

Blessed are...the Merciful, the Pure in Heart, the Peacemakers, and those Who are Persecuted

SCOTT HOEZEE

In our *Groundwork* series on Jesus' *Beatitudes* in Matthew 5, we have been noting that Jesus blesses some surprising categories and groups of people; but as we close out this series in this program, we will see that in the end, Jesus pronounces a blessing over a circumstance that all things being equal, no one would call a good situation, namely, persecution of Jesus' followers. How or why would Jesus regard that as anything other than difficult and undesirable? Well, today on *Groundwork*, we will ponder that, along with other of Jesus' final blessings. 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, this is now the third and final program in our look at the *Beatitudes* of Jesus in Matthew 5; and that, of course, is the very beginning of Jesus' larger *Sermon on the Mount*.

In the first program, we looked the *Beatitudes* as a set...how they fit specifically in Matthew's particular gospel account. We also contrasted Matthew's version of these blessings with Luke's version in Luke 6. In the second program, we took up the first four beatitudes: the poor in spirit; those who mourn; the meek; and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Today, we will dig into the rest.

As on the previous two programs in this series, we are glad to welcome back Dr. Danny Daley, Assistant Professor of New Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. So, Danny, welcome back.

DANNY DALEY

Absolutely. Wonderful to be here with you both again.

DARRELL DELANEY

Beautiful! As we begin here, we just want to hear again the verses that we will focus on in this episode, which is the second part of the *Beatitudes*. It starts in verse 7 of Matthew 5. It reads: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, a lot to cover; let's get to it. So, the fifth blessing is for the merciful. Danny, what sense of mercy is Jesus talking about here, do you think?

DANNY DALEY

Yes, I mentioned this in our previous episodes. I really try to read the *Beatitudes*...you could call it narrative reading. What I mean by that is that Matthew as a gospel has a narrative purpose behind it; and I think the best way to define a lot of these is by defining them within the narrative. So, the temptation is to say: Well, anything I can imagine as merciful must be what Jesus has in mind here. Then it becomes a catchall. You just start naming merciful behaviors, that *you* think are merciful; and then you think: Oh, well; okay, I'm covered because I am hitting these exact types of mercy. Actually, though, mercy is a major theme in Matthew's gospel, and if you track mercy through the gospel itself, I think you can be quite specific, actually, about what Jesus has in mind. There are a couple of things. The first is: the scribes and Pharisees are often described as lacking in mercy toward the poor and the needy, the downtrodden and the outcast. I think we have to be a little bit careful there, because the scribes and Pharisees sometimes then get too bad of a rap in the Church. We even say things like: Oh, don't be so Pharisaical, or whatever. The Pharisees actually were kind of heroes in ancient Judaism most of the time, but it is certainly the case that Jesus in the gospels had some bitter battles with the scribes and Pharisees, especially over interpretation of scripture and that sort of thing; and Jesus often accuses them of lacking mercy to the people who needed it the most.

One of the most important passages...and he does it twice in the entire Gospel of Matthew...in Chapter 9 and Chapter 12, he quotes Hosea Chapter 6:6, where he says to these Jewish leaders. He says: Go and learn what this means; which, by the way, I love that. If Jesus says to you: Go and learn what this means, you should probably go and learn what that means. And it is the only time that he says it, by the way. He says it twice, and he quotes Hosea 6:6 both times. So, it must matter to him a great deal that people go and learn what Hosea 6:6 has in mind. He says: Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. What Jesus is *not* saying is the thing that they would do, like tithing and these other things that you might list as sort of sacrificial behaviors are bad; he is just saying that if you do those things, but neglect the weightier matters of the law, like mercy toward the people who need merciful responses from us, that really, ultimately, the mercy is at the center of God's heart. So, Jesus is saying: Hey, not a lot has changed in 800 years. We are still neglecting this merciful behavior toward those who need it.

I also think there are a few times where mercy is explicitly connected to forgiveness in Matthew's gospel, that those who lack a willingness to forgive are then lacking in mercy toward those who need forgiveness. So, Jesus says things like: Forgive as often as you need to forgive. There is a parable where there is the king who forgives this extreme amount of money from a steward who then goes out and...

DARRELL DELANEY

Matthew 18.

