

Why Jesus Had to Die on a Cross

SCOTT HOEZEE

When I was a sophomore at Calvin College, I was part of a group that visited Germany for five weeks. Now, when you are learning a foreign language, it is amazing to hear little children speaking that language fluently. One little boy we met in Germany was the son of the owner of a place where we stayed, and no matter what this little boy's father said to him, the child had a one-word response: *warum*...why? Now, this was years before I became a parent, and discovered that the question *why* is on the lips of children a lot. It is how they discover how the world works; but sometimes after we grow up, we don't ask why often enough, especially on familiar subjects. A good example is the cross of Jesus Christ. Why? Why a cross? Why a crucifixion? On this episode of *Groundwork*, we will ask that very question. 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 kicking off with this program a seven-part series on the cross of Jesus, and we are doing this as a Lenten reflection for the season of Lent, that will then lead us also up to Easter. We are going to ask the question: Why did Jesus have to die on a cross?

DARRELL DELANEY

I love this season because we are actually preparing for the great Resurrection Day. It is really good for us to understand why we do what we do, because sometimes we get so caught up in the traditions and the season and the Church calendar that we don't pay close attention to the implications of what it means.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, in the course of this series, we will ask how are we involved in Jesus' death? We are going to look at different aspects of the cross, and there are quite a few; again, we are going to have a seven-part series on it. So, there are lots of different angles we can take on the cross. We don't want to do it academically, right? We don't want to do this just for the sake of asking questions. We are involved in this, Darrell, and so this has deep application for our lives, and we will see that by the end of this program; and we hope that everybody can see that by the end of the whole series as well. But today, specifically, we are going to take on that big question: Why...why did Jesus have to die on a cross, specifically?

DARRELL DELANEY

It couldn't be just that he would get hit by a car or he, you know, just passed away of natural causes; it had to be a specific way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Death by food poisoning wouldn't have done it, right? If he had stroke or a heart attack, right? Somehow or other, the Bible says: No, this cross has to be the way Jesus dies. We have to recognize that according to the Bible, something is very, very seriously wrong with this world, and it has to be fixed in a very, very serious way.

DARRELL DELANEY

When I was in Bible college, the professor talked about the radical seriousness of our sin, and a lot of us like to kind of glaze over and minimize things, but we realize that even when you get into the Bible, we cannot even get through Chapter 3 before you see the fall of humanity happen, and everything changed from that point on; and that is where I would like to pick up, in Genesis 3, picking up from these words. It says: ¹⁴So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is. After eating the forbidden fruit, being tempted by this serpent, we get here, Darrell...and we've talked about this before on *Groundwork*...Genesis 3:15 here is what scholars have a very, very big jaw-breaking term: the *protoevangelium*, which literally means the first hint of the gospel—the first preview of the gospel. Somebody is going to come from a woman, who is going to crush the head of this serpent. There is going to be a battle, but it is going to end well. There will be a fix to what just went terribly wrong there in the Garden of Eden. So, that is the first hint of the gospel already in Genesis Chapter 3; and by the time we get to the New Testament, we find the apostles kind of giving some interpretations on how that all goes.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is also right here in Romans 5, Paul is speaking about it. He says: ¹²Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—^{15b}For it the many died by the trespass of one man (Adam), how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by that grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! ¹⁷For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Romans 5 here. Paul basically says...you know, there is an old saying...what is it? In Adam's fall we sinned all, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Adam and Eve took us all down the tubes. Death came to everybody through these original parents...we sometimes refer to them as our first parents in Paradise. That is not so good, but Paul says there is a flip side: Life can come to all who believe through a second Adam. So, we had the first Adam messed up...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Brought death to all of us; but there is going to be a second Adam, and he is going to be so full of grace, and he is going to be so full of the power of God that if you associate yourself with that second Adam, you are going to get more life coming from him than you got death from the first Adam; and that is also the gospel.

