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# Blessed are...the Poor in Spirit, those Who Mourn, the Meek, and those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

## DARRELL DELANEY

I once sat in a worship service where the congregation was grieving a tragedy; and instead of rushing to upbeat songs, the pastor read the raw words of Psalm 13: How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? That moment reminded me that Jesus' blessings are not abstract ideals but real promises: Comfort for those who mourn; strength for the meek; and fullness for those who hunger for righteousness. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we explore how the first four beatitudes can reshape our churches into places of honesty, humility, and holy hunger. 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 in part two of our short, three-part series on the *Beatitudes*, and we are glad to have Dr. Danny Daley, Assistant Professor at Calvin Theological Seminary joining us again to study the *Beatitudes* in more detail. So, welcome, Danny.

## DANNY DALEY

Yes; happy to be here again. I had a lot of fun last time. So, yes; I am looking forward to it.

## SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, in our first episode, we took an overview look at Matthew's version of Jesus' beatitudes. We compared them to Luke's version in Luke 6, and we considered their context and setting. Today, we want to study the first four beatitudes in closer detail. Let's remind ourselves what those are: This is Matthew 5:3-6: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. <sup>5</sup>Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup>Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

## DARRELL DELANEY

So, Scott...and also Dr. Daley...when we look at this, we do not think about these are the blessings that everyone wants: Poor in spirit, you know, mourning, and meek, hunger and thirst. Those are not things that people run after and are excited about. What do you think Jesus is getting at here, because he turns our expectations upside down and he helps us to see there is a different way to look at this. So, let's talk about *poor in spirit*. What does that phrase mean...poor in spirit...and how does Jesus qualify it?

## DANNY DALEY

Yes; it is interesting. You know, when you say that not everybody would look at these as positives, and a lot of interpreters over the years have tried *not* to look at them as positives, because they do, on the surface, the first four sound so negative. The second four certainly sound a lot better. So, someone has said: Maybe the first four are something to be avoided and we don't get into virtues until the latter half of the *Beatitudes*. I

read that differently. I think they all are virtues...things that we can pursue and cultivate, and poor in spirit is one of those that can be tricky unless you really know the context of the phrase. It is interesting, we have to point out first of all that poor in spirit...this exact phrase as Jesus uses it in Matthew 5...is not found anywhere else. There are similar things, like contrite of spirit in the Psalms. In the Dead Sea scrolls, there are a few comments that are similar in nature; but really, this is sort of a unique phrase that Jesus came up with; but I really think ultimately it refers back...in the period of Israel's history, there was a group called the *Anavim*, and there was a Hebrew word, *annah*, which refers sort of to their condition...their state of things; and ultimately this was a group of people who really saw their need for God, and they would come to God with open hands and open hearts, understanding that they had nothing in and of themselves to offer, and they were just open and ready for God's will in their lives; and I think that is really what Jesus is getting at with *poor in spirit*. This is a good thing to be cultivated, not poverty to be ignored or neglected; and it is cultivated because it is simply that disposition that we should come to God with humble and open hearts and ready to pursue God's will. I think that is what Jesus is getting at.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

And so, one of things we saw in the first program is that Luke does seem to make it more about economic poverty: Blessed are those who are poor; and then he has a corresponding: Woe to you who are rich, now. So, you are saying it can have an economic component, but it is more than that.

### **DANNY DALEY**

Yes, and I would say it probably even does still have an economic component. I wouldn't want to remove that entirely. Certainly, in Luke, you are right; it does remain economic, which in Luke's gospel I think he is hitting on sort of an unfortunate circumstance that people are hoping will be reversed one day; and Jesus, there in that context, offers a hope that that reversal will come. But adding that phrase: *in spirit*, is really where I think Jesus seems to internalize it. And really, I think the precursor to this is found in Isaiah 61, where he talks about this kind of openness and brokenness; the ability to come before God in this humility. When he added the phrase: *in spirit*, he seems to be internalizing something, where it does not remove the economic connotations. In fact, I think most of Jesus' audience here probably was quite poor and didn't really have any financial resources to speak of. They were probably not privileged within their environment; but I think he is still also trying to pull them away from any sense of economic poverty only, and simply saying: Wherever you are at, whatever your condition: poor, rich...is irrelevant to the idea that you can still, in either condition, come before God with open hands and an open heart.

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

Speaking of that open hands and open heart, when he talks about blessed are you who are poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven; well, he says it in the third person, of course; but in your book, you called this the first blessing an *inclusio*...