DANNY DALEY

Yes; and you know, he runs into a guy right outside. He has just been forgiven untold amounts of money, and he walks outside and there is a guy who owes him, you know, twenty bucks or whatever; and he is like: Hey, hey; show me some mercy. And he is like: No, no, no; you owe me, and has the guy thrown in jail. So, this idea that God ultimately shows us mercy, that if we do not respond by then showing mercy to others, that there is really ultimately repercussions for this. Jesus takes mercy *very* seriously throughout the entire text. I would even say that both Matthew and Luke are kind of gospels of mercy, where it is a major theme throughout both texts; but ultimately, I would say this, that when it comes down to showing forgiveness toward those who need our forgiveness, and when we need to love those who are the downtrodden and the down-and-out, and those who are in difficult circumstances, that Matthew's gospel would tell us that that is at the very heart of God, more than all the other things God cares...and God cares about the many, many things...but ultimately, even if he does care about many things, that at the very center of God's heart is that we would show mercy to others in these particular contexts. So, I think that is what Jesus has in mind.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we don't want to be the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18. Blessed the pure in heart. An interesting beatitude to me. I mean, we read about purity and purity of heart in the Old Testament. Psalm 24: ³Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? ⁴The one who has clean hands and a

pure heart.

What does Jesus mean by purity of heart, Danny?

DANNY DALEY

I think the qualifier in heart is important, because if you look at purity by itself, you might be tempted to think about things like moral or ritual purity. You might even want to define that, then, through the laws of moral and ritual purity, maybe in, you know, the Jewish scriptures. You might want to go back to that, to the Pentateuch, you know, the five books of Moses, and try to define it that way; but when Jesus says it is pure in heart that he is talking about, I really believe, and I kind of argue this in my book, that that qualifier internalizes it to the degree that what he is really talking about is duplicity here. It is a form of integrity. To be pure in heart is to be able to be the same on the outside that you are on the inside; and for both of these things to be generated by a movement toward kingdom orientation...that in order to be a kingdom oriented person is to be pure in heart and to have God's designs for the world to become your designs for the world and God's hopes to become your hopes; and this can be contrasted with the hypocrisy that Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of exhibiting all over the Gospel of Matthew. Hypocrisy back then is not like it is now. Now, we think of hypocrisy as if you say one thing, but then go and do something else. Like, if you tell your kids: Don't do this; and then you turn around and go do it, then you are a hypocrite. That is not really what Jesus had in mind. Hypocrisy back then was really more of a form of playacting. It was doing things for the public and in the face of the public to receive their praise. Alms-giving, great. Alms-giving in the public so that everyone sees how much you are giving, that becomes a problem. Prayer, great; but praying out in the open so that everyone sees your piety, that becomes a problem. Purity of heart is the avoidance of that kind of hypocrisy ultimately, I think; and so really, it is about integrity.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; that reminds me, too, you know, when Jesus was calling the religious leaders whitewashed tombs...

DANNY DALEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are all whitewashed on the outside, but inside you are full of rotting bones.

DANNY DALEY

Right; yes, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or you clean the outside of the cup but the inside of the cup is full of junk; and that is the kind of thing that is *not* being pure in heart, right?

DANNY DALEY

Yes; I mean, ultimately, too, that purity in heart is connected to being able to see God, and I don't think that means a physical manifestation; I think ultimately it just means to have fellowship with him, right? To have fellowship with God. The hypocrites, according to Jesus, are not in line to have fellowship with God. So, ultimately, those of us who are in line with God are in line to have fellowship with him.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, coming up next, we are going to go into the last of the *Beatitudes*, so stay tuned for that.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney.

DANNY DALEY

I am Danny Daley.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Let's get right back to Matthew 5:9, where Jesus blesses what he calls "the peacemakers;" an interesting beatitude on a couple of levels: Blessed are the peacemakers, (and then) for they will be called children of God. How do we understand that? Peacemaking in what sense, Danny?

