

What Jesus Taught in His Final Days

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes as people come near to the end of their lives, they bring friends and family together to give farewell remarks. When this happens, what you typically expect is for the person in question to address the things that are most important to them: topics that characterize the core of who they had wanted to be as a person. When one approaches the ultimate moment of death, less important matters drop away and the really vital subjects take center stage. The gospels reveal to us that this is what Jesus also talked about as his death on the cross got ever closer. Today on *Groundwork*, we will consider some of those words from our Lord. 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 program number two in a four-part series for Lent, as we watch Jesus' journey to the cross. So, in the first program, we looked at that key pivot point for Jesus, and especially Mark 8 and Luke 9, as he revealed again his coming suffering and death, only to have this to be met with resistance by the disciples, and chiefly by the disciple Peter.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, he turns toward Jerusalem and he turns toward the suffering that he is going to endure; and this is the pivoting point that you are mentioning, Scott; and we journey with him because we are preparing during this Lenten season our hearts, and we have been suffering with Jesus, and now we are moving toward the most pivotal part of his suffering, which is coming up here soon.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, we are going to listen to some of Jesus' final teachings on the way to Jerusalem. In our third program, we are going to consider Holy Week itself—Palm Sunday through Good Friday; and the fourth and final program of this series we'll go to the joy of Easter.

Again, as they journeyed...as you said, Darrell...as we journey with Jesus, we listen to what he says, and it becomes clear that as the end got closer, Jesus' mind became focused on ultimate matters of importance. He wanted to sum up who he had been; why he had done the things and performed the things in his ministry that he did; and why he will soon experience the things in Jerusalem that will go all the way to the cross.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, he waxes eloquent earlier in the gospels. He is speaking parables, he is talking in forms and pictures, doing miracles; but as he gets closer to this time where his suffering and death is approaching, all those things fall away, and he wants to make sure that they don't miss who he is, why he has come, what his mission from the Father is, and how it will affect them. So, he starts to narrow it down and make it focus...laser-point focus...on the mission of why he had come.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and who he is is who the disciples are supposed to be, too. But unfortunately, they repeatedly misunderstand Jesus. So, let's dig into Mark 9 here: ³⁰They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ³²But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. ³³They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." ³⁶He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

