

Adopt the Mindset of Christ

SCOTT HOEZEE

The earliest church was persecuted by the Roman Empire; but then, early in the 4th Century, the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, and so the faith went from being threatened to becoming the official religion of the empire; and historians debate to this day whether that was a good thing or a bad thing, because ever since, and all through history, the closer the Christian Church gets to political power, the more tempted the Church is to become a political force—to use power and power tactics to enforce its will. Well, today on *Groundwork*, we will reflect on why this has always been a bad idea, and why we need to resist it. 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 the third program in a short, three-part series here on *Groundwork*, on what we have called: *Christians in Society*. It has been about Christian civility; how we are to treat people in the wider society; how we are to treat each other in ways that rise above the mean-spirited and petty ways by which too many people live lately, whether on social media or at political rallies, or even in the realm of the Church.

In the previous program, we pondered how to relate to the governing authorities, but in this program, we want to talk about what it is in the Christian life that should make Christianity...make the institution of the Church...be something other than people who keep trying to cozy up to political power.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it is interesting how things change quite a bit, because before what happened with Constantine, as you mentioned in the introduction, we had Christians running and fleeing for their lives. It was a minority thing happening in a place where it was predominantly hostile against the faith...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, there were house churches and there were people meeting in their rooms and in secret; and there are some places in the world today where that is still happening because Christianity is not the dominant religion of that country. But it was really a transcendent moment and a specific moment in history when Constantine becomes a Christian.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That tempted the Church to start acting like governing authorities in their own right; and students of Church history know some of the bad, sad things that happened in the last two thousand years as a result. When the Church decided to adopt a more militaristic posture, it launched whole armies...literal armies...in what became known as the Crusades.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The alleged goal was to drive the Muslims out of the Holy Land, but along the way, some of these Christian soldiers decided to persecute also the Jewish people; and upward of one-third of the Jews living in Europe were slaughtered, and that, Darrell, all in the name of Christ. Then there were long-running disputes between popes and kings; kings who wanted to have control over the Church; popes who wanted to have control over the whole country; so, you had popes excommunicating kings, you had kings exiling popes; and well, Darrell, the whole thing got pretty ugly pretty fast.

DARRELL DELANEY

We talked about in the last episode how a lot of these things have been tainted with sin. You know, people who were in powerful positions are not...and sometimes even more succumb to the greed and the power and what it means to wield all that power, and not understanding that great responsibility comes with that, that can actually influence a whole country and a whole nation in a way that is not helpful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And, when...and this happens today, too...when sometimes better known religious leaders in various countries...when they cozy up to presidents or prime ministers or whoever...when they are tempted to use political power and persuasion to get things done that maybe some pastors believe need to be done, the question we want to tackle in this final program of this three-part series is: What is the number one thing that *always* gets lost when the Church engages in the tactics of power politics? Christlikeness; and Darrell, I don't know about you, that is a pretty big thing to lose.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is the pearl of great price in this situation; and it is the most important thing. Losing the Christlikeness is something that we cannot live without. I mean, we need to understand how Christ would actually teach us to live in these situations. We need Christ's wisdom and how he would respond to different situations, and when we want political power, and when we feel like this is the way of doing it, we throw him out of the equation, and that cannot be helpful, because he is our goal, our example of how to live; and he shows us what needs to happen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The classic statement on this from Philippians 2; Paul: Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being likeminded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, this verse...I don't know personally, Scott...I cannot speak for you, but this one really challenges me personally. It is like I have been encouraged by being united with Christ; I have had comfort from his love; so this is very conditional. If that has happened, which he knows has happened...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

This is then how I am supposed to live in light of being grateful for what Christ has done; and to challenge the people around you to live that way is one thing, but to look in the mirror and say: Um, I've kind of fallen short on this attitude and the mindset of Christ Jesus. This concept of likemindedness will be very powerful

to emulate from Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To adopt the mindset of Christ, which is very, very clear here, not the mindset of power politics or of being in charge or of throwing your weight around; it is the mindset of humility, of service, of sacrifice; and as many of us know, Darrell, what comes next in this passage that we just quoted in Philippians 2...and by the way, a lot of people think this was an early hymn or a song that Paul was actually quoting, so the Philippians would have known it. It might have been as familiar to them as *Amazing Grace* is to people today...but Paul says: Look, Jesus had all the power in the universe, but he gave it up to sacrifice himself. He was in very nature God, but he gave it up. He emptied himself...and Darrell, let's hear those verses, 7 and 8.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: Rather, 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!