DANNY DALEY

Peacemaker here is a pretty important one to try to unpack a little bit, because I think, again, like a lot of the other beatitudes, the temptation is to just list all the ways we can do peacemaking in the world, and then assume that is what Jesus means. In modern interpretation, we often think, for example, about the wars that have happened. In the 20th Century, there was World War I and World War II, the Korean war, the Vietnam war. We have these wars that were sort on an unprecedented scale, and so, that kind of peacemaking gets brought into discussions on this verse quite often. I really don't think that is actually what Jesus has in mind. I mean, it is difficult because the word there for peacemakers is not used anywhere else in all of the scriptures, and that is true both of the New Testament and of the Greek translations of the Jewish scriptures. When they were translated from Hebrew into Greek, they didn't use this word anywhere either. Peace is obviously a very popular word in both the Hebrew scriptures and in the New Testament. We have words in both Hebrew, the word shalom, and then *eiréné* in Greek in the New Testament; those words are everywhere; but the peacemaker word that Jesus uses is only used here and nowhere else; so, it is really hard to understand exactly what he might have in mind; but ultimately, I think if you look at the rest of the *Sermon on the Mount*, he even starts to unpack what this looks like. The most prominent place for me is when he says we should love our enemies. This is so countercultural—it is so counterintuitive—that you would look at your enemies and say: I need to make peace with them; I need to love them; I need to be reconciled with those who are my enemies. It is not that you just live at peace with them; you *make* peace with them. If you move on to the rest of the *Sermon on the Mount*, you have alms-giving and these sort of things where mercy is being extended. That can also be seen as a form of peacemaking. So, I don't think we have to leave the Gospel of Matthew to define this. I think ultimately Jesus is talking about interpersonal relationships between people on a horizontal level. It might have something to do with leading people into peace with God himself as well—reconciliation with God because the world has been made so wrong with God. The attempt we have is to make things right again, or to participate with Jesus as he does that probably more accurately. What do we have in the *Lord's Prayer*? That things would be done on earth as they are done in heaven. So, there is a form of peacemaking, where we are bringing to values of heaven to bear upon the earth. I think that might have something to do with what Jesus has in mind here, but it is probably quite specific to the interrelational peacemaking that needs to be done between people.

DARRELL DELANEY

It's a beautiful thing, because the peacemaking that he is talking about here is exactly what the kingdom of God is like, in its character; and it is distinct from, say, peacekeeping...

DANNY DALEY

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because peacekeeping ignores that there is an issue; peacemaking says there is an issue, yet I am going to make this effort. I was trying to tie this to the second half of that verse, because he says: They will be called *children* of God, the ones who are peacemakers. So, you know, some translations say sons of God, some say children of God. Is there any distinction that needs to be made there, or what is Jesus getting at when he talks about being the children of God or son of God? He refers to himself as the Son of God in the scripture.

DANNY DALEY

Right; well, it is interesting, I think, because you could translate that phrase either way: son of God or children of God, and I think both of them are important. I mean, you do have to make a translation decision when you are a translator, but I think they are both important for this reason: The children of God aspect...you mentioned that peacemaking means you actually have to name that there is a problem. So, sometimes reconciliation cannot happen until you name the problem and say: This is the problem. We are going to name it; and now we are going to work through it. As that happens, you are bringing people from different backgrounds; all kinds of different nationalistic backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, all sorts of people from all different kinds of places, and saying: We are going to name the things that have kept us apart; we are going to do the process of making peace between us so we can all be united as what? Children of God. That is a single group, united under God, with God as our Father. To be children means he is our Father. We have a single Father in heaven, and all of us, then, become united in that sense. I think that is an important connotation here; but the idea that it also...in the Greek a lot of translations say children of God, but it actually says *sons* of God; and ultimately I think that is important because we only become children of God through the Son. Ultimately, Jesus is the one Son of God, and by uniting with him, we become sons and daughters in the Son. It is fascinating because if you look at the Jewish scriptures, God is referred to as a Father, but only a very few times—five or six times in all the Jewish scriptures is God called a Father. In the New Testament, it is everywhere that God is a Father. So, why the shift? Why did they go from hardly ever calling him Father to calling him Father over and over and over again? Well, that is because Jesus as the unique Son of God called him Father and then told us to do the same. We are invited into the process of declaring that God is our Abba Father, right? That is in Mark, that is twice in Paul, that God is our Father in the Son, who then ultimately unites us to the Father. So, we are sons and daughters in the Son, and we are children because we get united through the peacemaking process.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Then finally, starting in verse 10, we get a blessing on what seems like a very non-blessed state: Persecution. Note two things here, and then see, Danny, what you think about this. It is not just any persecution, but specifically persecution on the account of righteousness...

DANNY DALEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, that would mean persecution on account of our connection to Jesus. In the first episode of this series, we also noted that, Danny, you think there are nine beatitudes; so really, 10, 11, and 12 all talk about persecution, but you think verse 10 is one beatitude and then verses 11 and 12 are a different one. Jesus switches to *you* for one thing there, which makes it a little more like Luke's beatitudes; but why would persecution be seen as a blessed state? What is Jesus saying here?

