
The Shame of the Cross

SCOTT HOEZEE

In October 1998, a University of Wyoming student named Matthew Shepard was brutally pistol-whipped by two men. Before leaving their victim, the men lashed Matthew's bloodied body to a fencepost. When the police arrived, they remarked that Matthew looked like a scarecrow, but some also noted the scene looked an awful lot like a crucifixion. Matthew died six days later. As much as anything, the spectacle of Matthew's body on that fencepost was striking to many. It was meant to be humiliating—shaming. That was the message of crosses in the Roman Empire, too. Crucifixions were intentionally humiliating and deeply shaming. Today on *Groundwork*, we will explore this aspect of Jesus' cross. 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 now our third program in a planned seven-part series meditating on different aspects of Jesus' cross, and crucifixion. So, this is a set of meditations for the season of Lent. In our first program, we looked at the really big question: Why...why did Jesus have to die? Why did it have to be a particular kind of death, too? In the second program, we looked at the curse of the cross. Not only did the Old Testament say that if you were hung on a tree, you were dying in a cursed way. Jesus also took on the larger curse of evil that went back to the Garden of Eden.

DARRELL DELANEY

And you also noted that because sin was a big and serious problem, it had to be addressed in a big and serious way...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

You cannot just sweep it under the rug and act like nothing happened. God cannot just overlook it; it needs to be addressed because of his holy and just character, and he did that through Jesus on the cross.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Jesus died to save us from our sins; and we are looking at those different angles or aspects of the cross of Jesus in this series, but not just for idle curiosity, right? Not just for biblical theology or academic's sake, but we are doing it to see how it is connected to our lives and to the salvation that we still enjoy today. So, we will always be in this series looking for those connections to our lives today. But today, we are thinking about shame; the shame aspect of the cross; and Darrell, we can begin by thinking about the uncomfortable topic to a degree: Why did the Roman Empire crucify people in the first place?

DARRELL DELANEY

The Roman Empire was looking to make this a spectacle; they were looking to make sure that they made a statement; and so, they would publicly put this cross and crucifixion out to embarrass the person who did the

crime, and to make a statement to the people. When they looked at it, they knew: Oh, you don't want to end up like this guy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and of course, all through history there have been different ways to execute people; even in the Bible time...Old Testament times stoning someone to death...that was a public event, and usually with public participation, literally...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But there has also been public spectacles of hangings or death by guillotine. After guns were invented, we have firing squads. Today, you know, most executions happen beyond the public eye. There was the electric chair for a while, but today, it is basically all lethal injection, which the public doesn't see. So, there have been executions...you know, people used to gather in the town square to watch somebody be hanged, and that was kind of rather grim and gruesome, right; but even those public ones weren't meant to be what you were just saying, Darrell, which was very interesting. This was like a public warning from the Roman Empire, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it was; and interestingly enough, in the last chapters of the book of Romans it says that you should also submit to the authorities because they have a sword [Romans 13:1-5], and that sword is what they have the authority to do: capital punishment—to exact punishment to people who do things—and the Romans specifically used this spectacle, and they wanted to make sure that you don't want to end up like this guy...you don't want to find your way in this. So, they kind of deterred any crime that would happen from people who didn't want to end up that way; and it was a humiliating way to be killed, and a humiliating way to die.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It was almost like they would use it like an advertising billboard along a highway today, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Behave or you will end up here...behave or else. So, the cross was meant to inspire dread; and dread, in turn, was supposed to inspire obedience. You obey the Caesar, you toe the line, you follow the rules, or else. So, the public humiliation of a crucifixion was sort of the cherry on top. Death had to happen; it was a slow, terrible, agonizing death, too. It was barbaric in almost every way; but death was almost an afterthought. The main thing was, the spectacle and the public warning that the citizenry would get through it; but of course, you know, Darrell, although people did pass by crosses, and we even see this in Jesus'...they hurled insults; sometimes they hurled objects, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

People saw it, but probably a lot of people averted their eyes. It was just too shameful to look at that naked man...and they were hoisted up naked on the cross...it was too shameful to even look at.