I used to tease the youth group when I was teaching them. I said I want to go to Nothing University...I want to become nothing. This is...in the King James, it says; He became nothing; he made himself nothing; he emptied himself out. Whatever status he had, which he had earned, he literally gave it up; and that is the opposite of what the powers of this world tell you to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and of course, the great irony is that all through Jesus' public ministry it was almost like a motif: the disciples and a whole lot of other people, were hoping that as the Messiah—as the Anointed One chosen by God to save his people—Jesus would save them *politically* first and foremost. They maybe had some vague sense that they needed to be saved from their sins, too; but honestly, getting saved from the Romans was more important, or so they thought, right? So, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey that day, all that palm waving and Hosanna shouting was a giant celebration of the upcoming rebellion against Rome that the people were just sure Jesus was on the cusp of launching; and that is also why, Darrell, a few days later it became obvious Jesus was not aiming to be that kind of a king. So, *hosanna* turned into *crucify him!*

DARRELL DELANEY

So, they were thinking he was going to become David 2.0 or something, but he actually had a different agenda on his mind. He was going to put to death *death*—he was going to end the triumph of death; and therefore, that is why it says in the next verses of Philippians, it says that: ^{2:9}God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.

So, he came to conquer death. He went down, and counterintuitively, he goes down so that he can go up; and that is exactly what he has called us to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, make no mistake, as you just read those verses 9 and following, eventually: ¹⁰At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue (will) acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So, Jesus has all the power in the cosmos. I mean, make no mistake...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is the King of Kings; he is the President of presidents; the Prime Minister of prime ministers; but his power is of a different kind than political power; his glory is of a different kind than political fame and glory, which is often caught up in ego and bravado and arrogance and pride. Jesus has all the power, make no mistake; but it is not that kind of power; and so, we as a Church shouldn't be seeking that kind of power either. But there is more to unpack in terms of what it means to be Christlike, and we are going to do that in a

moment; so, stay tuned.

Segment 2

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, we are thinking about how being called to be Christlike shapes our behavior and our interactions with one another, and with people out and about in the wider society; but now, Darrell, let's spend this segment here, this last program of this three-part series, looking at...it is kind of a longish passage from Matthew 22...but it shows how Jesus responded when some groups of people in his day were out to get Jesus. They played a great big game of gotcha! So, to be streamlining a little bit, Matthew 22:15-45, but we want to pay attention to this to see how Jesus behaves.

Verse 15 of Matthew 22:

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for paying tax." They brought him a denarius, ²⁰and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" ²¹"Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." ²³That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him (Jesus) with a question.

Okay, here basically they say that there is a certain woman who had seven different husbands, but they all died. Whose wife is she going to be in the hereafter?

²⁹Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God. ³⁰At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage."

DARRELL DELANEY

³⁴Hearing that Jesus silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." ⁴¹While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?"

