

What it Means to be God's Chosen People

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have all met people who are amazing students of the Bible. Maybe such a person is a preacher, an evangelist, or a missionary; or maybe it is just a fellow church member who displays startlingly good facility with scripture passages and Bible studies and the like. Such people always seem to have a Bible verse on the tip of their tongue. They remember where very specific topics are addressed, and can quote chapter and verse. In 1 Peter 2, the Apostle Peter displays his own virtuoso ability to connect various scripture passages together to create new meanings. Today on *Groundwork*, we will see how he does that. So, 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, we are doing five programs in this series on 1 Peter, and then we will do three more programs on 2 Peter. This is now the third program on 1 Peter. We are mostly going to look today at 1 Peter 2. We got into just a little bit of that in the second program, but now we will take the rest of 1 Peter 2 in this program; and Darrell, we have noted that both of these letters appear to have been written to gentile Christians who were scattered in the mid-1st Century throughout Asia Minor, or what we today call Turkey.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, there are a lot of different Christians in that area, and the Roman Empire has taken over the known world in those places, and of course, they worshipped many gods and had many different things going on; and worshipping the true and living God, calling Jesus Christ the Resurrected One—your Lord and Savior—is a problem for an emperor named Nero.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, exactly; and that is why, indeed, suffering is one of the major themes. There are several major themes that we picked on in the first two programs. The one is Peter likes to talk a lot about the new identity we have received in Christ. We are going to see more of that, and hear now, in 1 Peter 2 on this program; but also, he does talk about suffering, as the early Christians did endure a lot of persecution, particularly with wicked Caesars like the Nero; but as we continue now in 1 Peter 2, we will see that now Peter is going to extend that focus on the new identity we all receive in Christ, and how that gives us comfort and confidence when we do endure trials and suffering.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and so, we are reminded, Scott, that we have a living hope in Christ. It is not some abstract concept, but it is Jesus himself who is the hope that keeps everyone going; that gives them the strength to endure; and in Chapter 2 he talks similarly about this same hope in a very concrete way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, let's listen now. This is 1 Peter 2:4. Peter writes: As 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.”

DARRELL DELANEY

⁷Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” ⁸and “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, if you have a Bible in front of you as you listen to us here, then you will notice the footnotes that come here, and that Peter is weaving here together three different passages from two different biblical books. He quotes in this order: Isaiah 28, Psalm 118, and then Isaiah 8. In just a moment, Darrell, we will see what happens when he weaves those all together; but first, again, we can note that image of a living stone, which is similar to the living hope in Chapter 1. It is a very striking image, and the living stone, like the living hope is Jesus, the living stone is Christ Jesus himself, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, it is interesting how Peter and Paul use scripture in a way that is very unique, that the Spirit gives them the authority and the ability to do. They use the scripture to prove the point. We, when we preach it, we explain the context and then give you the scripture, because we need to fill in all the things because we are far apart from the generation in which he was writing; but they understood the context, so he doesn't need to do all of that. So, he goes right to these Bible verses to express the point and tie it together by the Spirit's wisdom to show where Christ is, even in the Old Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, he starts in Isaiah 28 with a *living Stone*—a *precious Cornerstone*—oh, and that reminds Peter of Psalm 118 about the Stone that the builders rejected becoming the Cornerstone; and then he goes back to Isaiah 8 and says; Yes, but if you reject that stone, then you are going to trip over it. It is not going to become a source of life for you. You are going to stub your toe and you are going to hit the ground because you are not obeying what the message says; and that is that we have to accept Christ. So, it is very, very interesting. The other interesting thing, Darrell, is something we have talked about in other *Groundwork* programs, and that is that Psalm 118:22 on the stone that the builders rejected, that is the most often quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament, which is kind of funny, because if you had just been reading Psalm 118 and got to verse 22, you would never have guessed that out of the whole Old Testament, that was going to become the favorite verse in the New Testament, but it did.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is interesting how the Holy Spirit keeps hitting this same point to make sure that we don't miss it; and what we teach when we teach people how to study God's Word is that if something keeps coming back up, it doesn't mean God is redundant. God doesn't waste any words. He wants us to understand that that is a very important point. So, when they keep quoting it, they want us to remember who Christ is, what he has done, and the fact that he opposes those who walk against his will is why the stumbling block message still comes up, because this world is still against him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the apostles looked at the verse in Psalm 118:22 and said: You know, that sounds a lot like Jesus. The one who was despised, who was rejected, just like that cornerstone. He was treated that way. The authorities literally tried to cross him out eventually, that is how despised and rejected Jesus was...how marginalized Jesus was; and yet, God raised him to new life, such that his death becomes the gateway to new life. So, Psalm 118:22 is kind of the little verse that could, because it just sounded so much like the gospel. So, the apostles just kept coming back to it; and as you say, Darrell, that tells you something really significant is going on there.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it also, Scott, foreshadows the fact that if the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and it is a stumbling block for those, it is actually foreshadowing who we are called to be, because if we are part of the living hope and we are a chosen nation, then we are part of this, as being the living stones that we are called to be, that is going to happen to us as believers as well. So, we have another way and a special way to identify with Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; there are two things going on here at once: On the one hand, Peter says: All of you, you are all living stones; you are the building block of a new spiritual edifice, which is surely he means the Church, right? So, you are the living stones that create the walls of this new church—this new building; and at the same time, you are the people who live inside the building. You are the walls and the people inside; and if that seems a little confusing, Peter isn't worried about that at all. He just wants to create such a dynamic picture here, as dynamic as he can, to show what we receive in Christ; but he has a lot more to say in the rest of Chapter 2, and that is coming up next, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

