
Justice and Jesus the Prophet

SCOTT HOEZEE

At the seminary where I teach, every spring our senior students undergo their big, oral, comprehensive exam. One question I have occasionally asked on the oral comp is this: Where would you go in the New Testament if you wanted to preach on the theme of economic justice? Well, there is more than one right answer to that question, but a really good answer, and one students usually give is to say: The Gospel of Luke. As we will see today on *Groundwork*, Luke, even more than his three fellow gospel writers, had a definite emphasis on justice, and particularly economic justice. Let's trace this theme out in the Gospel of Luke. 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 second program of our planned six-part series on the Gospel of Luke. In the first program, we took a big overview of the book, but then focused, really, in on the role of the Holy Spirit, as Luke presents the stories of Jesus' life and ministry. Today, Darrell, as we just indicated in the introduction, on this program, we want to pick up on another major theme in Luke: economic justice.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, Luke is not exclusive to the topic of economic justice. We know that this topic shows up in every one of the gospels, but each of the gospel writers had a different emphasis as far as their overall theme in Jesus' life and Jesus' teachings, and Luke wants to highlight this economic justice theme throughout his book to make sure that people do not miss the importance of taking care of orphans, widows, strangers, and those who seem to be on the margins in his book.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we believe, Darrell, that, you know, all four of the gospel writers...Matthew, Mark, Luke, John...they all operated under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The fact that they each had a slightly different reading audience in mind, and therefore the fact that they shaped the raw material of Jesus' ministry in certain ways, that was all under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; because the Spirit wanted to make sure...that is why we have four gospels and not one, right? The Spirit wanted to make sure that all the major themes of Jesus got covered in the four gospels; and so, each gospel and each evangelist who wrote the gospel emphasized certain aspects of Jesus to make sure those were preserved for the Church. For Luke, one such theme was justice.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, when we talk about justice, it is really interesting that sometimes, when the whole topic of justice is brought up, some people think you are getting political when you do that, but if we are clear, Scott, this theme is all over scripture, it is not just centered in the Gospel of Luke; and if we look closely, we can see God talking about justice almost all the time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Almost all...you cannot avoid it. If you are going to teach or preach or read the Bible, you are going to bump into this theme of justice, and also economic justice, all the time. That is true, I mean, you know, there are Christians all over the world, Darrell, who live in various different governmental systems; they have various economic systems that they are part of; they have a whole bunch of all different political parties that people are a part of. It does not matter where you live, what your government is like, what your economy is like, how you identify politically or in a partisan way, justice is set before us as something we are supposed to do as Christians; and the Bible does not say: Oh, and there is one and only one way by which you can enforce justice as the Church or as an individual. No: the Bible says there are many creative ways for us to carry out the mission of Christ's Church, including this part of the mission.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, just like our Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are diverse yet unified, there is a way to do unified justice, even though it may manifest itself in diverse ways all over the world. So, there are many different ways that people get at this, but wherever you go, there will be people, and there will be an opportunity to exercise what biblical justice looks like in the culture and the context in which these people live, and where we live as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And for Jesus, Darrell, Jesus was an heir of everything that was in the Old Testament. In fact, obviously, when Jesus was here, the only scripture that existed *was* what we now call the Old Testament. The New Testament was not written yet. It was being written, right? So, what we want to do in this first part of the program, Darrell, is go back to the Old Testament...the Hebrew Scriptures...and particularly, we want to go back to the Pentateuch, which is the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, and right on through to Deuteronomy—because this is where God talks to his people a lot about the need that Israelite society had to be founded on justice.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we did do a series on Deuteronomy, and we talked a little bit about the theme of God saying: Remember, remember, remember; and he says it in Deuteronomy 5. He always reminds them that: Hey, remember when you were slaves in Egypt; don't be like the Egyptians were to you when you get into this other place; don't be an oppressor like you were oppressed; and there is actually an example of this also in Leviticus 19, where it says:

³³When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. ³⁴The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