### **DANNY DALEY**

Yes.

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

So, can you tell us what you meant by that, and why it is significant for our understanding of these beatitudes?

### **DANNY DALEY**

Yes; the first one is an *inclusio* with the eighth, right? So, the second half of the first beatitude and the eighth beatitude are identical: For theirs is the kingdom of heaven; and they are the only two that say that. What I really think is going on here is that that is a bracket around everything in between. So, the first one says: For theirs is the kingdom of heaven; the eighth one says: For theirs is the kingdom of heaven; because everything in between is then the definition of what that means. What does it mean for you to be a member of the kingdom of heaven, or to receive the kingdom of heaven as a gift? It is really explicated or explained by all those other second clauses and all of these other beatitudes. It means that you will be comforted, you will be

filled; it means that you will inherit the earth. All of these things are going to happen to those who receive the kingdom of heaven. I really think that what it means for it to be an *inclusio* is to bracket all of that as kingdom definition...these are all kingdom. They are not just beatitudes, these are not just virtues in a general sense, they are kingdom beatitudes in particular.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

And let's look at that next one: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. What kind of mourning are we talking about here? Is it in line with lament psalms in the Old Testament...that kind of mourning...or how do you take that, Danny?

### **DANNY DALEY**

Yes; I really like to look at a narrative reading of these things. So, our temptation is to use a giant net and to say that anything that would cause us mourning must be what Jesus has in mind; and I don't think that is quite the right way to read it. I really look at how Matthew uses these same ideas in the rest of the text to explain what Jesus might mean in these beatitudes; and where else do we find mourning within this text? Well, for example, the best place is in Matthew 23, where Jesus is mourning over the state of Jerusalem. So, I think what he is doing there is he is saying that those who mourn over the state of things...that there is a lot that has been made wrong that needs to be made right again, and Jesus mourns over that. I think what he is doing in the beatitude is inviting us into that same mourning. So again, some would say: I don't want to be in mourning. That sounds terrible. Why would I want to pursue that? Well, you pursue it because there is so much that has been made wrong in the world, and we mourn what our Savior mourns, right? So, if he is mourning something and he is inviting us to enter in to join him in that same state.

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

It's a beautiful thing when you see that Jesus teaches this, and then he models it later down in the book of Matthew...

### **DANNY DALEY**

Right, yes.

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

So, he is showing us the way: This is how you do it. And I like in mourning, too, this is what is going on in the world that is broken, and our God, who is good, is the one I will trust. Make this make sense...this distance between these two, right? And so, when Jesus says: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted, we talked about mourning, but you know, we want to talk about comfort. What do you think he means by that? Where does that comfort come from that Jesus promises, and how does it affect us?

### **DANNY DALEY**

Well, I think ultimately, even though the mourning is something we should want to enter into, to join into Jesus and his mourning, the comfort also to me is definitely communicating what I would say is a future hope that ultimately Jesus will finish the work that he started of taking everything that has been made wrong and making it right again. Then that brings comfort to those who did, in fact, join him in mourning; but I also think that there is a sense where mourning can drive us to what some have called *a holy discontent*; that if you look at the state of things and you mourn over those things, and it touches your heart deeply enough, then you might want to join in the process with Jesus now, of being able to sort of bring healing and hope to the people who are desperately in need of it. So, I think to some degree we become the hands and feet, through the Church, of Jesus to bring some of that comfort, but I do think ultimately Jesus had something more future-oriented in mind. That there is this restitution coming where all things will be made right again; and I think that ultimately becomes a future hope, even if we can participate in it now in the present.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

I like that. Yes, sort of a holy discontent and a desire to make things right. That is great. Well, in just a minute we will consider the next two beatitudes, so stay tuned for that.

**DARRELL DELANEY**

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

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

Let's read the next two beatitudes: <sup>5</sup>“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup>Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.

That is Matthew 5:5, 6; Danny, *meek*; what does Jesus mean? How is that commonly understood?