DARRELL DELANEY

Actually, in Genesis, where Noah's children were rebuked for looking at their father's nakedness; so, nakedness is seen as shameful after the fall; especially in a situation like this, where people are being crucified, people would avert their eyes as a sign of respect; or they just felt like: This is too embarrassing to look at. We have a passage in Isaiah 53 that talks about that:

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 humankind, 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, an arrow pointed straight toward Jesus; and toward the end of his life, certainly, people hide their faces. Now, we don't think Jesus was an ugly human being, but he certainly was despised and rejected, even in his life and ministry...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The religious authorities rejected his teaching, his own disciples misunderstood him half the time, abandoned him at the end, you know...to a person, they abandoned him. So, there was a sense in which this is Jesus. He is somebody who knew shame, and the feeling of being shamed, even by his own family. Remember the passage where his mother and brothers show up and they want to trundle him off home because they think he is off his rocker? He is out of his mind...he is crazy! We've got to hide him...we've got to hide him, you know; this is embarrassing for the whole family. I mean, nobody can shame you like your mother, right? So, Jesus knew shame in his whole life.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, I think it is important, just like you just said, Scott, that suffering for Jesus didn't start at the crucifixion. Suffering for Jesus actually went through his entire upbringing; and there is a time where he is teaching, and they say: Hey, Jesus; your mother and brothers are out here. It is like they are trying to pull him off the stage, so to speak...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because they are like, man, what is he talking about? His teachings...he is being despised and rejected throughout his life; and it is really crazy how some people think that is only at the cross, but Jesus is well acquainted with having people turn their faces away from him...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Turn their backs and walk away from him, even deny him. He has been through that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But it certainly reached its pinnacle; all of that combined, everything you were just talking about, Darrell, his whole lifelong climax on that shameful cross; and as we said a minute ago, you know, the Roman Empire...crosses...the very sight of a cross was supposed to inspire dread and fear. We have noted this

before on *Groundwork* episodes. Today, the cross is so commonplace. We see it on church signs, steeples, bulletin covers, book covers, jewelry...earrings, necklaces. If the people of the Roman Empire could see how we wear a cross for decoration today, they would gasp, because for them you didn't want to see a cross if you didn't have to. It was such a shameful thing; seeing a cross would make you shiver; but we said in the first program, Darrell, that Jesus had to die a shameful death like that. He couldn't die of food poisoning or a stroke. It had to be a shameful death. Why? Well, we will talk about that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are talking about the shame of the cross in this third part of a seven-part series on the cross of Jesus, Darrell. We have wondered why did Jesus have to die in a shameful way? Well, let's go right to a passage that deals with it. Philippians Chapter 2, a familiar verse that goes like this, starting in verse 5: In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in this passage here, a lot of scholars recognize that this is a psalm...this is a hymn that they would sing in the early Church; and you can see the steps down from glory...from the very nature of God, equality with God, making himself nothing, becoming a servant, made in human likeness, humbling himself, being obedient to death, even the death on a cross. It is like the cross is lower than low; it is lower than death; it is lower than the most humiliating and embarrassing thing that can happen; and Christ willingly took up that position for our sake.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is like watching a plane crash almost, you know. Here is a plane flying at 35,000 feet, something goes terribly wrong, and it goes down, down, down, down, down, until finally it explodes in a fireball on the ground. That is what Philippians 2 is. He is God—the Son of God, who became Jesus—he is God; but he didn't want to hang on to that equality. He willingly gave it up and just kind of took this downward spiral all the way to, not just death, but Paul uses the cross as an exclamation point, or the song does, that it wasn't just any old death, it was death on a cross, and that is very, very important.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is so important that they put it in the context of worship. So, everyone who is singing this, whether they knew how to read the scriptures, or even knew what was going on if they are new Christians, or even if they have been worshipping for years, they understood that the humiliation of Christ on the cross is exactly why we are here. This is why we get this saying, because the next part of this is the exaltation...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is actually our story that we get to enjoy because of Christ's work for us; but to have this part as actually the apex point—the chiasm, the cross part—the main focus, is really exciting for us to remember and for these churches that ended up singing these songs to remember.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; interesting. This is one of the first songs they ever wrote, and they went right to the cross. Isn't that interesting? The early Church recognized already what was saving about Jesus' particular form of death. He emptied himself. That is the key verse here in verse 7. Some verses say he made himself nothing, but it is really the Greek word *kenoó*, from which there is a whole branch of theology, Darrell, called *kenosis*...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Theology, as you know. So, he emptied himself—made himself nothing. C. S. Lewis once colorfully put it this way: If you want to get the idea of what it must be like to be the Son of God, to wake up one day as a human baby with a diaper on in a manger, just imagine how you would feel if you wake up some morning and you have become a garden slug. A rather vivid image, I would say, from Mr. Lewis, but I think he is probably right. He humbled himself. He had to endure shame, but why? Darrell, it goes all the way back to the beginning of the biblical story.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, let's look at it in Genesis. There is just this line from Genesis, before the fall. It says: ^{2:25}Adam and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame.