DARRELL DELANEY

What is beautiful about that, Scott, is that from Genesis 3 on, you see God's redemptive plan active at work in human history...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, God built in a solution even before we fully understood the problem. So, God is actually on the case and doing this initiating and intervening in the situation that is going to become a blessing for us; and so, Paul calls him...metaphorically...Jesus...the second Adam...so that we could be redeemed.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Indeed. So, something went terribly wrong in God's good order; and if it is one thing, Darrell, that we see from the get-go in the Bible, it is that there are some things that are so bad that you cannot just wave them away...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You cannot just sweep it under the rug. This was a situation of cosmic sinfulness and brokenness; so, God couldn't just say to Adam and Eve: Oh, okay; let's just pretend that didn't happen. Okay, we can just go on now; forgive and forget; live and let live; live and learn. No; something big got busted, and it is going to have to be fixed in a very, very serious way.

DARRELL DELANEY

I understand that God has a holy character. It is spotless, it is blameless, it is perfect; and sin in the presence of a holy God...God is offended by this sin. That is why it cannot be ignored. He wouldn't be a good judge...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

He wouldn't be righteous if he just said: Oh, don't worry about it. We will think about that later. God is holy; he has to address it; but the way he addresses it is the really interesting thing that I would love us to talk about.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and we will be talking about it in this program and the next six in this seven-part series on the cross. My teacher, Neal Plantinga, noted in his systematic theology class I took in seminary back in the 1980s that isn't it odd that in the Bible it looks like creating the universe was easier for God than redeeming it. In Genesis it goes: boom, boom, boom; or the Germans would say: *zack, zack, zack!* Let there be, let there be, let there be—pop, pop, pop. It just happened, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But salvation is going to take longer; and the Son of God is going to be screaming in pain and agony from a cross before it is done. It looks a lot harder to fix it, almost, than it did to create it in the first place.

DARRELL DELANEY

If that road to redemption takes a lot longer, and it is going to be more pain for him, then we get to see that unfold in the scripture, and in our lives; but in the next moment, we are going to explore the aspect of justice so we can go deeper. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this first episode of a seven-part season of Lent series, Darrell, on the cross of Jesus: what does it mean? What are the components of a crucifixion that were necessary for our salvation? We are going to be exploring that in this series; and in this particular one, we are looking at sort of the big question: Why did Jesus have to die in a violent way at all? We have already answered the question: Because something went really, really wrong in God's creation, and we encountered that already in Genesis 3.

DARRELL DELANEY

And also, we talked about how God's holy character was offended by that; and that is an issue, not only of just holiness and righteousness, but justice as well; and so, we are going to spend some time here unpacking a little bit about God's just character.

SCOTT HOEZEE

John Calvin, the theologian...the Reformation theologian...when he tried to define the image of God, he said: The image of God means that Adam and Eve in their pre-sinful selves were created in perfect righteousness, knowledge, and holiness. We were created holy like God is holy. We were righteous. So, what do we mean by righteousness? Well, it means that there is such a thing as a moral straight edge. There is a straight line in the universe: God. God's character is righteous and holy. So, he is the straight line to which everybody else has to compare what the lines of their lives look like, and the question is: do we line up...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In a one-to-one correspondence with God's moral line, or are we at variance?

DARRELL DELANEY

And the bad news is, we found ourselves way out of variance there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

We tried our best in our own efforts to make straight lines. It is kind of like a person who doesn't know how to write with their non-dominant hand, trying to write things. You would never be able to understand it. So, our best efforts, the Bible says, we all fall short of the glory of God. And so, because God has that holy standard, we have to understand how sinful we are; and I think this scripture here in Isaiah Chapter 10 explains how sinful we can be; and we have made unjust laws and we have lived in unjust ways.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Isaiah 10: Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, ²to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. ³What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches?

So, there in Isaiah, Darrell, that theme of justice, which in Hebrew and in Greek is basically the same word as righteousness. It is *tsedeq* in Hebrew, *dikiaosuné* in Greek, for those who like to hear those words...probably about two or three people like to hear those words; but, as you said, we don't line up...you know, I've got a piece of paper in my hand that was printed on a word processor, and this document is left justified, which means all the words on the left side of the page are in a straight line, just like the edge of the paper. They are justified—they line up right. We aren't justified next to God's straight line. I don't know about you, but my moral line zig-zags. I don't walk in a straight moral line for long before I mess up, and I am crooked. I am

not corresponding—I am not justified with God’s straight-edge morality.