**DANNY DALEY**

Yes; meek is the one I could probably, you know, talk about forever and ever and ever. This is the one that I talked about quite a bit in my first book, which was the impetus that helped me to come up with the idea to write a whole book on the rest of the *Beatitudes*. Meekness is difficult because ultimately at its root it means something like humble, but I think we need to be able to get quite a bit more specific about what kind of humility we are talking about. There is this very common phrase that I have heard quite a bit in popular preaching, where pastors will say things like: Meekness is not weakness, it is power under control; and I actually really don't love that as often as I have heard it preached; and I think here is why: I do think meekness is not weakness—that part I am fine with. I think that is true. The idea that it is power under control is only relevant to those who have powers; so that works for Jesus because he had it, right? I mean, he could have summoned legions of angels to pull him off the cross, and he made the choice—the active decision—in his meekness not to do that. I remember when I was studying this passage, I was living in Europe at the time and studying with people from all over the world...different continents; and there were lots of people who would say: Well, what about in my culture, where most of us have no semblance of power whatsoever? If it is power under control, and we don't have power, can we not be meek? And my thing was: No; you are supposed to be meek, too, right? All of us are supposed to be meek, whether we have power or not. I think even those of us who don't have any power can still engage in meekness. Ultimately, this is really what meekness is all about, and by the way, this concept pops up in the Psalms quite a bit. In the Psalms, meekness is always contrasted with anger. I think that is the most important part of it. It is the resistance of anger, the resistance of retribution, the resistance of revenge. I mean, what does Paul say: To not take out revenge, but instead leave it to the Lord; and I think that is sort of wrapped up in the connotation of meekness. So, ultimately, I think that is what meekness is driving at; and we talked already in this episode about the idea that Jesus models these things; Jesus himself refers to himself as meek at one point, and then it is called meek by Matthew later in the text. There are a couple of times where Jesus himself is referred to this way. So, he is certainly, for him, is controlling his power; but even for those of us who do not have it, it is the surrendering the need for that power in the first place, and instead saying: My role is whatever condition God has placed me in, I have the ability to remain humble and bless the world through that condition. I think ultimately wherever we find ourselves, we should be able to thrive within our meekness.

**DARRELL DELANEY**

It's a beautiful thing, because this is why meekness is not weakness, because I refuse to retaliate, even though I have the ability to snap back or to get even. I will leave that to the Lord, and I will endure through this and trust his process and timing on that. I mean, Jesus is the King of Kings, and Matthew refers to him as the King of Kings, but he is not coming in on a triumphant horse, he is coming in on the donkey...

**DANNY DALEY**

Yes, yes.

**DARRELL DELANEY**

So, he is modeling; again, he teaches it and he models it. I was thinking also that he said that they would inherit the earth, and maybe you can talk a little bit about that, because, I mean, this is one thing that he acknowledges that they are meek, but then another where he says they will inherit the earth. So, can you talk a little bit about that?

## DANNY DALEY

Yes, there is a parable later in Matthew, in Chapter 21, where, in the parable there are these tenants, where I make the argument that this is representative of many of the Jewish leaders who have been blind guides and led some of the Jews away from God's plan; and it says there that they are tenants who are tending the vineyard, which is probably a reference to Jerusalem; and they are not doing a very good job. So God sends his representatives...or the landowner representing God sends his representatives, and they show up and these tenants kill the representatives. These are probably the prophets. Then the landowner says: Well, I will send my Son. They will not kill my Son; they will respect my Son. This is, of course, Jesus. So, the landowner sends his Son and they kill the Son, too. There they specifically say: If we kill the Son, we can take his inheritance. So, the inheritance of the *earth* is something that belongs to Jesus and those who are disobedient to God's will—God's design for flourishing and human life—are those who are trying violently to take this by force. So, ultimately what it means to inherit the earth is to say that instead of trying to win over the inheritance of all things on our own—to steal it; to take it away—to recognize that it belongs to the Son, and the only way to share in that inheritance...to have a partaking of that inheritance...is to do it through the Son rather than in opposition to the Son. So, the inheritance ultimately belongs to Jesus, the kingdom of God, all things belong to him. There is a reference in Matthew 19 to the renewal of all things. So, I think that is really what the inheritance of the earth is, it is the future renewal, where God is going to take all things that have been made wrong in the world. There is going to be a final stage of making all things right again; and those who are pursuing kingdom orientation, like those who live according to the *Beatitudes*, are those same disciples who will, with Jesus, share in his own inheritance the things that belong to him. So, I really think that is what it is. It is a future promise of a share in the way in which God is going to take all things and make them right.

## SCOTT HOEZEE

Now let's pick up that fourth beatitude: <sup>6</sup>Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

We think of righteousness in a lot of different ways, and sometimes it includes justice and so forth. We think of righteousness as coming from those who are justified, you know; but how do you think Jesus meant the word *righteous*? What kind of righteousness should we hunger and thirst for?