DANNY DALEY

Yes; isn't that a weird one? I think in the peacemaking, the one we just talked about, is the easiest one to show that this is a virtue...that these are virtues that you are supposed to cultivate and pursue. Who wouldn't want to be a peacemaker? The very next beatitude is the hardest one to justify under my own interpretive framework. If this is stuff we are supposed to go pursue and cultivate, why would we pursue persecution? But what you said, Scott, is the key to it. It is not that we pursue persecution...and I don't think that is what Jesus had in mind; he does not mean so that you will sort of flourish, go out and find a way to get persecuted. I think that what he is saying is that if you are persecuted for the right reasons, meaning for the sake of righteousness...and ultimately Jesus says: For *my* sake... If you are persecuted for the sake of Jesus. So, the idea here is that, not that you are flourishing because you are being persecuted, but that you are flourishing because you are being righteous in pursuing Jesus, and if you are persecuted *because* of those things, then that is okay because you are still in a state of flourishing, which ultimately, because following Jesus is by definition countercultural, the culture will not always react well to it; and you can expect and anticipate the

persecution will almost certainly come your way.

One thing I want to warn people about, though, is that ultimately what I see is what you might call a *persecution complex*. Those who would say: Oh, well; I am being persecuted. I must be doing something right. That is not necessarily, I think, true. I mean, John the Baptist was right in the center of God's will and he got his head chopped off. There is a lot of persecution that will come your way, and you can certainly anticipate some of that; but I don't think we should go look for it, either, as though we can wear it as a badge of honor that someone is persecuting us. It might be because you are in the center of God's will; and it might be because you are just being a terrible person and maybe people are, you know, going after you because they are...you know...not that I would justify someone persecuting anyone, but you get the point here, right? I mean, ultimately is it: Are you being persecuted because you are at the center of God's will, pursuing righteousness? I think that is what matters. When Jesus switches in that ninth beatitude to the *you*, that is the one part where he changes it from whosoever to speaking very specifically to the disciples—you will be persecuted—I think ultimately the purpose here is that there is an intensification of what he is saying here: All of the beatitudes that he has said up to this point lead to that moment. If you are cultivating all of these things, then you are living within righteousness, and according to Jesus' plan for kingdom living; and if that happens, you can expect persecution, but don't worry. Why? Because when that persecution comes like a hammer over the fragile mug...over the fragile glass...ultimately you are going to be able to sustain it and live well within it because you have cultivated these things. In other words, don't worry about the persecution. You are ready. We have made you ready.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, we have looked at the nine *Beatitudes* in Matthew 5:1-12. We are going to wrap up the series in just a moment by kind of taking the big picture and talking about how it affects the Church today. So, stay tuned.
Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we have now looked at all of *Beatitudes*...nine of them, we believe, spoken by Jesus in Matthew 5, and we have talked a little bit about how this is, Danny, you know, ideal disciples. So, let's say... Jesus isn't the disciple...he is the ideal master...and if we are going to be an ideal disciple, we get that through conforming to him, right?

DANNY DALEY

Yes, absolutely. I mean, I think that is, ultimately, the goal here. Jesus models...that is most important part, maybe, for us to understand, and we have kind of talked about this in these episodes. Jesus models all of these *Beatitudes*...all of them at some point in the text. So, ultimately we think that, yes, the model makes him the master, but the cultivation of these as ideal disciples is to be able to look at how Jesus models them and then to pursue it in that light.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and so, we actually want to think about, as we conclude this segment and this series, a few practical take-aways for our lives. I think first and foremost, the Old Testament makes it clear that God has a soft spot for those who suffer in the margins of life. I think it is also the *anawim* that you mentioned earlier: the orphan, the widow, the stranger. He takes special note of those. It is also written there in Psalm 146.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Psalm 146:7: He (God-Yahweh) upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, ⁸the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. ⁹The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

So, you know, I think, Darrell and Danny, it is clear God takes special note of such people, and for Israel, and now for us in the new Israel, the Church, we are supposed to take note of those people, right?

DANNY DALEY

Yes; it is interesting if you think about when people...in the Gospel of Matthew, there is this sense in which people often will cry out to Jesus: Take mercy on us; take mercy on us. And there are always these people who are on those margins, and they are the ones who Jesus gravitates toward every time.

