

The Paradox of the Cross

DARRELL DELANEY

My son was introduced to the concept of a paradox at an early age. One day, I said to him: Isn't that a cute puppy, Son? He responded to me, saying: It's not a puppy, Dad. It's a dog. I looked at him and he was very serious. I said: Same difference. He was confused. Every attuned parent can see when question marks form in the minds of their children. In his mind, how could it be the same if it is different? That didn't make any sense to him. I explained that "same difference" is an expression that means we use two different words to explain the same thing, and then he got it. That puzzling part, when it was first spoken to him, was where he got caught in the oxymoron—the paradox. There are many contradictions in this world, but there is only one that is the most stark in the Christian experience: The cross is a paradox of sorts because it is both death and life; a penalty and a pardon; a judgment and a justification. On this episode of *Groundwork*, we are going to discuss the greatest paradox in all of history: the cross. 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 halfway through our seven-part series...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

In Lent: Number one was why the cross in the first place? Number two was the curse of the cross. Number three was the shame of the cross; and today, we are going into the paradox of the cross, and why it is ironic that we received death and life in the same location.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And not just the same location, but a very surprising location. One of the things we talked about in the previous program, Darrell, was that the sight of a cross made people in Jesus' day in the Roman Empire shudder. It sent a shiver down their spine. Today we see crosses on necklaces and steeples, and it is like, oh yes, it's a cross. It reminds you of Jesus. We are too used to it; but for the ancients, it made them shudder. It was a source of fear and dread; and yet, the reason we are used to seeing it today on crosses and pendants and earrings and steeples, is because for us it has become a sign of life; and the cross is about the last place you could ever expect to find life, but there it is.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, it is a paradox to think of that. I just wanted to make sure that we had an understanding of what a paradox is. It is basically a contraction of terms. When my grandmother was understanding something new, she would say: So, the blind man says I see; I see. And as an 11-year-old who hears this and thinks quite literally, I am like: What do you mean, the blind man is seeing? I didn't understand that it wasn't that he could physically see, but it is a perception that has changed. So, even though he is blind, he can still perceive and see in a deeper way. It is kind of an oxymoron when you talk about it, but it works when you think about it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The short story writer, Raymond Carver...one of his most famous short stories of all time is called *Cathedral*, and it is a story about a man who is a bit of a bigot. He is kind of...he is not a very pleasant-seeming fellow, but his wife has a friend who is blind, and he comes over for dinner one night, and the man of the house is just not comfortable having this blind man around. Anyway, later in the evening, they are watching a TV show...the blind man isn't...but it is about a cathedral; and so, you know, the blind man asks him to describe the cathedral, and he kind of does, but eventually, the blind man tells the seeing man: Close your eyes and put my hands on top of yours. As you draw a picture of a cathedral, I am going to follow you with my hands. The last line of the story is, sort of the bigoted man saying: Now *I* see; it is really something! So, the paradox is that this blind man helped this man who was kind of internally blind to see, because he was so bigoted in his opinions. So, that kind of paradox...and that has come all through literature, right? The blind person...the Greeks had dramas about it...the man born blind in John 9...the blind who see better than the people whose eyes are functioning...that is ironic, it is an oxymoron, it is a juxtaposition, it is a paradox.

DARRELL DELANEY

And you know what is crazy is that when you said it, I was thinking about John 9, when Jesus says: ^(39 paraphrased) I come that those who see will become blind and those who are blind will become seeing. All because of Jesus being that paradoxical figure; and we realize that, you now, we see in scripture and we see in history that paradoxes are everywhere; so Good Friday is one example of that. Good Friday is bad for Jesus, but good for us; but somehow, that Good Friday brings glory to God, and Paul talks about it in 1 Corinthians.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we did a series on 1 Corinthians a while back on *Groundwork*, and we dealt with this very famous passage from 1 Corinthians 1, starting at verse 18: For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. ²⁰Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²²Jews demand signs, Greeks look for wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those whom God has called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. So. Paul is having a paradox festival in these verses.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; there are paradoxes everywhere, Scott. First of all, we see that God is destroying the so-called wisdom of this world by using something that appears to be foolish to them. So, even though they think they have wisdom, he is using the message of the gospel, and that is foolishness. Oh so, you are saying that your king...your Messiah...is going to die for you, and that is the message? That is the whole message? Wait a minute, that seems a little bit like it doesn't make logical sense for a lot of people, but it is the power of God. So, even though God calls the message itself foolish, he is also saying that this foolish message is the power of God unto salvation for those who believe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You mentioned Good Friday a little while ago, and of course, the paradox is that we call that Friday good, right? The day when Jesus died horribly on a cross and abandoned by God. It reminds me, I went to a noontime Good Friday service a couple of years ago, and we were sitting in silence...it was silent before the service started, you know; it is kind of a somber service. Anyway, this couple was taking their seats with the older mother of one of them, and halfway down the aisle, before they get to their seat, the older woman turns to her son and says: Well, it wasn't such a good day for Jesus; which, of course, made everybody kind of titter and laugh a little bit, but she was right. We don't call the assassination day of John F. Kennedy Good

