

Dr. David DeSilva, On the Cultural World of the New Testament, Session 3, Patronage and Reciprocity

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This is Dr. David DeSilva in his teaching on The Cultural World of the New Testament. This is session 3, Patronage and Reciprocity.

In this session, we'll look closely at the social institution of patronage and the ethos of reciprocity that was a bedrock of first-century Mediterranean culture.

In America, if you hear it said, it's not what you know. It's who you know, it's usually in the context of someone expressing a sense of unfairness, of having been beaten out for something because someone else had a personal connection that gave him or her leverage to attain a certain goal. We tend to operate with a much more impersonal, non-relational approach to getting what we want or what we need. For example, a job search tends to be a fairly impersonal application process, at least up to a certain point.

When we need an object, our first impulse is to go to stores, Amazon.com, or something else to get whatever it is we need. Even if we don't currently have resources for something, for example, building a house, buying a house or starting a business, we tend to go to an impersonal agency for money, a bank, a credit union, or some such thing. If disaster strikes, we tend to rely on insurance to provide the resources we need to recover.

The first century of the Mediterranean world was a world apart from all of this. There, for many needs beyond food in the marketplace, for many needs, your first order resource is a person who might grant you what you need. A relationship, another person who had what you needed, was the primary means of access based on the value or the virtue of generosity and the value of gratitude.

All of this is anchored in the virtue of justice. We go again to Seneca, our first-century informant, who, in his book *On Benefits*, is really a marvelous firsthand introduction to patronage, friendship, and this ethos that governs these relationships. We turn to Seneca, who writes that giving and receiving favors is the practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society.

It is the glue that holds society together. It is the principal weave in the social fabric. Yes, there's a marketplace in every major city, and probably a village, where you go to get your fish, vegetables, bread, and things like that.

There are artisans and craftsmen from whom you purchase wares, but there's a much greater place for personal assistance in daily life in the ancient world than we tend to expect or look for in the modern Western world. So, a patron, someone who has greater means than myself, might provide money, or grain in time of shortage, or employment when I'm looking for that, or a grant of land, or some such thing. I would go to someone of means and petition for such a favor.

I could approach another person, not because he or she has what I need, but because he or she has access to the person who has what I need. I would look for a personal relationship as the means for professional or social advancement rather than posting a job application at romanforum.com or some such thing. So, there are patrons who provide assistance, and there are clients, those who receive assistance, put themselves in that position of being a client, and along with receiving assistance in whatever form, the client also accepts the obligation of gratitude, the obligation to publicize the favor that has been given, and to publicize his or her gratitude for it, thus building up the patron's reputation.

A client would also show gratitude by showing loyalty to a particular patron. Patrons in a city played their own games. They played their political games, seeking advancement one over the other, seeking to hold office in the city, to advance in offices.

Clients would support their patrons, so collecting a large number of clients through generosity, help, and assistance was also a way of increasing one's power base. I, as a client, would advance the interests of my patron to the extent possible. A client would typically, since he or she could not return a gift in kind to a patron, would often perform services for the patron.

Really, it's kind of stereotypical, but the opening scene in *The Godfather* is probably still the best introduction, and it's set in a Mediterranean context, after all, even though a modern one is the best introduction of patronage. A patron collects a clientele, and a patron has the power to grant all manner of requests, and if it should happen that you would be called upon to perform a service, you will remember this day. That really encapsulates the ancient ethos quite well.

I will never be able to repay a patron for a grant of land or for bailing my family out of a bad crop that failed, but I can perform some services for him when called upon to do so. We've talked about patrons, we've talked about clients, and I also mentioned that a patron's greatest gift might be access to another patron. A person with whom I might be connected might not have what I need, but that person might have a friend who has what I need, and so we can also talk about that first patron as a mediator, as a broker, to use the more modern term for it.

Someone who is able to connect a client with another person who has what that client needs. There's a good testimony to this kind of person in Sophocles' drama, Oedipus the King. Oedipus' brother-in-law, uncle, father-in-law, it's all very complicated because of the Oedipus story, but Creon, who is Oedipus' wife's and mother's brother, spoiler alert, says that his basis for power is not what he himself can provide in and of itself, but the fact that he has King Oedipus' ear.

So, he writes, I am welcome everywhere. Everyone salutes me, and those who want your favor seek my ear since I know how to manage what they ask if one were to read the letters of the Romans Pliny or Cicero, Pliny, who was a senator who finally became governor of the provinces of Bithynia and Pontus in what is now the northern sweep of Turkey.

