

You Belong. Be Rooted in Christ's Love.

DARRELL DELANEY

One of my favorite movies is *Remember the Titans*. It is a movie about the desegregation of schools. One particular school has to now find a way to unite, even though racial tensions continue in the 1960s. Blacks and whites have to learn what it means to play together on the football team to win games. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we want to talk about God's plan of uniting Jews and Gentiles into one new humanity, and how that is a great blessing for us all. 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 midway through...we are in part three of a six-part series on the book of Ephesians. In Chapter 1, we learned that God had a plan to redeem all things way before he created all things. It is interesting that God had a solution way before there was even a problem at the fall; and then, in Chapter 2, those words that we think are clichés: *saved by grace through faith*; we find out that there is so much rich meaning there for us, and we found meaning in them, even though we say them all the time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And now, as we move into the third chapter...and again, this is the middle chapter of this series...there is a lot of good stuff here, too, for us to dig into. One of the things we said in one of the previous programs, Darrell...I think it was your idea, this image of God sort of being like a master chess player...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And God can see the whole board, and he is always a hundred moves ahead of, you know, his enemy or anybody else. So, God has had a plan all along, and as we are going to discover once more in this third chapter of the letter to the Ephesians, it is a plan that went beyond Israel, and it went beyond the Jews to include the whole world.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I think, too, Scott that this passage speaks to anyone who has never felt like they belonged anywhere. I remember times in my life, in adolescence or young adulthood, when I felt like I just didn't fit in. Culturally, I didn't fit in; ethnically, I didn't fit in; familially...it was just really challenging to find places where I connected. Where are my people? Where is my tribe? Where do I belong? Where do I fit? I felt like a misfit; but then, when I started getting connected to fellow believers in Christ, I realized that, oh, okay; these are my people. These are the ones who I have something in common with; these are the ones who are going to sharpen me and care for me and I grow with.

The new humanity that Paul is talking about in Ephesus right here, this humanity of how two have become one, this is our new family, and we have some belonging there and some welcome because God is welcoming us in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and you know, it is interesting that in the ancient world, in the time when Paul was writing this letter and doing his work as an apostle, there probably weren't too many walls of division that were seen as more impenetrable as the one between Jews...the people of God, Israel...and non-Jews, or Gentiles or Greeks, as they are sometimes referred to.

So, in this third chapter, Paul is going to say that he had a special calling to make that impenetrable wall penetrable; indeed, to get rid of it. So, he says here in 3:2:

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴In reading this, then you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of the one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

It is a mystery, Paul says. I like that.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and that mystery probably would have blown every Jew's mind that read it, because they are like: What? Jews and Gentiles together?! God had been talking about this plan to redeem all of creation for all of history...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

He wants to make sure that we understand...and actually, the Jews understand...that you are not put in a superior position, you are not more special than them because of who you are or what you are doing. We have seen in history when things have gone wrong because people have felt superior based on nationality, based on elitism, based on status and social context...caste systems; we have seen superiority damage people, subjugate people, and hurt people. I think about the Jews during World War II. I think about chattel slavery before the Civil War. You see what happens when people take this special position to the extreme.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and it is interesting, Darrell, that here...but elsewhere in the New Testament...and you see this in the book of Acts as well...Paul has to make very clear that this mystery, you know, that we are going to have one humanity, there won't be any difference between Jews and Gentiles anymore, that was given to me, he says, by a revelation of God. So, he has to say that, because, as you said, a lot of people, including mostly among the Jews, would have thought this was such a foreign, crazy idea, they were tempted to reject it. So, Paul has to say: No, this was a direct revelation from God. I got this word from God himself...

DARRELL DELANEY

Hot off the press.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, unless you got something to counter that, there it is; that is my authority; and we know from the book of Acts, for instance, that even the apostles took a while to come around to this. They were suspicious of Paul. They weren't sure about the Gentiles. They had this huge argument that, well, the only way Greeks or Gentiles...non-Israelites, non-Jews...the only way they can get in good with God is to become a Jew first. So, they have to get circumcised if they are a male, and then they have to follow the food laws...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They have to become an Israelite, then they could be a Christian; and eventually, they put that all away, but it took a major conference in Acts 15. They had the first synod or general assembly of the Church, where they had to figure this out. What tipped the balance was, well, the Holy Spirit is working among the Gentiles, so that is that. Paul is right. This was a revelation from God to make one humanity out of everybody.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, it shouldn't have been a surprise to them because God has been replete with reminders and promises. In Genesis 12, he tells Abram: Listen, I am going to make you a blessing to all the nations...