DARRELL DELANEY

And God has made that clear in scripture, how we should live; and the problem...and I am guilty of this, too...is that sometimes I compare my moral line to some other person’s moral line, which will probably sometimes make me look better; but that has never been the standard for me to measure my moral line to someone else’s moral line. It has always been to God’s standard...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Of moral line, and we definitely fall short of it; and the issue with this, like you were reading in the passage, Scott, is that there is a serious situation that has happened. There has been a crime, and somebody has to pay for that. We cannot just let it go because of God’s character. Now, if we were in a court of law and we saw a judge who just dismissed every case, we would say: What a horrible judge!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

But then, God is the judge par excellence; and so, he has to deal with crime; he has to deal with brokenness and sin.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, there are a lot of things that go wrong in life that we can just sort of wink at or say it is okay, you know; somebody breaks a glass at the dinner table by mistake, or you know, you hit a baseball and it breaks somebody’s window; but when there is a kidnapping...when there is a rape...when there is a murder or a lynching...people in all societies basically all through history have looked at that and said: That is not right. Something has got to be done.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We cannot fix it many times if somebody is dead...if they have been murdered, we cannot fix it. We cannot restore the situation, but somehow, the books of justice had better balance. So, some kind of punishment has to be meted out. Something has to be done, we say that, something has to be done! And as you said, Darrell, if we say that, God for sure says it.

DARRELL DELANEY

And God does have the divine ledger that balances all books...he does. You just mentioned that if someone gets raped or gets murdered, that cannot be ignored; and that is our God. He has a holy character; and if you are a just and good judge, you are going to address this situation in a way that is different than pardon. So, what I wanted to tell you, too, was that grace and mercy are different from pardon.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, if you ignore a sin, then that is not pardon, that is mercy...that is grace. You don’t deserve that. Pardon is when charges are dropped; and God has to intervene in order for charges to change; and he does with his Son.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We apply this to individual situations—to an individual person who committed a crime, but we can pull back a little farther, and sometimes we see how systemic evil can be, and whole societies or governments...the Nazis...had to be held accountable. Hitler died...different people...but the Nazis that survived and were captured were put on trial in Nuremberg after World War II, right? Apartheid in South Africa...yes, it was ended, right? And Nelson Mandela became president, but they couldn't just let the past drop. So, Archbishop Desmond Tutu chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We've got to talk this out. We've got to admit what happens, and there has to be some sort of consequences, because otherwise we look at it and we say: That ain't right. That is just not right. You cannot just...you know...or, you know, we've seen it, unfortunately, in the United States, when police murder sometimes an innocent Black man, and then the juries don't convict them; and we say: He got away with it!

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is not right; and again, God says that about our individual lives. He would say that about a whole society; but Darrell, God also says it about the whole world—the whole cosmos!

DARRELL DELANEY

Because God has the best point of view to address these situations from the divine place that he sees all things, he is able to actually address the situation; and when injustice happens, we have our feelings about it; we get upset, we get angry, we feel like we get let down; we want to see justice happen swiftly. Habakkuk talks about this in his book. He actually says this: ^{1:1}How long, Lord, must I call for help but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? He is actually irritated because he sees it not happening.

SCOTT HOEZEE

³Why do you make me look at injustice? (Habakkuk said) Why do *you* tolerate wrongdoing? ⁴The law is paralyzed; and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted. That is the beginning of the book of Habakkuk. Are you going to sit there or are you going to do something, God? Well, God is going to do something. Something deep is broken; something tragic has happened; and the something...are you going to something or not, God? The something is God's Son on the cross. As we close the program in a minute, we will wonder a little bit more about that *why* question; but also, what it means for our lives yet today. 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 in this first program of our series on aspects of the cross of Jesus Christ, we are asking the big *why* question: Why did God's Son have to die on a cross; and the answer, Darrell, that we have come to in this program is that sin and evil in this world have resulted in such huge issues of injustice that something has to be done—something has to set things back to right again. The scales of justice have to balance somehow. Somebody has to pay.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, because God is holy, he cannot allow it to just go away, or just kind of sweep it under the rug; it must be addressed; and so, God has a holy standard he wants us to live by, and we have offended that. That is why it is important.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, in the Bible...you said earlier, Darrell, God just cannot abide being in the presence of unholiness, right? So, you know, one solution might be, well, let's see how people can do on their own, right? So, God comes to Abraham in Genesis: Walk before me and be blameless...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or he comes to the Israelites centuries later when they become a nation: Be holy as I am holy, says the Lord...he says that in Leviticus, right? Well, how did Abraham and Israel do in following up on that?