We kind of glaze over...we heard it a lot of times, I think...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

But the "no shame" is more than just a physical nakedness, even though that is part of it. The "no shame" means: I look at you in the eye, you look at me in the eye; we are intimate—into-me-see—intimacy. We get to trust each other, we get to fully disclose everything; and that is what we have before the fall, but then when the fall comes in and we become ashamed of who we are, now we have reasons to hide, because of sin; but when there was no sin, there was no need to hide.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and we do, we get hung up on the physical nakedness, and you know, you get all these paintings and pictures and Sunday school illustrations of conveniently placed palm fronds, and hibiscus flowers; but that really wasn't the key thing, right? You are right. They had no hidden agenda.

DARRELL DELANEY

Exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They could be transparent to each other. They could be transparent to God. So, what is the first thing that changed after they messed up? Well, again, here it is from Genesis 3:

⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. ⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" ¹⁰He answered, "I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Again, the physical nudity isn't the key here, it is what he is trying to hide in his heart.

DARRELL DELANEY

Exactly; so, there was an intimate connection. The word *know* in Hebrew is really about having an intimate connection with the relationship with someone. It says Adam and Eve knew each other and they had children. So, that is a physical connection, but they had a spiritual connection with God before the fall, and so, when they sinned, they broke that connection, and now they find a reason to be ashamed, because they have literally broken the one law that God gave them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right; and so now God's presence, which had been welcoming, is a threat. They hid because they had something *to* hide, right? It makes sense if you read it that way. I mean, so, you know, we find out they eat the apple—the forbidden fruit—right? And they realize they are naked. Well, if you have never had clothing before of any kind, how do you all of a sudden realize you are naked? It is not like Adam could say to Eve: Dear, you are out in public, put on your bathrobe at least. She didn't have a bathrobe. No, it wasn't the physical nakedness, or if it was, it was just a sign of the spiritual nakedness. They didn't need just fig leaves to hide their private parts, they needed something to hide their dirty hearts now.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and so, that is where their shame comes in, Scott, because it is like I am sorry for what I did, but I am also sorry for who I am. So, shame actually, I believe, goes against the image of God that he made us in...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because we were created to have no shame; we were created to be fully open...fully transparent; but when sin entered in to this world as a foreign ingredient—a contaminant—then we couldn't be proud of who we were anymore; and so, we try to hide it with figurative fig leaves, with achievements, with status, with riches, with education; with other things we try to achieve for ourselves, we still try to cover the shame, but we cannot wash it away; we cannot ignore it. That is why we need the Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To have no shame...to have no reason to avert our eyes or look down at our feet or shuffle our feet on the ground like we do when we are embarrassed and in shame, that is how God made us. Feeling ashamed and humiliated is what we did to ourselves in sin; and so, to set the cosmos right again, the Son of God had to be humble enough to enter our shame on something like the cross on Golgotha, so the saving act fit the original crime; but as we said at the beginning of the program, Darrell, what does that mean for us today? Well, stay tuned because we are going to think about that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, as we close this program on the shame of the cross, let's put two Bible verses in front of ourselves and go from there. Here is Hebrews 12: ¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race that is marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

DARRELL DELANEY

And let's couple that with the New Testament verse from 1 Peter Chapter 2, where there are actually parallels as well: ⁴As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For in scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there is an extremely important line there, that Peter is quoting from the Old Testament, I think, and Paul will quote it elsewhere as well. Here is what Peter is saying: Because Jesus endured the shame of the cross, we will never be put to shame when we put our trust in Christ alone; and that is an amazing message; and it really should be the cause of ongoing celebration in our lives as disciples.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, it is interesting how in Hebrews 12 it says that Christ scorned shame. It is like he shamed shame by taking on the very thing that was shameful and turning it into a way of salvation for us. It was a beautiful thing, and those who trust in him, like 1 Peter says, will never be put to shame. That is a promise; that is something that we can hold onto, that we could actually know that we have that promise that we will never be put to shame, no matter what happens in our lives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, there is probably not a person listening to this program, Darrell, including the two men at the microphones here, who do not have firsthand experiences with and firsthand memories of experiences with feelings of shame. Yes, sometimes it might be about our physical bodies. You know, we don't like other people seeing us naked for all kinds of reasons. It is even uncomfortable at the doctor's office when you have to do that, but it is spiritual, mental shame that we all know the best, and experience the most often. It is those people in our lives whom we can no longer look straight in the eye when we run into them. It is even the Genesis 3-like sense of not being able, as it were, to look God straight in the eye. That is the kind of shame we know really well.