DARRELL DELANEY

So, you have this moment where Jesus reveals a very important point. He is telling them: I am going to suffer; I am going to die. He is predicting his death, right? And then, when they are on their way to the next place, it seems that it went in one ear and out the other for the disciples. They are starting to argue about something that...it really doesn't matter who is going to be greatest in the kingdom. They obviously have not made the connection, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, absolutely not. Just kind of deaf to Jesus' words; and so, at first we are told they didn't understand, but they also didn't dare even ask him about it; and then to really show they didn't absorb what Jesus was talking about, they get into an argument: Who is going to be the greatest? Who is going to have the highest cabinet position in the new Jesus administration, when Jesus defeats Rome and launches a new Israel? So, once they get to Capernaum, to their destination, Jesus just kind of, you know, pretends like he doesn't know what was going on, and so he asks them, but again, they don't dare tell him; but then again, they can also tell they don't have to; Jesus knows anyway. So, Jesus did what he did with some frequency with these guys. He takes a child, and he said: This kid is the poster child of what you are supposed to be like; and Darrell, as we said before on *Groundwork*, that didn't mean Jesus was saying you have to be innocent and charming and winsome, because you know, that is how we view kids today. Back in Jesus' day, no. Children were regarded as losers because they couldn't contribute anything. So, they had to grow up before they could become useful, but once you did grow up, no sane adult would want to go back to becoming a child, but that is what Jesus said they had to do.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it actually is a humbling message for them, then, because they think as adults, they have everything they need to survive and to thrive in society, but Jesus is saying: That mentality that you think you have everything you need and you push for strength is actually wrong. So, he takes their whole philosophy and turns it on its head and says: No; you have to be like this child, and humble yourself and follow me like this child would in order to be one of the ones who are great in the kingdom. So, he turns the leadership model upside down.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, now let's move onto the next chapter, Darrell. We get a little shampoo, rinse, repeat in Mark 10.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: ¹³People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is again, Darrell. Jesus teaches, they misunderstand, and we are going to get it a little bit later, too. Let's listen to these verses: ³²They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³"We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise." (And now this) ³⁵Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." ³⁶"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. ³⁷They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right (hand) and the other at your left in your glory." ³⁸"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" ³⁹"We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am a baptized with, ⁴⁰but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Jesus is telling them...again, a very important moment in his life...he is predicting his death again, and letting them know he is going to suffer and die and give his life, but they are going on and on: who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom? And also, can you put me on your right and put my brother on your left? And they want to rule; they want to have these glory spaces; they want to have these positions of power; and they clearly do not understand what Jesus is trying to teach.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They are just not listening; and you know, particularly in Mark's gospel, Darrell, this starts right at the very beginning of Mark. There is just this rhythm of teaching, misunderstanding; teaching, misunderstanding; and if it is not teaching, misunderstanding, it is teaching, rejection; teaching, rejection. It is like this really sad rhythm. But, of course, Darrell, we look at this now and we read this all these centuries later...millennia later...and we say: How in the world did the disciples keep missing Jesus' teaching: I mean, it is plain as day. If we had been there, we would have gotten it! I am not always so sure that is true.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, no; it has taken a long time for us to get some of the simple truths that God is trying to teach us in our own lives, and in the kingdom as well. So, we cannot...when we read the back of the book and we know the answer, we cannot penalize the disciples in real time, because our own journey has been starts and stops, ups and downs, mistakes and repentances. So, we know that our journey is just like theirs.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we also know that all along the ages, Darrell, and this is all through Church history, and it comes up right to this present moment, the Church has always been tempted to grab political power...worldly power as the way to get things done, which is exactly what the disciples were doing; the exact same thing. So, sometimes we get Jesus wrong for some of the very same reasons they did. So, we shouldn't be so hard on them, but we should take a sober assessment of ourselves and see where we get it wrong sometimes, too. But in just a moment, we will look at some other things Jesus taught as he entered his final days to the cross, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, we have just seen that in his final days Jesus had to try to teach the disciples over and over and over who he was and what he came to do; and understanding that was supposed to lead the disciples to also

adopt a mindset of humility and service; but another key thing Jesus often talked about in his final days was the need to be watchful for the day, when after everything that is to come takes place, the day when Jesus will return; and so, he wants us to be watchful.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we pick that up in Luke Chapter 12. It says: ³⁵“Be dressed, ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him. ³⁷It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. ³⁸It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. ³⁹But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, as many of us know, this is indeed a prominent theme in Jesus’ final teachings. Mostly we find that just before the cross, in what we call the *Olivet Discourses*. Luke 12 isn’t part of that, although Luke will have that later in his gospel, too; but that is when Jesus took the disciples up, just ahead of Palm Sunday, to the Mount of Olives. That is why we call them the *Olivet Discourses*; and that is when he taught this kind of a thing. So, let’s go to one of those *Olivet Discourses*: This from Matthew 24: ³⁶“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man... ⁴¹Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴²Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³But understand this: (Again, a repeat from Luke) If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

DARRELL DELANEY

Two things that stick out to me in that, Scott: 1) No one knows the day or the hour when the Son of Man will return; and because of that: 2) Be watchful and alert and paying attention; and so, you know, I know that these things come with a warning to them, but if you read them literally, it could bring you to a state of alarm, and I am not sure if that is what Jesus wanted when he talks about being watchful, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you know, it is a good question to ask: What does it mean to be watchful? What exactly is Jesus talking about? After all, you know, Darrell, I think it is almost impossible to live constantly in some heightened state of watchful alertness. I mean, that is exhausting, right? You cannot live like...some of us might remember in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 9/11, the US started a color-coded alert system. The Homeland Security people put out this color-coded alert system that got posted in airports. So, green was a low terrorist threat; purple was for a guarded state; yellow was elevated; orange was high-risk or high likelihood of an attack; and finally, red was severe when another terrorist attack appeared to be imminent; but you know what, Darrell? They stopped using that after not a very long period of time because nobody was paying attention to it anyway. You just cannot function if you have to keep looking back over your shoulder at every moment to see if something bad is coming...or even something good, I suppose.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, it produces too much anxiety to function, I think; and so, Jesus is not telling them this to scare them; he is not telling them this so that they can be full of tension all the time; but he is telling them so they can be aware. I think that is what we are getting at when he talks about being watchful—to be aware of what is going on and to act accordingly. Now, we see a clue of this in the rest of Matthew 24, where it reads: ⁴⁵“Who