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, I call it the stupid cycle because they follow God and then they fall off and disobey God, and then the consequences of that sin comes, and then they call for help, and then there is a judge or a king or some other messianic figure who comes in and, during their lives they live great again. When that person dies, they fall off again. I have had that cycle in my life, too, where I confess, repent, go back; confess, repent, go back; and God wants to get off the crazy train. We cannot do it in our own righteousness. Israel found it out. Abraham found it out. I found it out. I am sure you did, too, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, exactly; and even...so, you know, we get that whole cycle of...after David and Solomon...we get that whole cycle of sometimes you get mostly wicked kings, but then you would get a good king...Jehu...or somebody like that, who would kind of temporarily set the train back on the tracks. Even David, the man after God's own heart, ends up, you know, having an affair with a woman, murdering her husband to cover it up. That is David! He was the best; and his moral line ended up being a big zig-zag, too, at one point. So, something is going to have to change, and that something comes out in Jeremiah 31, and similar passages, where God is going to make a promise that he is going to fix this from the inside out, not just expecting people can do it on their own.

³¹"The days are coming," declares the Lord (Jeremiah 31 here) "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them. ³³This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, this is actually very interesting to me, Scott, that God was always interested in what was going on inside of us. This new covenant tells us that we are not just going to look on the wall, or on your foreheads or your phylacteries or on your doorposts. No; we are going to put the law inside of you; therefore, you will know what is right; you will know what is wrong. We tried to live our lives in a way that we thought was necessary, and that line is zig-zagged all over the place; and so, God has to intervene, and the first step of that intervention is to put the law inside of us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; walk before me and be blameless...fail. Be holy as I am holy...fail. Our efforts on our own human power aren't going to do it. So, ultimately what Jeremiah is promising here is something we also see in some of the other prophets, like Joel, who says: I am going to put my very spirit inside people. We now know that is Pentecost, right? But it is possible because of the crucifixion; again, so why did Jesus die on the cross? That is the question of the hour for this *Groundwork* program; and it is because we were going to have to change from the inside; in only the grace of God that would pour through a sacrifice where Jesus took our

place; that is the only way we could get to the new humanity—that new heart on the inside; because we all contribute...I mean, sure, we mess up and sin in our individual lives, Darrell, but we were talking earlier about larger systems of injustice in the world; and you know, we contribute to that, too. We make choices, we support certain policies, we make lifestyle decisions or voting decisions, and sometimes they prop up injustice that hurts a lot of people. We are all trapped in it. We can only be rescued from the outside.

DARRELL DELANEY

In 2022, at the January Series at Calvin University, we had a speaker. Her name was Latasha Morrison; and she said that sometimes the laws that are written are not just, and so sometimes we have to disobey them, even though culturally speaking, we are taught to obey the law; but here is the thing where God sees that we have broken all the laws, and we cannot even get ourselves out of it, we are so entrenched and enmeshed in the situation that we are in that we need divine help and divine intervention; because the scripture says if all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...that is Romans 3:23...and the wages of sin is death. So, someone has to die in order for that to happen, and that is where Jesus' atoning sacrifice comes in. It is a beautiful thing where justice is served, but love is displayed at the same time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as you said, Darrell, we just cannot do this on our own. The injustice runs too deep...the scars and the wounds of evil in human history are just too deep. I cannot fix it; you cannot fix it; together we cannot fix it, right? So, why the cross? Because there was no other way. The Son of God had to go that far and suffer that much to tackle the problems that filled this fallen creation.

So, Darrell, we started the program talking about children...children who ask...the little German boy: *warum*, *warum*. He is always thinking why; but our children, too: Why, why? And we said, kids ask why because that is how they figure out how the world works. Well, we now as adults have to ask why about the cross, since that is how we figure out how salvation works.

DARRELL DELANEY

Why is the most important question because if we don't know why we do what we do, then what is the point of doing the things that we know are necessary? So, for our own growth, for our own situation and understanding of why the cross, why? Because God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever will believe in him will not perish but have eternal life. That is why the cross. Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. We hope you will join us again next time as we study scriptures that help us to understand the curse of the cross.

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

DARRELL DELANEY

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