DARRELL DELANEY

I have experienced this shame in my own life, especially when I break the rules. We said in the other program that God has put the law in our hearts. We know right from wrong; and whenever we break that code, we do feel the sense of shame, like there is something that has broken in us, and we need to repent...we need to have that restored. So, it is important for us to know that that shame is real, to not ignore it, to not escape it, to not medicate it; but then, God has provided a way to deal with that shame. Enter Christ and his salvation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, in the *Lord of the Rings* novel by J. R. R. Tolkien, but also in the Peter Jackson movie...the first movie...*The Fellowship of the Ring*...we have this fellowship...this group of hobbits, men, a dwarf, an elf, a wizard...and they all come before this semi-divine elf queen named Galadriel, and she is very wise and penetrating. She is almost semi-divine. Anyway, there is a man in this group named Boromir who has a terrible secret in his heart. He wants to steal the ring of power from Frodo, the hobbit, who is entrusted to destroy it, right? So, he has this dark secret in his heart. Well, Galadriel looks at all of them, and they all look back at her with wonder and amazement and awe because she is so beautiful and so...but when she looks at Boromir, he shudders and he looks away. He cannot hold her gaze because he knows she knows what is in his heart; and that is a terrible feeling, right? It is a terrible feeling; and if you had to worry that you would feel that way one day in front of God, that would be a source of ongoing worry. He can see right through me, and if all I have is what I have done, then I cannot look God in the eye. I might be going to hell for all I know.

DARRELL DELANEY

When you were talking about these things, Scott, there are so many echoes I see in scripture. In the Old Testament, in Psalm 139:2* when David is confessing his sin, he says: You know when I sit, when I rise; you see my thoughts from afar...

Then, when Jesus predicts that Peter will betray him, and then in one gospel he looks at him right after he does it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

And then Judas...he is looking him right in the face, and he is dipping the bread, and he says: Whatever you've got to do, go ahead and do it. I know what you are going to do. So God, in his divine omniscience and knowledge can see and know that we are ashamed of what we are doing, and he doesn't call us out, but the Holy Spirit convicts us, and the good news is, we don't have to live in that shame.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus took it for us. When I was a seminary intern at a church, it was the very first time I had ever walked with a man through his own journey with cancer, and it was clear he was going to die one day soon, and still, I can remember, Darrell, so vividly, we were sitting in his living room, just the two of us, and he had this idea that a lot of us have, that on the last day of the judgment, God was going to show the movie of his life to the whole world. Everything he had ever done was going to be up on this big screen; and he looked at me and he said: Scott, how will I ever endure the shame of all that? Because there is stuff I have done...you know, I am ashamed. I remember vividly what he said; I cannot remember what I said. Here is what I *hope* I said: No; you won't have to do that. You know, as Peter said, we will never be put to shame when we put our hope in Christ alone, because Jesus endured the shame of the cross. He took all the shame of our sin on himself. We don't have to have that worry that we are not going to be able to meet Jesus' gaze when he looks at us at the last day. He took care of that.

DARRELL DELANEY

What is beautiful about that, Scott, is that even though in the Old Testament...and sometimes in our own lives...we try to cover ourselves figuratively...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But we realize that when we trust God and he becomes our forgiveness, we receive his spiritual covering; and there is a scripture about that in Romans 10. It says that: ¹¹Anyone who believes in Jesus will never be put to shame; and we can say in response to that: Thanks be to God, again and again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen. Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Please join us again next time as we study the scriptures to help us understand the paradox of the cross.

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

DARRELL DELANEY

Groundwork is a listener supported program produced by ReFrame Ministries. Visit reframeministries.org for more information.

***Correction:** The audio of this program misstates the reference for this passage as Psalm 51. The correct reference is Psalm 139:2.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/the-shame-of-the-cross>

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