

The Beatitudes: A Kingdom Perspective on People who are Blessed

DARRELL DELANEY

If you asked a group of kids who they thought was blessed, there is a good chance you would get answers that include friends with money, friends with talent, celebrities, or intelligent people they know. None of these answers would surprise us. It is how the world has trained us to think; that the strong, the smart, the beautiful, the talented, the rich, those are the people who are blessed; but one of the topics Jesus taught most about was the kingdom of God, because the values of God's kingdom are completely unlike the values of the world. In Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, he begins by correcting our understanding of who is blessed, and as he does so, he teaches us how we should be or become if we want to reflect the kingdom of God in our lives. 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 beginning a six-part series on the Sermon on the Mount, and I am excited about this, because we are going to get into some of Jesus' most famous teachings. We know in the book of Matthew that Matthew is the one who wants to show Jesus is the Messiah—the one we have been waiting for—the one who is traced all the way back to Father Abraham; and he shows that Jesus has authority; and one of those areas is teaching, and that is what we are going to talk about, the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this is in Matthew 5, 6, and 7—three chapters—a very condensed teaching, Darrell. We are not one hundred percent sure if Jesus actually said all of this in one sitting...boy, it would be like drinking from a fire hose if so...or if this is a collection of things he regularly taught. There is another version of this in Luke 6, except there it is the Sermon on the Plain, but it has a lot of similarities; but right, as you said, Matthew wrote for a Jewish reading audience to affirm for those who already believed Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for, to say: Yep, he is; but for those who were on the fence, to say: No, my fellow Jews, Jesus *is* the Messiah. So, what you get in Matthew is a lot of scripture quotes, or sometimes just references...allusions...to scripture, because he knew his audience would get it...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we are going to see that today when we dive into the very, very first part of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus begins with what we now call the Beatitudes.

DARRELL DELANEY

^{5:1}Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them. He said: ³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

I just want to stop there, Scott, and just talk about the word *blessed*. It is interesting that Jesus uses that in the first set of these verses. He uses the word blessed, which is happy or to be envied, and it is interesting because the situations in which he says *blessed* don't seem like situations where people would feel blessed. It is contrary to what the world's standard is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; it is interesting, too, in what you read that Jesus saw the crowds, but then the disciples came to him, and then verse 2 says: He began to teach *them*...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there are a lot of scholars who think this was not for the general public, although they overheard it; but it was for the disciples, who had already been called into the kingdom of God by grace, when Jesus said, “Follow me.” And that is important, because we don't want to turn these traits of the Beatitudes into like entrance requirements...

DARRELL DELANEY

Okay.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Like, well, if you make yourself this way, then you will automatically get in. Jesus is blessing those who are already this way among the disciples, and that is part of why Jesus called them; but right, what we get here is an upside-down version of the way the world defines success, as you said in the intro.

Dallas Willard, who wrote a great book on the Sermon on the Mount, called *The Divine Conspiracy* said:

What Jesus is doing here is he is answering two very basic questions that people have always asked: What is the good life; and who is a good person?

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really powerful that the standards that are brought out are turning the world's priorities on their heads...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And, you know, Jesus is really saying that in the situation that the world does not call *blessed*, I [Jesus] am calling it blessed because there is something that comes after that. But there are a couple of things I would like to look at, especially when it says: Blessed are the poor in spirit; and I was thinking what is poor in spirit? You know, because people can be rich monetarily and materialistically, and still be poor in spirit; and I am thinking that means...and I look to scholars on this...is that it means that those are people who *know* they are in desperate need of God's grace and his love and his mercy, and they are humble enough to admit that, even though externally they may be looking very successful to the world, but they are able to name that: No, I need God's grace; I need his forgiveness; I need his peace in my life. And I know that I have been in that situation before, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Interestingly, if you look at Luke's version the Beatitudes, in Luke Chapter 6, Luke kind of does make this more like economic poverty, because he will go on to condemn the rich in the opposite Beatitudes in Luke 6. In Matthew, though, it isn't economic, it is exactly what you just said, Darrell. They are spiritually dry—they are spiritually destitute. They know they cannot make it on their own in life, and that makes them open to God. The poor in spirit know it is not a good thing to be poor in spirit. It is kind of miserable, actually.