SCOTT HOEZEE

All the nations.

DARRELL DELANEY

of the earth; and then Isaiah 49:6 says: I will make you as a light to the nations that my salvation shall reach the ends of the earth. You already mentioned the book of Acts and Pentecost, where we see all these different languages happen from these people from Galilee; and even in the book of Revelation, you have every tribe, language, people and nation worshipping the Lamb; and so, it really shouldn't be a surprise to them, but for some reason, because of the cultural way that they were going, they just missed the mystery.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; even Paul calls it a mystery. This is new stuff, right? It seems mysterious, but it really isn't; and as you said, and we harked back, I think, in one of the first episodes in the Ephesians series, to a recent series we did on *Groundwork* on Jonah, who was the perfect example of an insular Israelite who didn't want to let anybody else in the club, including the Ninevites, you know, who he was called to preach to.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jonah stood for all of Israel. They had become an elite club because they forgot. As you say, the prophet said: You are going to be a light to all the nations...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

All nations will be drawn to the shining of your light, right? It is all through the prophets, and yet, they forgot. They kind of liked that dividing wall of hostility we looked at in the last episode. Paul says: No; Jesus came to knock it down, and he has called me to be the one to preach this to the world. We will look a little bit more at that aspect of the mystery in just a moment.

Segment 2

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, Paul is talking about a mystery, the mystery that, as it turns out, there are not going to be any distinctions among people anymore, including one of the biggest distinctions in the ancient world, Jews and Gentiles. Now, we know from other writings of Paul, like in Galatians, he will expand that more. There is also no difference between slave and free, which was a huge difference back then. Males and females, no; and Jews and Gentiles—Jews and Greeks; and so, that is the mystery, and he is going

to go on to talk about that in the next few verses.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it says in verse 7 here: I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹²In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. ¹³I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Man, a few things stick out to me when I see this, Scott. First, Paul's humility is off the charts. I cannot believe that he would say: I am less than the least of all of these. I mean, come on, Paul; you are a Pharisee, a Jew of Jews, you were born of the tribe of Benjamin; you have thirteen epistles that you wrote. I mean, like, all these things. Caught up to the third heaven, speaking in unknown languages. You mean to tell me you feel like the least; but I think it is the humility for him to know that, like he wrote in Philippians 3, it is all rubbish. Knowing Christ and being a child of God is the focus for Paul, because if he believed his own press, I think he'd be in trouble.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think that is right; but you know, it is interesting, too...I mean, so that is interesting all by itself, what you just said. So, here Paul is writing to Gentiles, right? He is writing to people in Ephesus, but he will be equally blunt when he writes to Jewish people. What he is basically saying is, you thought you got saved by your Jewishness, by being a good little boy...a good little Pharisee? No; it is nothing...it is nothing. I was that. I am here to tell you, I am the least of the least. I am the last of the last; and I do wonder sometimes, Darrell, if a lot of that...so, I mean, some of this is just good Christlike humility, but I do think Paul was probably haunted a little bit by his memories of the time when he was a persecutor of the Church—the *lead* persecutor of the Church we are told in the book of Acts...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Saul, as he was known then...Saul of Tarsus was a feared figure. If you saw him coming down your street and you were a Christian, your knees knocked because this man dragged women off to jail by their hair. He beat people up, he stood there and approved when a dear deacon named Stephen got stoned to death in front of his very eyes. I think Paul felt pretty haunted by that. That is what his hyper-Jewishness, his hyper-Phariseism, led him to; and he says: Man, if I did all that; I tried to wipe the name of Jesus from the face of the earth; that is who I was for a long time, and that makes me the lowest of the low. So, he is being humble, but I think in his own soul he thinks he is just being honest.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that he has the humility to remind himself of what he was before he was a believer; and what is beautiful about that is that God has given him a special grace to know exactly what his call is. So, he is called to preach the gospel to Gentiles. He went...remember, he tried to go to the Jews, and they were like, wait; this dude was persecuting yesterday. So, they were like afraid of him; and the conversion was so sudden, it was like, yesterday he was fighting us and today he is preaching Christ? Well, wait a minute. So, the Gentiles...he decided to go to them; and since the Ephesian Christians are mostly Gentile Christians, this is good news that includes them as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I like that story from the book of Acts; you know, after the Damascus Road thing, and Paul is blind for a while...he cannot see a thing, right? And so, God calls on this Ananias to go. He says: Hey, Ananias; Saul of

