called the holy hounds of heaven on the case, and he is in the process of his plan being done; and those who he has chosen will definitely come to their senses at the right time. So, we can trust God's process in that, and the effective prayers that we pray for those people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God was not making this up as he went along, in short. When you think about the larger scheme of things, which Paul is making us think about here. He is talking in cosmic terms with cosmic timelines here; it is quite stunning; but it is a little bit like the game of chess, in that God is like the master chess player, who knows exactly what he is doing. It reminds me of a story that Reverend Jack Roeda told in a Christmas sermon some years ago, where he said that when the great chess master, Bobby Fischer...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Was a very young man, and he had a major chess match against some Russian genius player, and people who absolutely know chess recognized that relatively early in the game, Bobby Fischer made a move that meant he was going to win. His opponent didn't know it, most people watching the game didn't know it, but there were about nineteen more moves to make, but when Bobby moved that one piece, checkmate was inevitable...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nothing was going to stop it now; and when Christ was born in Bethlehem...checkmate! God has the game over the devil and over the forces of evil; and that is the sort of grand strategy and long game, you know, that Paul is talking about here.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is beautiful to see that God has all that in place before he says: Let there be light; which is really powerful. I think that also one of the things that gets me excited is when Paul starts talking about that the Holy Spirit is the seal unto the day of redemption; and so, he is the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance; and I think what is important to me is that when we think about seals, I think about the kings and the emperors of that day, and they have a scroll that they roll up with their decree on it. This is a decree that cannot be refuted; and then they take their signet ring and they seal it with wax; and so, no one can open that seal until they get that to the destination of the person who was designated to open it; and so, the authority of the king is on that seal and everyone knows that; and so, the Revelation talks about these books of seals that have been put together by the King of Kings, and we have been sealed by the King of Kings, by the seal, which happens to be the Holy Spirit; and so, he is the down payment and the guarantee that God is going to redeem all things, starting with us on the inside; and that gives the Ephesians hope. Even in their own personal struggles, they can think about how the Spirit is in them at work.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Paul talks also, you know, about how the Holy Spirit is like a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance, he says in verse 14, and that is so interesting. I think both of us, Darrell, have recently purchased a new house...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, you know, when you go through that, you have to...at some point early in the process when you have made an offer on a house and maybe the offer has been accepted...you have to put down some earnest money—they call it earnest money...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To show that you are earnest...you are serious. So, you have to make a deposit that will get applied toward your purchase later, but they want \$2,000 or \$5,000 or something in hand right away to say you are serious.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Paul says that is what the Holy Spirit is. We don't have the fullness of our salvation yet, obviously. We still struggle, we still are tempted, we still fail; and we sometimes still have doubts, and we sometimes still have questions; but Paul says: Look, you have been given the Holy Spirit. It is like that wax seal. It's God's deposit to you saying he is serious...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is his earnest money, if you will. This is going to happen; God is going to follow through in the long run, because he has already given you the Holy Spirit.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, that is skin in the game there, Scott...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

When the money is put where his mouth is, so to speak, if you want to go with that metaphor. You just talked about a process of already being saved, being saved daily, and then actually being fully saved at the end of all things; and the Ephesian church needed to know that God is winning, even though it looks like he is losing according to the world's standard; and they are being persecuted for their faith, they are being murdered for their faith, but they need the hope that comes with understanding that God is present and active in creation right now with them; and the Holy Spirit seal is their promise that that is happening.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Paul has pulled the camera way back here. There is always a little bit of a danger, I suppose, when you take such a cosmic perspective that we could feel kind of diminished by that, or you know, whatever. Maybe you are made to feel small by seeing everything in such a large context, but Paul is trying to accomplish exactly the opposite. He is trying to say: Look, you may feel small, you may feel abandoned sometimes, you may feel like God is losing or the church is losing, but don't worry about it. God's got this thing. He has been moving these chess pieces around for eons...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he sent his Holy Spirit into your life, you have received it, you felt its power; so, take hope...take hope. God's got this thing, and better yet, God's got you in this thing; and so, that is, indeed, as Paul writes at the end of verse 14, which we read a little while ago, all this is to the great praise of God's glory. The glory of God is indeed the plan he has. God's plans have come to fruition, but as we wrap up this episode on Ephesians Chapter 1, we want to understand a little bit more of the implications this has for the Ephesians, but also the implications it has for our walk of faith yet today. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and we are in the final segment of our first episode of this six-part series on the book of Ephesians; and we have been talking about how God has had a redemptive plan to save and redeem all of creation way before he created everything; and not only that, but his plan to put everything under Christ's feet was something that included the fellow believers, the ones who are reading this letter in Ephesus. It also includes you and I and the ones who are listening; that they are believers who God wants to redeem, and we want to give you more details about how, in Chapter 2, when we talk about it, how God, who is rich in mercy, does this; and we will get to that in the next episode, but suffice it to say here, that Paul is grateful. He begins to lift them up in a prayer and he is excited about that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this is a lovely part of Ephesians Chapter 1; beginning of the 15th verse: For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹and his incomparably great power for those of us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²²And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²²which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