November 22, you know...

DARRELL DELANEY

Exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We don't call Martin Luther King's assassination a good day; but when Jesus died we call it good because of the paradox. Life came out of his death.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is the message that Paul and the apostles were told to preach by God, and that is the message that is preached in every pulpit everywhere on Sundays—the gospel of that foolishness of that message; because he died, he actually paid the price on that cross. That would be the power of God if you believe that and take that by faith. It is not to say that people in this world aren't wise at all. I mean, they have wisdom according to the world's standards. Some are business savvy, some of them have financial smarts, or whatnot. There is nothing wrong with that, but God, by himself, definitely is the wisdom that we need—the true salvation wisdom—the wisdom that cannot be compared to anyone; and because God is so infinitely wise, he literally has to condescend to our level so that we can even grasp the truth of that message.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly. There is a classic hymn in choral setting, Darrell, *Christus Paradox*, and it plays in the song of all of the paradoxes...that Jesus is the Lion of Judah, and he is the Lamb that was slain; he is the wisdom of God and he is the foolishness of the world...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is the King who was the servant of all. This is where our salvation comes.

DARRELL DELANEY

In just a minute, we are going to dig a little bit deeper into that concept, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and if you are just joining us, we have been talking about the paradox of the cross, and how significant this is for believers. The paradox of the cross is God going to great lengths to demonstrate just how much he loves us, and it is not about him proving that he is wise or strong, or just to prove a point. He did it because he loved us, and he has a relationship that he wants to establish with us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the previous program about the shame of the cross, Darrell, we read from Philippians 2, and how far Jesus went to save us, and to show his love. You know, God so loved the world, John 3:16. Jesus went to great lengths. He went as low as you can go in this world; and he started out as the Son of God, as fully divine; omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent; he was God, and he ended up on a cross, which is as low as you could go on almost any scale. But you are right; that is how we became justified. We talked about that on one of the programs earlier, too. We had to be made right. We had to be put in a right relationship with God. Jesus did that for us.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the motivating factor behind all that? Love. So, for those who may feel like they think they are not significant or they don't matter much; maybe they have heard a lot of people say negative things to them and they started to believe those things, believe this: God loves us so much that he would go through all of these great lengths to take the curse, the shame, the paradox, and all of these things, to make sure that we knew he loved us. He actually put it all on the line for us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Paul talks about it in Romans 5: ¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. ⁶You see at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

DARRELL DELANEY

As you can see here, God doesn't believe in irreconcilable differences. If you ever read a tabloid or hear on the news or some sort of entertainment show where two celebrities will get married, and then a week later...or a short time later...they would divorce, and cite "irreconcilable differences" as the reason. Well, God doesn't believe in that. Sin against a holy God is the most irreconcilable difference in history, and because God loves us, he actually bridged the gap and intervened. He knew we couldn't make it to him, so he had to come to us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God had every right, all the way back in the Garden of Eden, to just wipe the dust off his hands and say: I am destroying the whole thing; maybe I will start over, maybe I won't, but this is over.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And, you know, we do see, even a little later in Genesis...in Genesis 6, the story of the flood, where God says: This is getting so bad, I am going to kill everybody but Noah and his family; but when he is done with that, God says: I don't like that at all. I am never going to do that again. I am going to give you this rainbow, I will never that again. God had tremendous grief...in fact, you read that in Genesis 6: God was grieved...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It doesn't say he was angry, he was grieved that he had made human beings, so he sends the flood; but in the end, he says: No, I am going to turn from grief to grace. From here on out, it is grace. I am going to save these people, even though they are dirty, rotten, smelly, stinky sinners. I am going to the mat for them because of what you said, Darrell, eternal love.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is the meat of the paradox, Scott. We are the sinners; I am the sinner, you are the sinner, but God demonstrates the love to the sinner while we are in the sin; and not only that, he becomes the sin for us; and so, the fact that he is willing to shed his blood so that we are justified, and given the status of not guilty, that