Nobody should want to be poor in spirit, but when we are poor in spirit, then we know that only God can take care of us; only God can give us what we need; spiritually and, well, for eternal life, ultimately. So yes, that is exactly right. When you know you cannot make it on your own spiritually, that is when God comes in and says: Yes, but I've got you...you know...I've got you by my grace.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is the longing that we all need to be fulfilled in us; and I also looked at where it says: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Mourning is a situation that the Jews are no stranger to. In the situation that they live in, they are not under the rule of King David anymore. They have Roman oppression around them, and they mourn what Jerusalem used to be, and what the kingdom used to mean for them, how it used to be united and then it got separated—they got exiled and all of these things happened in their history. They have a lot to mourn for; and God says through Jesus in this teaching: You actually are seen, you are heard, and you will be comforted. Because God is the only one who could comfort us in situations that are beyond grief, and that are beyond our situation to fix quickly; and God is the one who can address that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me of Isaiah 40. The people of Israel way back when were in Babylonian exile, and Isaiah comes...

DARRELL DELANEY

Comfort...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Comfort, comfort my people. Comfort those who mourn. Those who mourn...the ones who Jesus is declaring blessed here...these are not just sort of, you know, downer people or people who just, you know, are real emotional or something; this is godly sorrow, I think, Darrell, right? You mourn because the world isn't the way God wanted it to be. You mourn because you are not who you were made to be. So, this is a godly sorrow that just mourns over the fact...weeps over the fact...laments the fact that we have clearly fallen so far from what God has called us to be.

DARRELL DELANEY

Everything isn't hunky-dory; everything isn't peaches and cream; but as we continue in the next segment, we are going to talk about what else God has to say through Christ in the Beatitudes. So, stay tuned.
Segment 2

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; and Scott, we are in a series on the Sermon on the Mount, and we just started with the first few verses of the Beatitudes; and we are going to dig right back in, starting at verse 5.

SCOTT HOEZEE

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

And Darrell, we could talk about each one of these for 15-20 minutes a piece, but we are going to try to do it inside this one segment; and so, we will kind of begin with the meek; and again, we said in the previous segment, Jesus is showing us that when you fly upside down by the world's standards, that is when you are blessed; and here we see it because, to a lot of the world, Darrell, nobody wants to be meek.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, for some reason in this world, and even in the world that Jewish people who he is speaking to came from, meekness is weakness, because it is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. You repay evil for evil—retribution. You get what you deserve; and even in this culture that we live in, some people are like: Don't get mad, get even; and they want to take vengeance into their own hands, and they want to make sure that you know you did wrong. But meekness is actually when you hold your peace and you allow God to solve the problem in a way that he has planned to solve it. So, when it says the meek will inherit the earth, it is actually an allusion, I think, to...scholars say that it is coming from Psalm 37, where it says fret not yourself because of evil doers, because in due time, God will address the situation with them; so you don't need to worry yourself about if they are winning, or they look like they are winning, or they are getting away with something, because we serve a just God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is a sense, Darrell...in the previous segment, we looked at blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are those who mourn. Those are the people the world derides as losers; and Jesus says: No, they are not losers. Here, the meek are those the world derides as wimps. Like you just said, meekness is weakness. Nobody wants to be the world's doormat, you know.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nobody wants to be taken advantage of. The meek say: I would rather be taken advantage of than resort to violence myself. I would rather take it in silence...as Jesus himself did, of course, eventually, at the end of his life...I would rather do that than give into the world's tactics of always just using might makes right, and so forth. So, the meek are those who are willing to suffer, those who are willing to not strike back, to leave those things to God so that we can be more like Jesus. So, that is what it means to be meek; and Jesus says: Guess what? Meekness is weakness? Huh-uh. You will inherit the whole earth...that is what he says. That is a great reversal. Those who are meek and mild now, as Jesus was, they are going to get the whole earth. They are not losers; they are not wimps. This is true strength given to us by God. Then next, hunger and thirst, but not just for food and drink, but for righteousness.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think Jesus is really using the tactic to connect natural things to spiritual things. We will come back to that later on in the program, but it is really cool how it shows that we have more than just physical desires. We have deep longings that are inside of us, and they are for righteousness. So, Jesus is saying we should long for, and we should hunger and thirst for the way God's standard of living is, and the way he has his plans established the world. That is the true righteousness. It comes from the kingdom of God's way of doing things. Unfortunately, this world does not live according to that standard; and therefore, there will be brokenness, there will be a longing that is not fulfilled until fully he returns and establishes that; but there are things that we can do right now, like pray for righteousness, like ask God to make us instruments of righteousness. We can actually impact the world in small but effective ways. But hungering and thirsting is where it starts.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and righteousness. We said earlier that Matthew wrote this for a Jewish reading audience that was really literate about the Bible. They knew their Bible, right? In the...what we now call the Old

Testament...the Hebrew scriptures...righteousness...*tsedaqah*...or being a righteous person...*tsedeq*...right? That was huge. Righteousness is the key characteristic of God for Israel. God...Yahweh...the God of Israel was just. God is the straight line against which we determine all other crookedness in our world, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, what you just said is right. We need to long for justice. The old saying, you know: The arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice...