If we want to move over to Luke, I always think about Luke Chapter 4, when he reads from the Isaiah scroll in the synagogue, and you know, he talks about the release of the captives, and he says: This has been fulfilled in your hearing, which probably would have been so shocking to the audience at the moment. But this is clearly the agenda for Jesus from the very beginning. The kingdom agenda is to be able to say: Hey, the kingdom as you have probably imagined it in your minds up to this point, it is not really quite at the middle of the heart of God. The heart of God is for these people who the rest of us have kind of left behind.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is beautiful, too, that I think about one of my favorite hymns is *Blessed Assurance*. One of the lines says: Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine. We look at this second thing that we want to take away from this episode is that, you know, this, what Jesus is talking about in the *Beatitudes*, it is a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven; and how do we think about how this situation that is happening now, if we could put it together and look at God's kingdom, how do we anticipate God being able to show through the disciples who are ideal, what the kingdom is like?

DANNY DALEY

Yes; I think an interesting piece to solve that puzzle is why Matthew uses the phrase: Kingdom of heaven when none of the other gospel writers use it. Mark always calls it the kingdom of God; Luke always calls it the kingdom of God; Matthew does call it the kingdom of God four times, but he calls it the kingdom of heaven dozens of times; so, why does only Matthew change it to kingdom of heaven? A lot of research has been done on this, and ultimately the answer is this: That it has changed to the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's gospel when heaven is being compared and contrasted with the ways of the earth—the way things are normally done in human society. Only when it is changed to kingdom of heaven can you immediately see that the values of earth are in contrast. So, the ways of heaven...the values of heaven...the culture of heaven is not the same as the culture of the earth. What it means for us to be ideal disciples according to Matthew's gospel is to understand first the values of heaven and what are those values? What does it mean to live in accordance with the kingdom of heaven...the values of heaven? And then to say that now that we understand that...now that we have looked into it and studied it and become disciples, how do we then take the values of heaven to bear upon the earth in a way that is fruitful...that people can then see heaven as it is played out? When we look around at sort of the way that the Church behaves in the world, can we always say that we are taking the values of heaven and bringing those values to bear upon the earth? I think sometimes instead we are getting really wrapped up in the ways of the world and what is really going on around us. That becomes our sort of what you might call a shadow mission...a distraction from the proper mission; but ultimately, I think that is really what it means for us, maybe, to bring heaven to bear is to understand the values of heaven and to show the world what that looks like through our ideal discipleship.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, it is interesting, Danny, you and I were part of a seminar not long ago, talking about the kingdom of heaven—the kingdom of God; and we talked about how sometimes the Church does not seem to talk enough about the kingdom, and Jesus did. So, this is an interesting verse from Acts 1:3:

After his suffering, he (Jesus) presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

So, you know, when you are the resurrected King of Kings and Lord of Lords, you are only going to talk about the most important thing. I mean, apparently the kingdom of God was the most important thing. I sometimes think we in the Church today do not give it enough emphasis. We don't preach sermons on it often enough.

DANNY DALEY

Which is interesting, because if you think of that as a bracket...he does that at the very end in Acts, right before his ascension; but what in the Gospel of Mark, which is probably the first of the gospels to be written, the very first words of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark in Chapter 1 are: ⁽¹⁵⁾Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

He starts with the kingdom, he ends with the kingdom, and everything in between is all about the kingdom. So, if he talked about it so much, why do we talk about it so little? I think that is a great question, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is interesting that the point you brought up earlier when you were talking about how there is a difference between what Jesus portrays as the kingdom and ideal disciple lifestyle and the discrepancy of what we actually live in and falling short of. I would like you to speak a little bit more about that, and how can we close the gap in that?

DANNY DALEY

Yes; I think it is because we too often sift what it means to be a disciple through the lenses of our modern culture. I understand the desire to do that. It is very difficult to place ourselves in the ancient world, but I really do think that, you know, we do have to be able to strip away a little bit of our own sort of modern culture, modern proclivities, and understand in Jesus' own context what discipleship looked like, because that kind of discipleship is meant to sort of carry on through the whole history of the Church. So, I think ultimately that is it. I think the difficulty is we have to be able to see where our culture has led us into distraction and be able to strip that away a little bit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, this has been a lot of fun for all three of us. We certainly want to thank our guest co-host, Dr. Danny Daley. Thanks for being with us.

DANNY DALEY

Yes, thanks for having me. I loved it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what better way to close this series than to ask God's blessing on all of you who are listening. Thanks be to God.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney and Scott Hoezee; and today we had Danny Daley with us. Join us again next time as we continue to dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com. Share what *Groundwork* means to you. Tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

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