Cicero, of course, is a famous statesman from the pre-imperial period, the Republican period, and one would find many, many examples of brokerage at work. For example, Pliny, as governor of Bithynia and Pontus, can provide many gifts, services, and opportunities for advancement for people in the province, but he's also got a gift that almost no one else has in the province. He has the gift of access to the emperor Trajan himself.

So, actually, many of the things that Pliny is sought out for are things that only Trajan can grant. For example, the gift of Roman citizenship for Pliny's faithful masseuse things like that. So, really, Pliny's power as a patron comes from his ability to mediate the gifts of an even greater patron.

Now, we've spoken so far; I've spoken so far about patronage and clientage in terms of social inequality. The patron is the powerful person, the richer, the better resource person. The client is, of course, the social, political, and economic inferior.

But this kind of dynamic also existed between social equals. Pliny and a person just like Pliny, another governor of another province, could help one another out. One would not become the patron of the other, one would not be abased to become the client of the other, but they would consider each other friends.

The language of friendship in the first century is very much the language of patronage between equals, between social equals. You might think of the story in the passion narrative of Pilate and Herod Antipas because Pilate shows Herod Antipas a courtesy in the midst of that passion narrative, offering Herod the opportunity to judge the case of this Jesus. Pilate and Herod became friends that day.

That doesn't mean they became chums so much, as they suddenly turned from a relationship of rivalry to a relationship where they would begin to show each other favors. They would do favors for one another, and they would look out for each

other's interests. Neither one was really inferior or superior to the other, although one could probably argue that point if one were Herod Antipas.

Well, Pilate would have his claim, too. But they were essentially political equals who thenceforth did favors one for another. Patronage, reciprocity, and friendship do not simply matter for the elite in the first-century world, nor were they only relationships that might connect elites to non-elites.

One also finds evidence of this same sort of system, the same ethos among the rural population, among the agrarian class, reaching way back to Hesiod, I believe a 6th century BC Greek author. In his *Works and Days*, which is a work that is very much about the common agrarian life of the Greek people, he gives advice about how to participate in the exchange of favors, services, and gifts in a peasant village. Take fair measure from your neighbor and pay him back fairly with the same measure or better if you can so that if you are in need afterward, you may find him sure.

What Hesiod is looking at is the willingness of neighbor A to help neighbor B; I don't have seed for sowing my next crop; can you help me out? And then the wisdom of neighbor B making sure he gives back and more to neighbor A, so that if neighbor B is ever in need again, he has established himself as an honorable client is a wrong word, but an honorable neighbor, an honorable friend. Someone who would return the favors or the gifts that are given, even with better measures in return. This kind of ethos continues to be observed in modern Mediterranean agrarian villages, where exchanging favors is essential, and failing to return a favor results in eventual exclusion from networks of favor and, thus, in a sense, social failure for one's self and one's family, since one would always at some point need assistance.

We should observe the difference between public benefaction and personal patronage in the ancient world. If you were to visit virtually any archaeological site or museum in the Mediterranean, you would find a host of inscriptions testifying that some rich member of the city, or a rich member of another city, gave some gift to the public, whether it's the gift of sponsoring games every four years, or the gift of a festival at his or her own expense, or the gift of a temple, or the gift of a pavement, or a fountain, or some such thing. People of means were disposed to give to the public and thus enhance their reputation by having a monument that will always testify, some usually functioning monument that will always testify to their generosity.

And inscriptions, and probably at the time, some kind of public recognition of the fact that this gift had been given. But in doing so, that benefactor, that public benefactor, did not suddenly create a web of relationships with everyone in the city. No, it was a gift to everyone in general and, therefore, a gift to no one in particular.

And so, the public as a whole would express thanks and honor, but no particular Ephesian would feel, therefore, indebted to Maximus for the new fountain. I'm making that up. You won't actually find a fountain for Maximus in Ephesus.

It's very different when patronage or friendship happens one-on-one. When a resident of a city approaches a richer person in the city for a favor, that act of responding and giving something to the petitioner could create a long-term relationship. Because I'm not just giving once.

I'm giving to a person who, if that person is virtuous, will continue then to act in ways that advance my interests. He, usually he, sometimes she, but usually he, he will give back to me in different ways than I've given, but he will still be returning the favor. And therefore, he will be in a position to ask me again for something.

And if he's been a good recipient, I will not really be in a position to refuse. Because I've given, he's shown gratitude, I should give again. And he'll continue to advance my interests, and so on and so on.

So, this initial act of giving could very well initiate a lifelong relationship. And to read some authors, like Ben Sirah or the author of the collection, *To Demonicus*. It's a tribute to Isocrates, a fourth-century Greek speaker and orator, but it's probably pseudonymous.