DARRELL DELANEY

Martin Luther King.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, Martin Luther King. That is because God is a just God, a righteous God. He wants people treated right. He wants societies treated right. He wants us to treat each other in love as the image-bearers of God that we are; and so, if we hunger and thirst to be like God...to be righteous...we will, Jesus says, be filled, because the day will come when God will be all and all; and all of us who have desired God will be filled by him. Two last things as we close out this part of the program: Blessed are those who are merciful, and also pure in heart; and they might be somewhat related, Darrell, but Jesus says you are blessed if you are merciful because you will be shown mercy; and that is sort of a happy viscous cycle, isn't it, of grace and forgiveness?

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a beautiful thing, because if you think about mercy, mercy is when there is an offense, or there is something that happens, but then you don't give that person or they don't give you what you deserve in that situation; they give you something better that you do not deserve and you cannot earn. So, if someone crossed you or someone sinned against you, mercy would be, okay, it is not ignoring that that thing was wrong, but it is acknowledging it and choosing to give you an alternative that you could not deserve in that situation; and God, who is rich in mercy, has done this with us. While we were yet sinners, he died for us and he gave us the gift of salvation by grace through faith. He saved us, right? We didn't earn it, we couldn't deserve it; and because we live under God's rule, we are called to show the same mercy to one another that he has shown to us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As we said before, Darrell, on different *Groundwork* programs, this just shows that we get it. I cannot be happy that God forgave all my sins by his mercy and grace, and then turn right around, like the unmerciful servant in the parable, and just choke somebody to death for a little, tiny offence they did to me. It is like, you cannot be happy about grace in your own life and then refuse to share it with others. If it makes you happy, hey, spread the joy. Forgive other people, right?

This is also how you get the last Beatitude, the pure in heart. None of us are pure in heart, right? Who may ascend God's holy hill, the psalmist said. Only one with clean hands and a pure heart. Well, who is that?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus; only Jesus. So, we get a pure heart, not because we are able to crank that up ourselves or cleanse it ourselves, we get that by grace, too; and Jesus says: If you are pure in heart, it is a gift; and then he says: For you will see God. Sin keeps us from seeing God; sin separates us from God; but when God is merciful to us, when he gives us by grace a pure heart, now we can see God.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a beautiful thing. We ask him for a new heart, just like in Psalm 51. He needs to create in us a clean heart...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

But we don't have that, and that is exactly what he does. The pure in heart are the ones who will see God. It is a promise. As we wrap up the rest of this episode, we are going to talk about the last part of the Beatitudes, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are in the first episode of a six-part series on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5 through 7; and in this first program, we are looking at the very first part, Darrell: the Beatitudes; and we have looked at all of them now, except for just the last couple, beginning at verse 9.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: Blessed 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 this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, it shifts a little bit here. So, we get another standard beatitude: Blessed are the peacemakers; and then, we get, not a trait, but a fact: Blessed are you when you are persecuted. So, this isn't something you are, this is something that happens to you because of who you are—because you are a righteous person. We just said a minute ago: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; and if you get that righteousness in your life, sometimes the world doesn't like it, and they are going to beat you up for it.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They are going to persecute you, but don't worry; yours is the kingdom of heaven. So, let's think a little bit about this. Let's start with that standard beatitude, the last one on the list: Peacemakers. What is that about, Darrell?