is something that we actually exchange with him. So now, he who knew no sin became sin, and we are the ones who become justified. That paradox happens right there on the cross, and that is why we can boast in our sufferings.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, we have paradox on paradox there. So, the cross is the ultimate paradox. It meant only death in the ancient world, and now for us it means life. But there is another paradox, right? God looks at us sinners and should see only the sin, but he doesn't. He sees potential saints. So, he makes us saints by pouring his grace into us. There is also one other thing I want to pick up on, Darrell, before we get too far from Romans 5 that we read a moment ago, the flip that we get on the cross...this symbol of death...this piece of execution gave life...causes a flip in our life. When we suffer now, Paul says, we can see that as a positive, too. It is building character in us; it is building perseverance; and Paul often said: You know, when I suffer, part of me is glad. I don't enjoy suffering...I am not a masochist...but Jesus suffered, so when I suffer, I feel like I am like Jesus. That is also a paradox in the Christian life that spins out of the cross. We regard our suffering for Christ as potentially positive because we are like the Master.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a beautiful thing; and in a previous episode, you talked about when you were a pastor and there was a gentleman who was getting ready to pass on and go home to be with the Lord, and he was wondering if the tapes would play of his whole life in front of everyone; but when we get this exchange that you are talking about, Scott, then that tape is blank. God has forgiven and God has paid for it. There is no past. Our past is now joined in with Christ's past, and we also now live the new life in him, which is what Romans 6 points us to; and so, we actually, when we suffer, we are put in the same place where Christ is, and we can actually say we are suffering like our Savior, and we are enduring persecution like our Savior. Those hardships will make us stronger, and we have had the exchange happen on the cross there. That is a beautiful exchange, because there are no more irreconcilable differences, and God has dealt with both sides of the problem.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There was a movie some years ago called *Trading Places* with Dan Akroyd and Eddie Murphy; and as the movie begins, Dan Akroyd plays this extremely snooty, rich guy. He's got lots of money, but he is kind of mean...he is not a very nice person. Eddie Murphy has no money. He is a beggar on the street and he is a crook...he is a criminal...he is a con man. Well, anyway, through a series of things, they switch places, and Dan Akroyd's character loses all his money. Eddie Murphy gets all his money; but at the end of the movie, they have switched places in a different sense. Dan Akroyd's character has become kind and Eddie Murphy's character has become honest. They traded places in terms of economics, but it ended up changing their hearts; and that is what happens with us, because God lets us trade places with Jesus. Jesus died for us. On the last program of this series, we are going to talk about what it means to be crucified *with* Christ...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that changes our hearts.

DARRELL DELANEY

This paradox we are going to continue to talk about. We want to know how to live in light of this paradox; and so, as we wrap up this program, we are going to talk about just that; so, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and the conclusion of this episode, number four in a seven-part series for the season of Lent, meditating on the cross of Jesus, and today it has been on the paradox of the cross; and in that connection, Darrell, we were in 1 Corinthians 1 a little

while ago and saw the paradox that the cross, which looks weak and foolish to the world, is strong and wise to God and to those who believe; but Paul has some more things to say about the Corinthians themselves.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we are looking back at Chapter 1 again, picking up here at verse 26. It says: Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of this world to shame the strong. ²⁸God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us the wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

The day Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 1, he really had his Wheaties for breakfast, because he is on a tear in this first chapter. He was amazing in verses 18 to 25 on the paradox of the cross; now, he goes to the Corinthians themselves and says: You know what? You know how the cross looks foolish to the world? So do you. You foolish looking people are God’s kind of people; because what the world thinks is foolish, God thinks is wise. What the world thinks is nothing...they think you are nothing. You are not celebrities, you are not in the *Who’s Who* of the Roman Empire, you are not of noble birth, you are not rich, you are not on the cover of *Time* magazine; you are not person of the year; but that makes you God’s kind of people. Another paradox: We who get *saved* through the paradox of the cross are ourselves paradoxical, because what the world doesn’t think much of us, God does.