then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. ⁴⁷Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. ⁵⁰The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. ⁵¹He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, as you just said, Darrell, a minute ago that Jesus isn't trying to be threatening to the disciples; he is not trying to frighten them; no, he is not trying to frighten them with the prospect of being watchful, but he is frightening them about *not* being watchful, because it looks like, from the last line there, there will be consequences if Jesus comes back and finds us doing things we shouldn't do. So, this is kind of a quasi-parable; it is not really a parable, but it is kind of a parable. So, Jesus tells us who is the watchful servant, and what does this watchfulness look like, we just said. Is it constantly looking over your shoulder? Is it having this terrorist color-coded alert system? No. You know what it is? It is a servant who serves up dinner when dinnertime rolls around. That is it. That is being watchful. It is like: Really; being watchful is that simple? Yes; it just means living the right way, doing acts of service and mercy; taking care of the things God has entrusted to you, and doing them in a Christlike way.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we are displaying the love of Jesus Christ in our attitudes and actions. We are being a neighbor to our neighbor; we are praying; we are watching; and we are studying the Word. We are practicing spiritual disciplines and the character traits that Jesus wants us to: The fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and so forth. When we live that way, we are actually being watchful servants. When we do what our hands are called to do, and we do that to honor our God, that is being a watchful servant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this reminds me a little bit about when John the Baptist was ministering, and he was so powerful and calling people to repent, you know; and everybody said: Well; what should we do, you know; and John said: Well, you should go find yourself a way to set up huge relief centers and start a philanthropic trust fund... No; he said: Just do your jobs. You Roman soldiers: Don't take bribes; don't shake people down; be nice; be kind; share your stuff; and that is what Jesus is saying. What does watchfulness look like? It means you do your job; it means you are honest and fair; it means you show love for all. That is what being watchful...that is what being ready looks like; and so that surely, Darrell, is something we can all do by the grace of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

DARRELL DELANEY

And God knows that we need his grace when we don't do this perfectly. So, whenever we fail to do these things...whenever we shirk the work that we have been given...whenever we are not honoring in our word and deed, we can ask God for forgiveness in the person that we have hurt; and then we can start again and get a new set of grace to be able to do the things that a servant does when he is watching to be ready.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; well, in just a moment, we will conclude this program with a few other last things that Jesus taught. So, stay tuned for that.

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, let's dig right back into scripture. We have been in the late part of Matthew. We were just in Matthew 24, now let's go to Matthew 25, words familiar to many of us: ³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’”

DARRELL DELANEY

³⁷“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ ⁴⁰The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ ⁴¹Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ ⁴⁴They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ ⁴⁵He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Okay, so this is Matthew 25, and clearly, Darrell, it is a continuation of what we looked at in the previous part of the program, from Matthew 24, in terms of what it means to be watchful and ready; and here, Jesus frames it up with some very specific ministries we can perform for the hungry, the thirsty, the lonely, the ill-clad, the imprisoned people around us in the world. And Darrell, you know, I have always thought the most striking part of this passage involves the one thing that the sheep and the goats have in common, and that is that at first, they have no idea what Jesus is talking about.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; they are saying: Wait; when did we see you? Were you in disguise in the crowds of the people? Were you in the jail? Were you in the hospital? Where were you? We didn't see you. And Jesus is making it clear that he has an inextricable connection to the people who have been served or have not been served. So, now Jesus is making the connection with the people who are being served when the watchperson...the person who is watching is serving well; and when his life is connected to theirs inextricably by that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and you know, I mean, the sheep say: We didn't know that was you. We have no recollection of that whatsoever. And the goats say: We have no recollection of seeing you either, because, you know, if we had seen you, Jesus, we probably would have helped you out...