Darrell, let's dig right back into 1 Peter 2, now beginning in verse 9. Peter writes: But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹²Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, I love this language, Scott; this royal priesthood, chosen people, holy nation, God's special possession; and he is echoing what he said in the earlier chapters about how we are called to live a set-apart life. He is speaking to these gentile Christians, saying: You don't live the way you used to live. You don't live the way everyone else is living; but God has set you apart for his purposes, that you may witness and declare praises of him in the midst of challenges; and that is unique language, isn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is; and because we said, I think, in the first program of this series, when we were in 1 Peter 1, that Peter is writing, as you just said, Darrell, to mostly gentile Christians; people who did not have a heritage or a history with the nation of Israel. They had not been the chosen people of God, but what is interesting is that throughout this letter, Peter refers to, and addresses these Gentiles as though they were Jewish...as though they were the people of ancient Israel. He uses the exact same language that the Old Testament uses for set-aside Israel, for now also the Gentiles who have been grafted in, as it says elsewhere; and so, Peter really piles on the language that, in the Old Testament, was ever and only associated with ancient Israel, but now it perfectly describes, not just the literal descendants of Abraham and Sarah, out of whom came the nation of Israel, but everybody who is now part of the new Israel, which is the Church.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, Peter is saying: Okay, Gentiles; I know you haven't been part of the program for a long time, but let me put you into the information and bring you up to speed. This is now your history. This is now your promises. This is now the covenant that God has made to you as well, because Abraham is the father of many nations, that includes you as well. Spiritually speaking, the Holy Spirit has made you family with us. You