## DANNY DALEY

Yes; the Greek word there can be translated either righteousness or justice; both are defensible in the context. I am a bit of a maximalist, so there is a part of me who wants to say it is probably a little bit of both of those things. The justice aspect, like we have been talking about, the idea that there are things that are wrong and we can hunger and thirst for them to be made right again; but I don't think in Matthew that is the only thing we should think about. I think righteousness actually does refer to behavior, and people resist this because Paul, for example in Romans says: There is no one righteous; no, not one. But Paul is talking about righteousness that you might boast in; that you can take before God and say: O God, look at my righteousness. What Paul is saying there is: No, no, no; you do not have that kind of righteousness. But for me to look at the two of you and say: Hey, these are two righteous men before me, actually according to Matthew's use of the word, would not be out of bounds at all. It is perfectly okay to look at somebody's behavior that accords with the kingdom of God and say that is righteous behavior.

We get that right in the beginning of Matthew. Joseph is described as righteous because of the way he treats Mary when he finds out that she is pregnant when they have not had relations with one another, right? It says that when he chose to divorce her quietly to show her mercy, that this was righteous behavior. So, I really think that hunger and thirst for righteousness also has that connotation to it, that we are striving to live in accord with the kingdom; that we are hungering and thirsting to live in accord with kingdom values. I think that that is a big part of it, but I ultimately think that this justice piece cannot be left out either.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

We talked a little bit in the first episode of this series about the distinctives of Matthew's gospel, and I think I am right in saying that one of the distinctives of Matthew's gospel is that Jesus has come to reveal what true righteousness is, and it was not what people had come to think it was; and Joseph kind of becomes exemplar number one. He thought the righteous thing to do was divorce her quietly, and God said: No; there is a deeper righteousness. Stay with her. So, I think that must be in play here, too, right?

**DANNY DALEY**

Yes, absolutely; I think that is a great point.

**DARRELL DELANEY**

I think meekness keeps our strength surrendered to God, and righteous hunger keeps our hearts awake to God's purposes. When these come together, we become disciples who are steady and engaged. The world may not notice it at first, but Jesus says these are the people who will inherit the earth. So, coming up next, we are going to take a little bit more time and reflect on the four beatitudes and the lives of discipleship in the Church. So, stay tuned.

*Segment 3*

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

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

**DARRELL DELANEY**

And I am Darrell Delaney.

**DANNY DALEY**

And I am Danny Daley.

**SCOTT HOEZEE**

So, now we have walked through the first four beatitudes together: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted; blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth; blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Again, Danny, you called your book *Ideal Discipleship*. You talked a little bit about this in the first program, but just looking at these first four beatitudes, how does this build up a picture of ideal discipleship?

**DANNY DALEY**

Yes; so, there is this sort of analogy I use in the book: There is this idea that all things possess what you could call a disposition. So, a glass, if it is made of glass...so, it cannot be plastic...a glass that is made of glass...one of its dispositions is that it is fragile, which is interesting, because especially if it is like a coffee mug, what do you expect it to do? You expect it to actually hold...if you are going to pour boiling hot liquid into it, you want it to hold and not spill your coffee all over you; and yet, it is a very fragile thing. If I were to smack it with a hammer, it would shatter all over the place. So really, what it is is that just because the glass is fragile—just because that is its disposition—does not mean that when it shatters it shattered because it was fragile. We expect it not to shatter. If it shatters, it shattered because I enacted force upon it that caused it to shatter. Its fragility is the disposition that predicted that it would shatter, but that is not what caused it to shatter. I say all of that to say I think that is really what Jesus is getting at with these beatitudes; is if we cultivate these things, then they become predictors of the way that we will behave when difficult circumstances come our way. If you are poor in spirit, meaning you are open-handed as you come before God and you have an open heart to follow his lead. If you mourn over the things that need to be mourned over and you are broken-hearted over the things that breaks God's heart. If you are meek, meaning you are resisting anger; resisting retribution; resisting lording your power and authority over people. If you are hungering and thirsting for righteousness...if you are doing these things...these become predictors of the

way you will behave, then, when you actually have to make decisions in life, because dispositions are the things you cultivate that make you the kind of person that you become, that ultimately, then, will lead you toward the decisions that you ultimately make. I mean, can you imagine if we had an entire church just full of people who cultivated these things and these were the kinds of dispositions that would characterize us? I think we would lead in the world around us with so much more grace and humility maybe than we often do.