Tarsus...you've heard of him...he is staying down the street. Go and talk to him. I think he is going to join our side. Ananias is like: Did I hear you right? You want me to walk up to this Christian killer? Could you repeat that? But of course, he did go. That is the thing. He switches from the person who wants to stamp the name of Jesus off of the face of the earth to somebody who wants to stamp the name of Jesus onto the earth; and in every part he becomes the Johnny Appleseed of the early Church. Everywhere he goes, he plants a church. Primarily not among the Jewish people, but among everybody who wasn't a Jew, and that is the mystery, that God called him, not to go preach to the Jewish people...there were people like that: Matthew, who we think wrote his gospel directly to a Jewish reading audience to convince them. Peter spent a lot of time, and the other apostles, talking to Jews, convincing them Jesus of Nazareth is the one you have been waiting for as Messiah. Not Paul; he had a very specific task, and it involved everybody who was never before connected to Israel.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love how you brought up that incident with Ananias. He says...Ananias says; You mean the guy who was persecuting us? And God says: No, he will be my chosen instrument, and he will suffer much for my sake. And Paul is writing this book of Ephesians...this letter of Ephesians...to encourage these Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. He is one who knows the beatings; he is one who knows the floggings; he is one who is probably jailed up right now as he is writing this letter...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; right.

DARRELL DELANEY

On house arrest; and everything that he is doing is so that people will see that Christ is the way, that the mystery of the gospel...he believes it so much he is willing to give his life for it...and hopefully, it would encourage them to keep their faith in trying times, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; Paul the persecutor became Paul the persecuted. God just basically said he will get a taste of his own medicine, but for my glory; and Paul saw it all as part of the glory of God. There are tests; there are trials; there is persecution. The Ephesians knew that, too, and you know, in the next program, when we move into Ephesians 4 and 5, we are going to see Paul telling the Ephesians all kinds of things that everybody else in Ephesus was doing, but they couldn't do anymore. They probably got made fun of for that, you know. People looked down their noses at them for that. That is not easy, you know; even just facing social opprobrium and being an outcast in your own city; but it is worth it, Paul says, because it is all for God's glory—it redounds to God's glory—because it is all about the mystery of God's grace.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that mystery is not just made known to their local neighborhood in their city. It has been known to the world; it has also been known to the cosmos. It says that his eternal purposes were made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly realms. So, God is telling it to everyone everywhere. He is not ashamed of us, and we need not be ashamed of him. We are going to conclude this episode by looking at Paul's beautiful prayer to the Ephesians, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this is episode three in a six-part series on Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which means we are right in the middle of the series, Darrell, in the third chapter; and so far, we have seen the revelation of a mystery, as Paul calls it, that God is uniting into one new group Jews, Gentiles—Jews, Greeks—everybody into one new humanity. God wants all people included, and Paul wanted the Ephesians to know that is part of them, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the mystery has been solved, Scott, and the case has been closed; but Paul does not want them to miss this, so he ends up saying a prayer in this chapter for them, and the prayer reads like this: ^{3:14}For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

I love it...I love it!