have the same benefits, the same access to God, and the unity that we now share together; and that is what Peter wants them to know.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we share a common and very specific vocation. We have a task, and that is what? To declare God's praises. We sing to God in Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit; and why? Why are we called to praise God? Because, Peter says, God called us out of darkness into what Peter calls God's wonderful light...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me of John 1 and that image where the Word of God, whom John writes about in his prologue, that Word is the same light that shines in the darkness, but the darkness cannot comprehend it or extinguish it. We are inside now, God's wonderful light; and that is a pretty amazing and special image.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it is; and the light that we are called to live in is the place that testifies of who God is and what God has done. That is not easy in a world that continues to propagate darkness and continues to live this way. So, it can be a very hard and challenging place to shine your light.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And, you know, speaking of that darkness image, I mean, all of us can be a little afraid of the dark, and of dark places. In fact, places that seem perfectly safe to us in broad daylight can be a little spooky or fraught with danger at night, because you know, you cannot see that there might be somebody lurking around the next corner. Ancient people had a lot of fears of the darkness. So, the idea that that is where we were once forced to live spiritually all the time, in the dark; wow, that we got to move out of that and into the wonderful light; a wonderful light that never switches off; that is profoundly, profoundly comforting.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, darkness could also be a stretched metaphor if you think about it. It is a place that you have no awareness, no understanding, no illumination, but when that light comes—that light who is God—that is, the true light; then he brings you into his revelation of understanding how things really are, who you really are, and what you really have to do as far as his call; and that is a beautiful thing. So, that is why we go from no people to a royal people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; once you were *no* people—you were nobody. It reminds of the Beatle's song, *Nowhere Man*: He's a real nowhere man, living in his nowhere land, making all his nowhere plans for nobody! That is fairly bleak; but indeed, it makes us think of being aimless and pointless and at loose ends, and nobody wants to feel that way. You know, I don't want to feel like I have no purpose. You don't want to feel like you are at loose ends; you know, we want to live in ways that add up to something meaningful. Well, Peter said: Once you were just pointless. You had no real meaning. You were in the dark, and you were pointless; but now you have received mercy, and so now you are a people, saved by grace alone, and that is just wonderful, good news. That is the essence of the gospel.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it is; and I think, unknowingly, when we were walking around in darkness, we really are searching for significance. We are searching for: Does my life matter? Does it make a difference? If you know people who are struggling with this, we do know the real hope is to be connected to God and allow his light to shine in us; and in that way, we can see our path; why we were created and what we need to do; and that is what Peter is trying to remind them in the midst of suffering, because when you go through pain, and when you go through challenges, it is sometimes hard to remember those things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; but then Peter has to also issue a warning: Look, there are still sinful desires at war within you; don't give in to them; not just because that is the wrong way to live...not just because it is, you know, naughty or bad, but Peter gives another reason here, and that is that we don't want to any ammunition to people who are just eager to say: Aha! See, those Christians are fake; they are phonies; they think they are better than everybody else; but they are really not. Don't give them a chance to say that, Peter says. Lead such good lives that when they try to say something bad about you, they are going to have to make something up, or they are just going to come up empty. Don't help the people who want to harm you as the Church of God.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, that means it's bigger than me then, Scott. I mean, it is not just about what I want to do or what I don't want to do, it is who I represent; because if I am an ambassador for Christ, I have to do what he would do and say what he would say and act as he would act in that situation. Unfortunately, people will see, if you do go the wrong way, then God is the one who gets the bad rap. God is the one who...they are like: I am not going to church with those people, because look at that; they are hypocrites; they are not doing what they said they were going to do; but if we live the way God has called us to live, then they will not be able to slander us, they will not be able to say anything, because we will be blameless before them by God's help.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and then Peter says something very odd, Darrell. He says that if you do that, then those people will give glory to God on the day Christ returns. Now, I don't really know what that means. Does it mean that if we do lead consistently good lives, people will want to get in on that? They will want to become part of that people? Does it mean they are going to have some conversion at the moment when Christ appears, and they are going to say: Oh, they were right all along! I am not quite sure what that curious verse means, but it does say, again, Darrell, when we resist sinful desires and sinful behavior, it leads to everything good and nothing bad.

DARRELL DELANEY

I am going to go back to the Sermon on the Mount on that one, Scott. Actually, when Jesus says: Let your light shine before people, so that when they see your good deeds, they will glorify your Father in heaven. So, I feel like Peter again, because he is an eye witness to Jesus and he lived with Jesus. There is this echo in his spirit that he will say something that reminds us of what the Sermon on the Mount says there; and it is actually good motivation to heed his advice there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But in just a moment, there is a little bit more here in 1 Peter 2, so, stay tuned.

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 next up, Darrell, in 1 Peter 2 are some words that I am sure some people found hard to swallow at the time; so, let's hear that.