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

Speaking of that, it is really interesting to think about how might people who embody these truths live, and how might it affect the church, and how might it affect wider society if we took these beatitudes seriously and we lived them out? What are the kind of things that you would imagine ideal disciples would be doing and how we would live?

### **DANNY DALEY**

Yes, it is interesting; because if you go back to even the ancient Greeks talked a lot about, for example, meekness is one of the ones that they talked about. Aristotle talked a lot about meekness; and he talked about it in relationship to leadership in the world. So, again, as I mentioned earlier in the episode, I don't think it always has to be for leaders. Anybody can be meek; but there was a sense in which Aristotle always said that the Greek kings were always so disappointing to him because they were not as meek as they needed to be; to put others needs in front of themselves. The right leader is not the one who has a hubris and a design on their own vision of things and enforces that; but it is one who looks around at the world and says: What are the needs around me and how do we go out and meet these needs and meet people where they are?

So, when you move into Jesus, and Jesus then calls himself humble and meek in Matthew Chapter 11; and in Matthew 21 it says is not just a king, but it calls him the *meek* king; and you contrast that, for example, with Herod...

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

Oh, yes.

### **DANNY DALEY**

In the book of Matthew, who is a complete and total mess, right? Like he is the kind of king you do not want. Jesus is the kind of king that you do. I think ultimately as we cultivate these things, the sort of things that we do or the way we look out at the world and say: Where is this brokenness that breaks our hearts? And not just our hearts, what is the brokenness that breaks God's heart? How do we then go and see what is going on in the world and address those things? Not because we are walking into those things with our own agenda. I mean, ultimately we might have an agenda in order to, you know, convey the kingdom of God to people, and I think that is important; but to be able to look at people and meet them where they are at and say: How do we love you the way you need to be loved in order for us to show you the mercy, the love, the grace of God? I think really having that disposition of walking in without those predetermined agendas is step number one. Because I do think we often have this kind of sense in the Church: We are going to go into such-and-such a place and do such-and-such a thing; and then we walk in with our own agenda and our own motives, and not really ever get to know what is going on in the communities that we are trying to meet with and to love and to show mercy toward, and that sort of thing. So, I think dispositions are sort of the baseline...the base level of walking in and just saying simply: Who are you? What are your needs? How can we love you well? Then to introduce the love of God to them through that.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Of course, the irony is that even though Jesus was the meek king who came in riding on a donkey, we know that the disciples still deep down really were hoping for Jesus to be a political, mighty king to replace Caesar, and that he was going to establish a new Israel. So, when they shouted their hosannas, when they said: Here comes the king, they were right to call him a king, but their definition of king, had you stopped to ask them that day, would have been wrong. It would not have been meekness. Sometimes I think the more things change, the more they stay the same. I think that in the Church today, we too are kind of into power and to amassing political power to enforce our will. You know, you get a lot of talk about a certain kind of rugged

masculinity that, you know, we are calling men to be real men, right? And real men, I guess, are not meek, is the message. So, it is kind of interesting that these are our marching orders. This is our picture of ideal discipleship, but it seems like we still struggle today.

### **DANNY DALEY**

One of the interesting things about that is that, I think, in the New Testament we get the sense that we are always supposed to feel like we are exiles and sojourners in this world. We are in it, but not of it. When we are trying to utilize power to sort of force the world around us to conform to our own standards, if we are using power to make ourselves more comfortable in the world around us, then we are really, I think, utilizing that in a way that does not make any sense, because comfort really has never been our goal. Jesus has never said: Hey, recreate the world so that you are as comfortable as possible. Instead, he said: You are never really going to fit in entirely. This is a countercultural movement. You are always supposed to be a bit uncomfortable, but within that level of discomfort, that is okay. As long as you cultivate these dispositions, your discomfort is irrelevant to your mission. Your mission is actually not to go recreate the world in your own image, it is to love the world into the image of Christ, and there is a bit of a difference there between those two things.

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

Well, we pray that the Lord Jesus Christ will remind all of us that we need to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and then all these other things will be added unto you; thanks be to God.

### **DARRELL DELANEY**

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee; and joining us today was Dr. Danny Daley. We hope you will join us again next time as we study the remaining beatitudes of Jesus as recorded in Matthew, and explore mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, and the surprising blessing hidden behind persecution.

Connect with us at [groundworkonline.com](http://groundworkonline.com) to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or to tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*

### **SCOTT HOEZEE**

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