Then they go on to have a conversation about how Jesus is even greater and superior to David; and so, you know that you see a particular pattern in these. Me and you, we study scriptures quite often. You see something going on here that I think should be brought to our attention.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, ultimately, we want to pay attention to the posture Jesus adopted here when he was being attacked, because that is instructive for us. That is what we are supposed to do; but the pattern here is interesting: Jesus is asked a series of three questions, and in the end, he asks his own question. It turns out...and Matthew's highly Jewish audience would have recognized this right off the bat...this is a pattern adopted straight from one of the meals associated with the annual observance of Passover. At one of the meals of Passover, the father of the family is asked three questions by his children, and then the father gets to turn the tables and ask a question of his own. So, just in structuring this the way he did, Matthew is helping us to start anticipating the feast of the Passover and its connection to the work of Jesus as the ultimate Passover sacrificial lamb; but as we said, Darrell, in this program, we just want to notice the posture of Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is really important because Jesus... It says in scripture he knows what they are doing. He knows they are laying it on thick; he knows that they are attacking him; he knows that they are trying to trap him; and he doesn't get into this reactionary position with them. He actually responds. He lets them talk; he lets them say what they want; and he knows that it is either this ditch or that ditch: you are going to be a zealot or you are going to be overthrowing the government. We cannot have either one of those; and God is giving Jesus wisdom on how to navigate that, that can help us as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, yes; you have to admire Jesus' cleverness. He sidestepped every trap they tried to set for him. They are trying to trip him up in his words, get him in trouble with Rome, get him in trouble with the religious authorities, get him in trouble with anybody...anything will do! They want to get rid of Jesus, right? So, Jesus knew he was being attacked. He knew the Pharisees and the Sadducees were out to get him, but did he get angry? Does he snap back? Does he tell them to take a hike? Get lost? No! I mean, he remained calm and humble. Jesus was smart enough and wise enough to get out of their traps, but it is instructive that his posture in the face of so much opposition, was calm; and therefore, Darrell, that is how we are called to respond when we are in the crosshairs of people out to get us.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is really important, Scott, to know that there is a poise and a pause. Like for me, when people are accusing me of something I didn't do, I can feel my blood pressure rising; I can feel I am getting irritated; I can feel that stuff. What I do is I take a moment. I listen, I repeat back what I heard them saying, and then I bring clarification. This is what I hear you saying, but I disagree with you for these reasons. And I don't have to yell, I don't have to get upset. The Christlikeness that Jesus is showing...the model that he is showing...for him to remain calm, for him to speak to them truthfully, is the way that Christlikeness shows itself; and we can model that in every context.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I know; I mean, it is so easy to look at this, like, well, of course Jesus could have traded insult for insult; he could have gotten into a defensive posture; he could have engaged in name-calling; but of course, Jesus would never do that. He is Jesus, right? Okay, good; so then, how come you and I do that? If we want to be like Jesus...but we say: Yeah, yeah, but I'm not Jesus! I was provoked. I couldn't help it. Well, Jesus was provoked, too; and he can help us. You know, it reminds you of Hebrews 2:17:

For this reason he (Jesus) had to be made like them, (people) fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

So, in other words, Darrell, Jesus is the ultimate been-there-done-that kind of Savior. Jesus knows how rough temptations are. He faced them, too. He faced them in Matthew 22. So, that means that when we are in the same situation, we are not helpless. We cannot say: I couldn't help it. Maybe I cannot help it, but Jesus can help me; and he wants to, because he has been there; he has done that; he knows how tough it is.

DARRELL DELANEY

And in Hebrews Chapter 4 it talks about: (verse 15, 16 paraphrased) We don't have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us, but he actually has been tempted at every point, yet without sin. That is why we can go to the throne of grace and ask for help in our time of need. I might need to ask for help in a moment when someone is disagreeing with me. Right there, I say: I need your help, Jesus, to respond in the way you would in the situation that is frustrating me, upsetting me; I don't like being misunderstood; I don't like being disrespected; and so, I want to respond the way you would, but I need your help to do that. So, I am going to shoot a flare right here and pray and ask God; and I love the fact that, like you said, Jesus has been there and done that. He's got the tee-shirt. He understands what it feels like and can give us help.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we have been listening to Hebrews, and we looked at Matthew 22, but 1 Peter 2:21: To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps: ²²He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. ²³When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. So, there Peter, Darrell, spells out directly exactly what you were just saying. We are called to this. You were called, Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:21: You were called. Christ left you an example. Do as he did, and that is our calling. But as we wrap up this program and this short series, we will consider a few final applications of all this. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

We said in the outset of this program, Darrell, that the Church has faced a perennial temptation to mix it up in society by adopting the tactics and the rhetoric of power politics; trying to take on governing authority within the Church; but actually, Darrell, that temptation actually predates the Church—it actually began with the disciples themselves. I mean, how often don't we read in the gospels about how the disciples were always jockeying for power positions. In fact, there is an interesting story about this in Matthew 20.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, there is this situation where the mother of James and John comes to Jesus and say: We have a request of you. We want John on the right; we want James on the left; and we want these different positions when you come into your kingdom, you know, when you are getting ready to take over this thing...when you are able to establish your kingdom; and the other disciples kind of look at them like: What are they doing?! Why are they trying to get these special positions? And there is this competition going on that Jesus has to set the record straight on.