By the way, whenever something ends in the Old Testament with God saying: I am the Lord your God, which is basically *ani Yahweh*: I am Yahweh. In other words, this is me talking; you better take it seriously. And similarly in Deuteronomy 10:17: For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. ¹⁸He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. ¹⁹And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in Egypt. We have seen this many different times in different series on *Groundwork*, Darrell. There is that triplet that is sometimes called the *anawim*. The triplet is the widow, the orphan, the stranger. It comes up all over the place in the Old Testament, and God makes it clear that not only was Israel to ensure a level playing field for these vulnerable people, they had to go out of their way to give them extra help, in fact.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; you know what I love about scripture is that if you read it, it will echo itself. When I listen to this passage from Deuteronomy, I am hearing echoes of this stuff in different parts of scripture, in different parts

of the New Testament; and if you are paying attention, then you will start to see that the scripture fulfills itself; and it is really powerful to see that God continues to talk about it, and it is not just left in the Old Testament, and we will get to that; but there are definitely some opportunities to talk more about what it means to take care of the orphan, the widow, and the stranger, because that is justice. That is actually making sure that the playing field is not only fair but equal and equitable. So, that is something that really continues to show itself over and over in the scriptures.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We can think of the gleaner laws, where they were not supposed to vacuum up all the wheat from their fields. They had to leave the edges in place so that people like, oh, let's say, Ruth could eat and could live, which she did. My former professor, David Holwerda, had once wrote: In the Old Testament, it is clear that God is scandalized by poverty, and he wills its abolition. And we see that all over the place; unfortunately, though, Darrell, if Israel had... One of the biggest failings of Israel was that they didn't actually do this, and that is when you get to the minor prophets.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and so, Amos and Micah both have something to say about this. In Amos 2, God is indicting Israel, and he says: ⁷They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.

In Micah 3, he is also calling them to account. Again, he says: Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel. Should you not embrace justice, ²you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones; ³who eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot.

Oh, my gosh!

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a raw image, comparing the leaders of Israel to cannibals. That is how bad mistreating the widow, the orphan and the stranger is in God's sight. So, you get that line from Amos 5: (verse 24) But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream. And just, by the way, as we round out this segment, Darrell, that line from Amos 5 reminds us that in both the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, and the Greek of the New Testament, justice and righteousness are almost the exact same word; reminding us that it is God's holy righteousness that leads to God's justice; and now that we as New Testament people have been credited with the righteousness of Christ Jesus, our Savior, that is the source of our seeking to live just lives with those around us, too. But, we have been in the Old Testament, Darrell. We want to go to the New Testament, especially, of course, in the Gospel of Luke, so that is next. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are going to turn now to the Gospel of Luke, which this is a whole series on Luke, so that makes sense, right? Luke doesn't waste any time, Darrell, in getting the theme of economic justice in front of his readers. Luke has this monumental first chapter; this really, really long chapter that foretells the birth of John the Baptist, the annunciation to the Virgin Mary by the archangel Gabriel; and then, we read of Mary visiting her cousin Elizabeth; and Darrell, as part of that visit, Mary is said to have burst forth in song, and let's listen to that now, here from Luke 1, starting at verse 46.

DARRELL DELANEY

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁹for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who

are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. ⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Luke 1, starting at verse 46; we call this song the *Magnificat*, Darrell. That comes from the first word of the song in Latin: *Magnificat anima mea, Dominum* (My soul magnifies the Lord).

And Darrell, apparently something about Mary's being tapped to be the mother of the Son of God in human form triggered some thoughts in her mind. I mean, Mary was a nobody; really just a humble young woman living in the outback of the Roman Empire; and yet, God has exalted her to the highest place; and when Mary thought about that, Darrell, apparently, she tumbled to the thought: Wait a minute! God is always doing that! He is always taking the little people...the vulnerable people...and exalting them and sending the proud and the rich away empty. God is going to feed the hungry, but he is going to send the rich away empty-handed. You know, we have noticed this before here on *Groundwork*, but C. S. Lewis called this a "terrible song," not meaning bad quality; he meant "terrible" in the sense of shocking and bracing. Here is a young woman, Darrell, crooning about God's just sending the powerful and the rich away empty-handed. Wow; that is a powerful song!