SCOTT HOEZEE

That's a prayer...it is the second prayer we have had in this book, and they are both beautiful. There was a prayer earlier in Ephesians, where he asked for the eyes of their heart to be opened to see the beauty and the mysteries of God and of God's grace; but this prayer is lovely. "I kneel before the Father..." and just to say that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...just to be strengthened in your inner being, he says. I want God's love to fill you up. I want God's love, which finally surpassed knowledge, he says...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, I want you to know this, but you cannot really know this, right? You need to know this, but in knowing it, you are going to know how much you don't know because it is that big...it is just that big, that beautiful. It will just fill you up.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, being lost in a sea of love, basically. I mean, the idea is that God is expansive, and his love for us never ends, it is overflowing. I think that in hard times, we can remember how long and how high and how wide and how deep his love is for us; and being rooted and established in that love helps us to face trials, helps us to face difficulties and setbacks. We had a time where there was a pandemic and we needed to trust God even more in those hard times. We have political tensions; we have racial tensions going on. All of these things were kind of a perfect storm, and we need to be rooted and established in the love of God that bands Christians together that have many differences, but they are under one banner: Christ; and that should be encouraging, even in trying times.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Singer John Denver...I mean, granted this is a romantic love ballad, but I remember John Denver had that song years ago: You fill up my senses...you know, you just fill me to the brim; and that is what Paul wants to happen for the Ephesians, and for everybody, just to be filled up to the brim with that knowledge, as we just said...surpasses knowledge; and boy, he really, as you just said, Darrell, he really piles it on, you know: how wide, how long, how high, how deep...in every direction, as far as you can go in every direction...up, down and all around...that is the love of God. It is boundless, it is as big as the universe; and somehow, you have to start working on knowing that; and I do think that something you alluded to, I think, a minute ago, Darrell; doesn't it seem like when you are talking about the pandemic and stuff...doesn't it seem like if we really focused on the love of God in this way, if we let it fill us up, that a lot of our little human arguments would go away; or the things that annoy us about each other? I mean, if we really, really all wanted to try to know the unknowable, in terms of how big God's love is, I think it might help us in a lot of ways. It would have a lot of good side effects.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; the Bible says love covers over a multitude of sins; and so, if I am letting this love wash over me, in me, through me, around me, then I cannot help but exude that love to people around me, whether they deserve it or not. I think that all of those things would begin to wash away and we could actually show love, grace and mercy, forgiveness and truth to each other in a way that would build us up instead of us thinking our knowledge builds us up, because the Bible says knowledge puffs up, but love builds up; and not only is it the love that builds us up, it is about being loved by someone. So, because God set his plan in place way before the foundations of the world to include us into this new humanity, solving the mystery that Paul is preaching about, he wants us to know...Paul wants us to know...that God loved us that much that he wanted to include us in that plan. That is a beautiful thing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is. I think we have mentioned this before on *Groundwork*, but there is sort of an age-old question...theological...philosophical debate...you know, why did God create the world? Well, he couldn't have been under any external pressure to do it, right? I mean, God being God, God is self-sufficient. God didn't need a creation. Everything God needs, God already has, just being God...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, why did he do it? Well, you know, theologians have gone on and on about it, but I think the best answer that anybody has ever come up with is that what compelled God to make the world? Love. There was so much love among Father, Son and Holy Spirit in what the Eastern Orthodox tradition they call the *perichoresis*...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From which we get our word *choreography*...

DARRELL DELANEY

Dance.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This dance. This dance. That is why in the Eastern church, the Trinity is not a triangle, it is a circle. People say: what has a circle got to do with three? Well, it is the three of them chasing each other around in never-ending love, right? They had so much love, they said: You know, we ought to share it...we ought to share this. So, let's make a universe with people and tadpoles and bobcats and who knows what all to share the love of God in ever wider circles. We were created out of that love, we are now redeemed out of that love...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are headed to dwell inside that love, like being wrapped up in a blanket for all time.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is a beautiful thing. As we conclude this episode, we think about how Paul gave this little act of worship at the end. He had his own little private worship service with the last few verses that he concluded this chapter with. It says: ²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,

according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is something that I have used as a benediction, as a blessing. Paul really has it here almost more as a doxology...a doxological statement. That is from the Greek *doxa** ...glory...*logos*...word...this is a glory word...it's a glory word! So, it is a doxology like we sing at the end of services. It is a benediction; it is a blessing; and just mind-blowing! He can do more than we could ask or even imagine. I love it that he included *imagine* there. You cannot imagine your way past God; and indeed, to him be the glory in the Church for ever and ever. Thanks be to God.

Thank you for digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we study Paul's teachings for how to live according to our new life in Christ found in Ephesians 4 and 5. Connect with us now 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

Groundwork is a listener supported program produced by ReFrame Ministries. Visit reframeministries.org for more information and to find more resources to encourage your faith. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee.

***Correction:** *In the audio of this episode, host Scott Hoezee misspeaks and says "doxos," when he meant to say "doxa," the correct form of the Greek word for "glory."*

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/you-belong-be-rooted-in-christs-love>

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