SCOTT HOEZEE

²⁴When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵Jesus called them together and said, "You know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

So, you know how the Romans act, Jesus basically says; lording authority, throwing their weight around. You don't want to be like that, do you? Well, in truth, they kind of did, actually, but Jesus makes it clear: Not so among you.

DARRELL DELANEY

This verse is also picked up in Mark Chapter 10:45, where Jesus says: (I) did not come to be served, I came to serve and give my life as a ransom for many.

So, the idea is, if you want to be first...if you want to be great...I am not saying you cannot do that, I am saying it is going to be counterintuitive to what the world says you need to do. You are not going to step on everybody to get up the political ladder; you are not going to use and manipulate and connive your way; you are actually going to serve people; and that is the Christlike way; not to just gain things for yourself or use power over folks. That is what the Romans are doing. That is what everyone else is doing. I am calling you to a standard that might not make sense at first, but you are still called to it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it doesn't make sense to the world, right? Jesus is turning conventional wisdom on its head: Not so with you. Be servants; be humble; give up your ego; give up your very self. I mean, that is what Jesus came to do,

and that now forms our marching orders going forward as well.

Of course, you know, the world around us, Darrell, they are not going to regard that as a formula for success. Jesus tells us, though, just trust the gospel system...trust the gospel system. This is the way that leads to God glorifying greatness. And again, we go back to that hymn we looked at earlier from Philippians 2. It is the path down that leads up. By swooping lower than low, Jesus got exalted higher than high; and if it all seemed backwards and a path to failure rather than success, well, Jesus proved that wrong.

DARRELL DELANEY

The fact that his ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts is ringing true in this situation where Jesus is showing if you want to go up, you have to go down; and so, hopefully the Church understands that their role in the wider society isn't to be like the world and go along with what the world is doing, but God has called us to a different way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A different way: the gospel way. This whole series, Darrell, has been Christians in society talking about the Church, talking about our interactions with the wider society and with people in the wider society; and you know, Darrell, a lot of Christians sincerely want to get things done to make life better for people. You know, we genuinely want to help people make good, moral choices in their lives, whether they are Christians or not; whether they are members of a church or not. We want to help, but it is very tempting then to try to force things on people; you know, to work the levels of political power to manipulate things in ways that the whole world around us assures that, well, that is just how you get things done. Again, Jesus says trust the gospel system. Jesus' chosen path of being the servant of all; being humble and sacrificial, that is the only genuine way to accomplish our laudable goals to help people live better. We have to do it, not just for Jesus' sake, we have to do it in Jesus' way.

DARRELL DELANEY

When we do things in Jesus' way, sometimes the world will call it either slow...it doesn't happen fast enough...or they will say that it is not effective at all; and ultimately, they call it foolishness. Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians Chapter 1, where he says: ²⁰Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²²Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. Which means, again, God's ways are not our ways.

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is not the seven habits of highly effective people, but it is God's way of getting things done; what God desires to see among his people and the Church; this is how we behave; these are the things we choose when we interact with the wider world. I think, you know, once again, it is kind of a summary for the whole series. It all comes down to Christlikeness. This is something we should desire, Darrell, more deeply than anything in our lives.

DARRELL DELANEY

As disciples who love and follow Jesus and want to become more like him in our attitudes and actions, and seek to make other disciples who do the same, we need to look at his pattern of how he interacted with people; how he interacted with government and with society; and model and emulate his behavior and methods. I love the fact that he didn't react, but he responded, and he did this with mercy, with humility, and with grace; and that we can embody in our own interactions with the society that we live in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, Darrell, Christlikeness is maybe the core foundation of discipleship. It is the most important thing; and maybe that is why we so routinely face the temptation to develop other mindsets, to adopt other postures, to take other tactics drawn from the wider world. The more important something is, the more the devil and his hosts are going to try to pull us away from it; and if that temptation can come cloaked to us in what looks like a laudable goal, well, then it gets under our radar. We need to constantly be in prayer to ward that off. We need each other to help us do this. We need the Spirit in us, and thankfully, God has provided just that. Thanks be to God.

And thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney and Scott Hoezee, and we hope that you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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