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a powerful song; and it is interesting because it turns the world's economy upside down. Sometimes the world favors the rich...favors the people who have power...and so, God is...in her song, she is being reminded that he uses the weak to shame the strong, the foolish to shame the wise. We will get to that in the New Testament, when Paul talks about the foolishness of being Christ the power of God. That is what he preaches, and he doesn't do wisdom or eloquent words or any of that; and he shows how God's foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom, and she is singing about that in this song.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is Luke 1, and her boy, Jesus, is going to grow up to be a chip off the maternal block. Jesus picks up on this, too, very early in his ministry. In Luke 6 we get to what is called, Darrell, the Sermon on the Plain. Now, the better version of a lot of what Jesus says in Luke 6 is in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5; but there are differences between the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain—Matthew 5 and Luke 6. So, what? Was this the same sermon, but they got reshaped a bit by Matthew and Luke; or...and I can attest to this myself...and maybe you can, too...like traveling preachers, Jesus maybe preached the same sermon in more than one place. I have done...oh, I don't know...a few hundred times. So, maybe Luke is reporting on a slightly different version than Matthew. Either way or both ways, what we know is that Luke's version here, of the Beatitudes especially, seem much more concrete and earthy than how Matthew talks about it.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, Matthew is actually explaining these things in probably more flowery language...more spiritual terms: Blessed are these people...the kingdom of heaven...things of that nature, but when Luke talks about it, it is interesting that he couples the blessings and the woes. Look at what he says here, starting in verse 20 of Chapter 6 of Luke. He says: Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

He goes on; but later down in the verses, we get to the woes, and he says in verse 24: "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets."

So, he is a straight shooter here. I just wanted to pause here, Scott, and just make sure that people understood that we are not preaching or teaching that being rich and having power is evil. We are not saying that. What

we are saying is: If you derive your identity...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Your purpose, and your calling from the things and the possessions that you have, and you start making yourself self-righteous and you are better than other folks because of it, that is a problem. It really messes with the justice theme that Luke is trying to get emphasized in this book.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; I mean, and Luke again makes it much more earthy than Matthew does, and that is very clear as part of the theme. That is also why...so, there are a number of parables that are unique to Luke, but one of them is Luke 16, and let's listen to this, starting in verse 19: "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' ²⁵But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' ²⁷He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' ³⁰No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' ³¹He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; this is powerful, Scott. I mean, this is one of the few parables... I don't know if I have seen another parable that Jesus did, which is a spiritual story. The parable is actually a tangible story with a spiritual meaning, and in this one, he names the people. Lazarus has a name. I don't think I have ever seen that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; there are no other... Jesus taught about thirty-six parables, depending on how you count. This is the only character who had a name, and I think, Darrell, that is Jesus and Luke's way of saying, you know, the poor are not a category; they are not faceless; they are not anonymous; they have names. They are real people with real names, real stories, and we need to know and care about them. It is also interesting the rich man did know about Lazarus. He knew his name...he knew his name!

But then, the other thing, just real quickly as we close out this segment: The rich man claims that he had no chance to know that he should have treated Lazarus better; and his brothers don't either, so go warn them; and then Abraham says: They have Moses; they have the Prophets. In other words, they had the Old Testament; that which we reviewed in the first part of this program. It is all there for the reading. Just read it and then live that way; and that is what Luke is saying and that is what Jesus in Luke is saying: Live that way; live justly. But Darrell, speaking of Moses and the Prophets, there is one other thing we want to talk about in this program, so we will get to that in just a moment.

Segment 3

Darrell Delaney:

You are listening 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, the New Testament connects Jesus to the Old Testament in a lot of different ways. You know, in Matthew's gospel in the temptations in the wilderness, Jesus refutes Satan with three passages and they are all from Deuteronomy, which is Matthew's way of saying: Jesus is the new Israel; and all of the synoptic gospels also tell us about Jesus' transfiguration; and in Luke it comes in Chapter 9.