DARRELL DELANEY

I am telling you right there, Scott, that is my praise break right there, because God is using the lowly things, the despised things, the things that are not to nullify the things that are. So, that includes me. I wasn’t born in a noble family; I wasn’t born with a silver spoon in my mouth, so to speak; but that God is saying: I am choosing you, and when things happen in your life, when I save you, when I sanctify you, you will know and you will give me all the glory, all the honor and all the praise because you couldn’t do that for yourself; and it wasn’t nothing about you that made you special, in order for God to pick you, because he doesn’t respect persons; he doesn’t show favoritism. He wanted to get all the glory, he chose those things that society might not have chosen; and I am excited about that because that includes you, that includes me, that includes us all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I may have used this illustration somewhere on *Groundwork* before, but years ago in the *New York Times* book review, there was an essay where somebody was lamenting the glut of autobiographies that were getting published, you know; including books where people tell their life stories, of celebrities who were only 28 years old; you know, it was like they’ve got a life story to tell at 28 years old? Anyway, this person was bemoaning all these, you know, throw-away autobiographies that were coming out. Then he quoted a statistic. He said: You know, there was a survey recently, where seventy percent of the American public thought they had a story worth telling; and he kind of rolled his eyes, like, yeah, right; but a week later, there was a letter to the editor that turned it on its head. Somebody said: So, that means thirty percent of the people think that their story isn’t worth telling? How tragic...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He turned it on its head, saying we all have a story worth telling. We are all precious in God’s sight. There are no throwaway people in God’s sight, which is just what you were saying. So, we were talking about how we want to make this series on the cross practical. This is it, Darrell; this is us, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You cannot feel worthless, because Jesus died for you. You cannot feel that you are of no account, because you are not famous like George Clooney is famous. You are God's kind of person. That is good news for every single one of us.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am so excited about the fact that God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. He always has been doing that; and also, the fact that this paradox is really powerful because Christ's death brings us life. The ironic thing about that paradox is that he beats death by dying...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, he actually beats death at its own game. He brings life to us in the process. It is really powerful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Those kinds of reversals get played with a lot. C. S. Lewis had it in [*The Chronicles of Narnia*] where it was the death of Aslan. The White Witch got tricked into killing Aslan, thinking that would do it...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But then Lewis says: Yes, but she forgot about the deep magic of the universe, that through Aslan's death would come her defeat and life would come.

Harry Potter's story is the same thing, right? Harry Potter, as it turns out, carries some of Voldemort...the Dark Lord, Voldemort's life...in him. So, when Voldemort kills Harry Potter, he doesn't actually kill Harry; he kills the little piece of himself that was in Harry, and then he dies, right? Those kinds of reversals that started with the gospel, literature still loves playing with that, because there is something amazing about it.

DARRELL DELANEY

And fiction is a really powerful way to get us to spark our imaginations to see these deeper truths. I love the fact that there are allegories and parables and things of that nature that God has used people to get those things to us, whether it be books or media. I am a movie fan, so I see a lot of different analogies in it; and I feel like it is also important to name that because this paradox is so powerful, it is the place where Christ took our penalty and then died; and because of that penalty being paid, our debt has now been paid in full; and that eternal debt has been taken away from us. So, we had the one Adam who sinned and brought in...we talked about this in an earlier episode...one Adam sinned and brought in death; the second Adam, being Christ, who brought in life eternal, and we have a new standing with him, so we are actually excited about that as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Ephesians 2: ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So, there again, Darrell, that wonderful, paradoxical exchange that happens at the cross: Sinners become righteous; life comes out of death; crucifixion leads to resurrection; it is just all the wonderful gospel message.

DARRELL DELANEY

And this grace is paradoxical in the cross; and we get an opportunity to live that new life, and share with others, and there is hope for them. So, we not only live it, but we share that good news that that grace is available for other people. It is our responsibility as Christians and disciples, thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we study scripture that helps us understand why the cross is completely sufficient for earning our salvation.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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Printed on July 16, 2025