So, once again, Paul has shaken up the bottle of champagne and popped the cork and it is just spraying bubbly all over the place, this is just so enthusiastic and effusive.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, man; I love this verse. It is one of my favorite passages. I remember praying it when I was in college; like when I started with Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, and the young people were not waiting until they had gray hair to worship God; and they were unashamed in their faith. I started praying this prayer: Could you give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know you better. What I learned is that that is connected to the things that Paul says next. He wants the eyes of their hearts to be enlightened. Not just some emotional experience or anything like that, but an objective truth that is grounded in the fact that God is who he says he is, and the plan he has established is working. That gives them the hope that they need, and that is the triad that I love, too, where he talks about the hope, the riches of inheritance, and incomparably great power for us who believe. Those three things he unpacks, and we need that stuff today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, it reminds me of the singer George Harrison, who was one of the Beatles...

DARRELL DELANEY

The Beatles.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And when he went out on his solo career after the Beatles broke up, he had a song called *My Sweet Lord*. Now, it was kind of a Hindu song. He was referring to Hari Krishna, but there is such longing in that song, and the chorus in that song, *my sweet lord, I really want to know you; I really want to know you*. That is what Paul says here: I want you to know God better. I want you to know Jesus better. You are never going to get to the bottom of knowing him, right? But keep getting to know him better, Paul says; that is my prayer. Get to know him better, because the more you get to know God, the more you are going to be blown away by what Paul talks about here...his incomparable power. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Get to know that, Paul says. It is exciting. That power gets down inside you, and inside us in the Church today, that is just exciting; and you know, I think we need that today, Darrell. I mean, the Church has been hurting throughout the time of the pandemic, in the United States for sure, but in other places, too, around the world, huge political divides are leading to huge church divides, and arguments; and sometimes it just seems like we are just all headed in the wrong direction. The world has just gone bonkers! But here Paul says even in this situation, get to know God better, because when you get to know God better, you are going to get filled with the power that will assure you that God still has our back...he is still in the Church working.

DARRELL DELANEY

Scott, I want to continue to connect that truth you just said to the fact that God established it before the foundations of the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, because God is not reacting and saying: Oh, wait; what do we do? He is not...what I pray in my prayer a lot is that 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 the finisher of our faith, and also the sustainer of it; and you are faithful to complete the work you started.

So, for the Ephesians who are sitting on death row waiting on Nero or whoever the emperor is to persecute and kill them, they need to understand this grounded hope—this grounded hope that will give them the encouragement that they need, that they know that they have a status now that legally, because they have been adopted as children of God, they have this status of heir. That is important for them, and that is important for us. We need to understand that even though sometimes the world feels like it is falling apart, either in our lives, either when we have a pandemic, even when there are political or racial tensions, that we serve a God who is in control of all of this; and he had that control way before creation started, and he has that control now; and so, we need to take hope in the fact that that resurrection power that he used to raise Jesus from the dead is at work in us and among us and around us; and he likes to use that power to help this world get back to right; because right now, it is off kilter.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and that is also I think...and you know, the Ephesians probably had their own topsy-turvy world to deal with, as we do now today, Darrell; and that is why I think Paul makes such a point...and he really piles on the verbiage here...that he said: Look, Christ is seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms; and then notice what he says, that he is far above all rule and authority, power, dominion, every name that is invoked...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In this age and the age to come. In other words, Jesus is way above kings and queens and presidents and prime ministers. Jesus is way above the political foment of the moment...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is so exalted, so far above all things, that we don't have to worry. God is still in charge, all appearances from the news to the contrary, Jesus is still seated right there.

DARRELL DELANEY

And even in a cosmic world, which we will get to in Ephesians 6, God is over all those things; and the Ephesians and we both simply have to hold onto our most precious faith. In the next episodes that come after this we are going to hear just how we are to live that out; but in this episode, we saw how God's manifested plan in Christ happened just at the right time. 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 when we study Paul's teaching about finding life and reconciliation in Christ in Ephesians Chapter 2.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, and share what *Groundwork* means to you, or what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

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