DARRELL DELANEY

Picking it up in verse 28, it says: About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John, and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. ³¹They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, here is a clear way to show that Jesus, Darrell, was the final fulfillment of the law and the prophets. You have Moses and Elijah—the law and the prophets. Deuteronomy 18 assured Israel that after Moses died there would always be a prophet in Israel to succeed Moses, and the most famous of them was Elijah. So, in other words...and Elijah, of course, you know, called for economic justice for the poor, too, like all the prophets. So, the transfiguration shows us, you know, Jesus is picking up the prophetic mantle of the prophets to call for justice for the poor and the oppressed and the vulnerable; but like those prophets, Darrell, Jesus also got rejected.

DARRELL DELANEY

He is also the fulfillment of the law, because Moses is the lawgiver. So, he is fulfilling the law and the prophets; but it also shows that because prophets are rejected, he goes into this mission statement, which is in Luke 4, and it says: ¹⁶He went into Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” ²⁰Then he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

And initially everybody is happy with that, and they speak well of him, but then eventually Jesus sort of, you know, goes on and says, you know: ²⁴No prophet is accepted in his hometown. ^{25b}There were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. ²⁶Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”

And then everybody is furious with him and they literally try to throw Jesus off a cliff because what Jesus was saying is: Like ancient Israel, you are not living just lives; and God will go minister to somebody other than you, just as he did with Elijah and with Elisha; but what Jesus was also saying, Darrell, is that all the covenant promises God ever made were finding their yes in Jesus. Somewhere Paul I think says: Everything God ever promised in Jesus, that is the yes. Every promise. So, Jesus is the fulfillment of everything; and in case we didn't catch that earlier in the Gospel of Luke, we get it squarely at the end.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when they are on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24, Jesus is walking with them, but he is in disguise; but really, what was important was that he said that all these things have been fulfilled in me, and he starts going from the Old Testament and explaining these things, showing where they are. So, in verse 25 it says: ²⁵He

said to them (who were walking with him), “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. ²⁶Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” (And then this part:) ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we know, he disappears from those two people. They run back to Jerusalem, meet with the disciples, Jesus pops into the room at the very end of Luke 24, and again, verse 44 of Luke 24: He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.”

So, a breathtaking claim. Jesus is saying everything in scripture up till now is about me; it is all about me. That again is a breathtaking claim. But as we wrap up this segment and this program on economic justice in Luke, maybe we could do a couple of takeaways, Darrell.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, the first thing that we want to emphasize is that it is important for believers and Christians to know the Old Testament, because Jesus is fulfilling everything that is happening in the Old Testament; and what I was taught is that the Old Testament is God’s plan concealed and the New Testament is God’s plan revealed. So, if you know what is going on in the type and shadow and hints from the Old Testament, you will see that fulfilled in the New Testament in the life of Jesus, this is really powerful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we have to know about it, and you know, in some churches, Darrell, the Old Testament does not get preached much. They preach the gospels. If they follow the lectionaries, they tend to preach the gospel lesson, not the Old Testament lesson; but we really, as Christians we need to really understand the Old Testament or we are not even going to understand... We need to understand the old covenant if we are going to going to understand the new covenant in Jesus’ blood that we celebrate every time we take the Lord’s Supper.

Then, a second takeaway, Darrell, in addition to needing to know the Old Testament, obviously, no nation on earth today is the exact equivalent of ancient Israel. In fact, the Church is the new Israel; and so, there were things that applied to old, ancient Israel that don’t apply to the new Israel, the Church; but justice isn’t one of them, because justice is just as important and just as emphasized in the New Testament as in the Old. So, that is one thing that does carry over from the ancient Israel to the new Israel of the Church. We still want to live lives that reflect God’s justice.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, what better way to conclude this episode than from the prophet Micah in Chapter 6:8, where it says: He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

We pray that is our goal; thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we trace the theme of prayer and dependence on God in the Gospel of Luke.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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Printed on July 3, 2026

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