DARRELL DELANEY

Starting in verse 13, it says: Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. ¹⁶Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, keep in mind what we said: The people to whom Peter is writing were suffering persecution, and most of the worst of it was at the hands of the Roman Empire, and from the Caesar and his minions. So, I am sure, Darrell, that the people who first got this letter in the 1st Century found it to be a pretty tall order to hold in honor the emperor. I mean, honor Nero, who mercilessly killed Christians?! Honor the governors, who carried out the emperor's pogroms of persecution? Somehow or other, yes. So, Peter is kind of echoing the Apostle Paul in Romans 13, when there Paul says: God uses civil authorities to help nations stay in control, and to punish those who commit crimes. But of course, the problem here is that these are the same people who are punishing those who's only crime was to love Jesus as Lord; so, these words had to cause some real consternation, I would think, from the people who first read them.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I feel like it is a situation that is very challenging. I think it impossible to do without the help of the Spirit, but these are things that happen to people...individuals. But there have been cases in history, of course we know, where... I mean, if Martin Luther King says an unjust law is no law at all, and he found ways to do...taking a page from Mahatma Gandhi...civil disobedience in a way to protest against and to challenge the government...speak truth to power. So, there will be times where you honor the emperor in this way, or the president, whoever is in charge; but there will be other times when there is civil disobedience, where you decide peacefully: No; we are not going to do that because we need the system to change. And so, which is it? Oh, you have to trust the Spirit to find out which case you use it in; and in this case, Peter is saying you are not going to be able to upset the apple cart as far as the government establishment, but you are able to honor God anyway, and this is how.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you do it with honor; you do it with respect, right? It is not easy to do. We have mentioned the Sermon on the Mount earlier, and I think even in our next program we are going to see some echoes of the Sermon on the Mount; you know, Peter was there that day when Jesus spoke those words: to pray for your enemies; to pray for those who persecute you. Did somebody slap you on your right cheek? Well, expose the left cheek so they can whack you again. You know, let's never pretend that what Jesus asks of us is easy. It surely doesn't come naturally; but here again, like we saw earlier in the previous segment of this program, Darrell, Peter claims that among the reasons to behave this way is to silence people who are just itching for a chance to prove that Christians are phonies. So, be polite; be respectful; be in due submission as far as it lies with you to those who are charged with law and order; and that will take away any opportunities or ammunition that people could use to call Christianity and the whole Church just a hypocritical façade and fake.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right; and that we are witnesses in that way. So, Peter deals with authorities, and then he goes into this next section, where he deals with the slaves and servants. So, he says: ¹⁸Slaves, in reverent fear of God, submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also those who are harsh. ¹⁹For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ²²“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” ²³When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” ²⁵For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we said earlier in 1 Peter 2 that he went twice to Isaiah, and now he is going back to Isaiah; this time the well-known 53rd Chapter on Jesus as the Suffering Servant, the one whose suffering would bring

redemption; the one who was wounded and treated like and punished like a sinner, even though he wasn't, and he stood up under that kind of unjust persecution; and so, that is sort of a model when *we* suffer unjustly, too; but let's just admit, Darrell, that all of us who despise any form of slavery, we are going to stumble a little bit about these words that tell slaves to submit to their masters, even if they are harsh. You know, many of us believe that the ultimate arc of the kingdom of God as it is presented in the New Testament is toward the elimination of slavery, but it was a fact of life in the 1st Century; and so, those caught up in that system had to be encouraged to live as Christians even inside of that.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is true, every station God can address, and let's just be clear that this is not the chattel slavery that we had in the United States in the history of this, and the way that this verse and verses like it have been abused and used in a way that has not been redemptive or helpful. That was not the intent of the scripture. I believe the intent of the scripture is to show that no matter what station of life you find yourself in, you can still find a way to honor God and glorify him. There were indentured servants and slaves in that time that needed to know: Oh, well; what do we do? Because we are having harsh treatment from our masters; and Peter addresses that here, because it is a station, and he is showing that because we are new and a royal priesthood, and a different kind of people, we have a different way to respond.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, taken together, 1 Peter 2, God is building a new spiritual house. The living stone of Jesus is the cornerstone; and the rest of us are living stones who build up and form the walls of that Church, even as we populate that Church; and all of this is because of that great mercy of God. Everything Peter describes adds up to our being unique, to our being set apart, Darrell, as you just said; to our being flat out so different that when those around us in this fallen, broken world try to accuse us of something, they are going to come up emptyhanded. We cannot do this on our own, we can only do it by grace; but by grace we can do it, thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue our study of 1 Peter in Chapter 3.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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