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, it is really interesting that he uses the word *peacemaker* here, because in their time, when he was sitting there teaching them about this, there were wars, there were rumors of wars, they were under Roman rule, violence was prevalent. They had killings for sport; they had the Colosseum; they had all these games of things that they would do to have... Peace is actually a radical idea in a world that is kind of violence driven; and even today we have media and movies and all these things that, like, glorify violence in a way. So, to have a peacemaking attitude...and I don't want you to think *peacekeeping*, Scott. I am talking about *peacemaking*. There is a difference between peacemaking and peacekeeping. Peacekeeping is when you think you can sweep everything under the rug; you don't want to rock the boat; you don't want anybody offended; you don't want to make any waves; and that is actually unrealistic and not able to be done; but peacemaking actually is a way to work through challenges, conflicts, differences, and get to a place of reconciliation; and

that is what he is calling us to do, and that is what children of God do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When I think of peacekeepers, I think of, like you know, people with guns. The United Nations Peacekeepers, right? What are they doing? Well, they are keeping the peace by preventing violence. By...I've got a gun, so don't mess up. You are right, that is not what Jesus means. This is a positive dimension because we are not talking about peace, we are talking about shalom...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And shalom is not just the absence of conflict or keeping conflict at bay because, you know, peacekeepers got guns: No. *Peacemaking* is positive. It is constructive. It is making life better, right? In shalom, all people and all creatures exist in mutually edifying relationships. It is sort of the classic I'll scratch your back; you scratch mine. I'll help you; you help me. I will make your life better, Darrell; you will make my life better; and together we are going to make her life better, and we are going to make life better for the animals of this planet, and all creatures. So, peacemaking is constructive. It is not just staying quiet, don't rock the boat, don't engage in conflict; no. Yes, we do avoid that, but peacemaking is an action to make life better; but sometimes when you do that, oddly enough, the world doesn't like it, and they actually persecute you because you are actually trying to bring in God's ways of doing things.

DARRELL DELANEY

Ultimately, the most important piece is to make peace with God, and this is what Christ did. He made peace between God and us, becoming the instrument of our peace. So, confession and repentance are how you become a child of God in the first place, but when you start living according to that standard, which is a kingdom standard, then the world will oppose it—Satan will oppose it—and there are forces in this world that will oppose it. That is how you get to the persecution. Jesus assumes persecution. He doesn't say: If it might happen, maybe. He says: Blessed are those who *are* persecuted because of righteousness and that right way of God doing things. When you are persecuted, it means that people will oppose you, they will beat you, they will abuse you, they will even kill you because of the cause you carry; and in this case, it is the cause of Christ. So, you can be killed for that because you say you believe and you will not renounce him. We see in the *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* and many others who have named many thousands of Christians who have died for their faith.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And yet, particularly in the country I have grown up in, in the United States, people often seem surprised when the world can be a little hard on Christians; and in fact, our typical reaction is to say: Well, that is not right, you know; so, let's pass some laws to make it easier to be Christians. We are *surprised* when the world opposes us sometimes. Jesus says: Why are you surprised? I told you this would happen. The more you live for me [Jesus], the closer you get to my righteousness and make it your own, the more the world is going to persecute you and rough you up. So, don't be surprised; don't think you can legislate it away, so that, you know, Christians *never* get questioned or never get opposed. Jesus says that is not going to happen until the kingdom fully comes. Your job is to be faithful and to endure the persecution. For yours is the kingdom of heaven. The world cannot take the kingdom of heaven away from you...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, stay strong, stay true. Don't think you are doing it wrong because you are persecuted; in fact, assume you are doing it right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And you know what else he says. He actually gives them something to do. He tells them to rejoice and be glad because great is their reward in heaven. So, there have been people who have been prophets, there have been other people who have served God who have endured this same kind of persecution. So, if you are being persecuted, guess what? You are in good company; and even though you don't feel like rejoicing because it is actually really hard, Jesus doesn't dismiss that it is not going to be difficult, but he wants them to rejoice because the prophets had that, and if the servant is no greater than his master, they did it to Jesus, they are also going to do it to his believers as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me Jesus' brother James, who would later write a letter saying count it all joy when you encounter trials; and I always read that verse and go: Oh, I wish you hadn't said that, because it is not easy to rejoice when you are being roughed up, or when you are being criticized. That can only be a gift of the Holy Spirit right there, Darrell; because nobody really, naturally would rejoice when you are getting roughed up; and Darrell, what it basically means is, what Matthew is presenting to his readers is, there is a new sheriff in town. Jesus is revealing to us something very new about the kingdom of God.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is a beautiful thing, because the message that he taught in the Beatitudes and in the Sermon on the Mount still rings true today; and at any moment, we could be deeply encouraged by what Jesus had to teach us there because those facts and those truths can still encourage us today; thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we study what Jesus means when he says we are the salt of the earth and we are the light of the world.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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