DARRELL DELANEY

Of course!

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, as you said, that inextricable connection. Jesus is saying that he identifies. This is true of the Old Testament, too. You know, God was always identifying in Israel with the widow, the orphan, the stranger...the immigrant in your midst. So, Jesus also so strongly identifies with the needy and the hurting people of the world, that he is saying to them: If you helped them, it was just the same thing as helping me; and if you did not help them, it was the same thing as ignoring me. So, that is the startling revelation here in

this imagery that Jesus uses for the sheep and the goat. Again, the sheep...essentially to connect it down to the previous chapter...the sheep were watchful because they just did the right thing, the generous thing. The goats saw some of the same needs and they walked the other way.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I am reminded of this because I worked in a jail ministry; and so, we reminded every volunteer that we are being the hands and feet of Jesus when we visit people who are in jail; and actually, if we are closely paying attention, the image bearer that we are serving is actually Jesus' connection to that person. So, when we see that we are ministering to them and we are praying with them, then Jesus actually applauds that kind of behavior. So, we do encourage one another, whether you are working in a jail ministry like me, or whether you are just somebody who wants to be nice to your neighbor, this is an opportunity to serve Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; for Jesus is always with us, and he comes to us often in the guise of the poor and the needy. Okay; so, let's sum up this program, Darrell. What are some of the takeaways? And we will think about three things. First, we are called to be humble. We are called to be lowly servants of others. Yes, we have a lot we need to do as disciples; we have a lot we need to do as church communities; but Jesus makes it clear that we are fooling ourselves if we think that the best way to get all that accomplished is through the world of strong-arm tactics or through amassing a lot of political or worldly power for ourselves. We said in an earlier part of the program, the disciples wanted that; we are tempted to do that; but that is not the way to get things done. Jesus says: humility; being the lowliest of all, that is the ticket to the top.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it says humility comes before honor in the Proverbs as well. So, the next thing that we need to think about is that Jesus made this point of being watchful and being mindful that we serve the King; and we need to understand that we may not know when he is going to return, but we can do the things that we are called to do in order to show that we are watchful servants; and so, I was thinking about Ezekiel 33*, where the watchman on the wall is the one who has the responsibility to warn the people if he sees something coming. And so, Jesus is not telling us we need to sit around and watch, he is telling us to be active and be serving, and that is the best way to show that we are watchful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; yes, that is...watchfulness is faithfulness, basically, is what Jesus is saying...watchfulness is faithfulness. So, be like a little child, right? In those examples we saw earlier in the program, be the servant of all; be the lowliest of all; be humble; be watchful, which means to be faithful, to do Christlike acts of mercy; just do the right thing; do your job; be honest; be fair; be forthright and so forth. Then a third takeaway, Darrell: We can combine those two things: humble service and being watchful; and what we get from that combination is a life of service to the last, least, lost and lonely of the earth. We minister to all we meet, and when we do, you know, we will be ministering to Jesus himself.

DARRELL DELANEY

We are connected to Christ in this way because he is so inextricably connected to the ones who are suffering...the marginalized, the people who have no voice. He stands in the gap for them, and has a relationship with them; and we honor Christ when we do what he tells us to do. I know that is a tall order, and it is very hard for us to do, but we can, under the power of Christ, and as followers of Jesus. We do it with the Holy Spirit leading us, and we do it in the power of him walking together in unity.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; it is not our own steam; it is not our own effort; not our own industry; it is ever and only the power of Christ at work in us, through that indwelling Spirit; and for that, you know, all we can do is be grateful for the grace that forgives us when we fail to be Christlike. When we get a little goat-like we can be forgiven; and by the Holy Spirit, we can become sheeplike again; and for that, all we can say is what we always say as we conclude our programs: 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 we hope that you will join us again next time as we reflect on what Jesus' sacrifice means for us today by studying Jesus' journey to the cross on Palm Sunday through Good Friday. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

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*Correction: The audio of this program misstates the reference for this passage as Ezekiel 10. The correct reference is Ezekiel 33.

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Printed on April 28, 2025