To read these collections of advice, one gets the sense that one could inherit one's father's friendships. The son was to repay the kindnesses that were shown to the father so that we might even have cross-generational ties of friendship, or patronage and clientage, between people.

As a result, Seneca says, I'm going to be very careful before I give a favor or receive a favor. I have to be very sure that this is someone with whom I potentially want to be related long-term in a relationship like this. Now, it might not come as a surprise at all that people in the ancient world conceptualized their relationship with the gods.

Or, in the case of the Jewish people, with God, along the lines of patronage and clientage. This became the primary model for talking about the gods. They give gifts better than, bigger than, and more important than almost any human benefactor.

And we owe to the gods, therefore, all the honor that we can give them. The worship that we offer in the temple is a continual offering of gratitude to the gods for their gifts. Brokerage, the mediator, becomes the model for the priesthood in many Greek and Roman settings, as well as Jewish and Christian settings.

In fact, the Latin word for priest is rather telling in this regard. It is *pontifex*, a word that comes from the words meaning bridge, *pontus*, and the maker of something. So, a priest is named literally a bridge builder.

He or she connects people with the gods and the gods with people and helps to schmooze the relationship between the two so that petitions are sent to the one, and sacrifices are returned to the one, who then lavishes gifts upon the worshipers again in return. These boundaries between the divine patrons and human patrons could become blurred in the ancient world. The phenomenon of emperor cult in the Roman world, especially in the eastern half of the Mediterranean, shows us at work.

Reaching even back before that, though, generals who liberated a city could be offered, as an expression of gratitude, worship. Demetrius Poliorcetes was a general who saved Athens from coming under the power of an aggressor. In an inscription to Demetrius, worship, a cult for Demetrius, is established in Athens because he gave the gifts that the Athenians were praying for to the gods.

In the inscription, we read, other deities are far away or have no ears, or don't exist, or have no care for us at all. But you, we see here, are present, not shaped by stone or wood, but in reality. And so, to you, we pray, first bring us peace, for you possess the power.

Fast forward three centuries to the rise of Augustus. A contemporary of Herod the Great, in fact, a personal friend of Herod the Great, Nicholas of Damascus, a historian of the period, writes about the birth of the cult of Augustus this way. All people around the Mediterranean address him thus, as Augustus, in accordance with their estimation of his honor, revering him with temples and sacrifices across islands and continents, organized in cities and provinces, matching the greatness of his virtue, and repaying his benefactions toward them.

The implication of all that is that Augustus gave the Mediterranean world gifts worthy of the gods to give. He is credited with having brought peace at the end of, essentially, a generation of civil wars. Never mind the fact that he was responsible for them, and so was his adoptive father, Julius Caesar.

But he brought a successful conclusion to them and so restored stability, security, and prosperity to the entire Mediterranean region. In response to this, because his gifts were so great, the response of gratitude had to match. And so, in something that must be attributed to some extent to flattery, people around the Mediterranean, especially the eastern half, turned to forms of worship as a way of saying, this is how much we esteem your favor, the gifts that you have given and will continue to give us.

Having said that, and will continue to give us, I'm reminded of the fact that a lot of people think of Greco-Roman religion in terms of the Latin expression, *do ut des*. I give in order that you might give. And so, the distinction is often made between Greco-Roman religion and Jewish or Christian religion, that the former give to stimulate the gods to grant some request, and the latter simply give in response to what God has done.

But I will simply say the evidence doesn't really bear that out. One finds many instances in the Greco-Roman world of a sense of *do quia de disti*. I'm not really great at Latin.

It took me a while to figure that one out. I give because you have given. And that is essentially the driving force of religion in both the Greco-Roman and the Jewish world.

I give to acknowledge what sacrifice, what praise, whatever I do religiously, I do this to acknowledge the gifts that you have given, but also in both settings with the awareness that as a grateful recipient of your gifts, I am therefore a good candidate for more gifts, as opposed to the person who takes your gifts for granted and doesn't give you due thanks. You can find that, you can see that played out in both Greco-Roman and Jewish literature in that regard. Moving to focus on the ethos of these relationships more particularly, I want to think with you all about the social context of grace.

Now, for me, grace is primarily a theological term. It's a religious term. I don't hear about grace out there in the real world.

Real world's the wrong thing to say. I only hear it in seminaries and in churches. But it's very important for us to understand that Paul and other New Testament authors wrote before grace was a specialized religious term.

In their time, grace was an everyday word. It really belonged out there in every context, everywhere that favors were given, received, and returned. And Paul and other New Testament writers reached to that world in order to talk meaningfully about what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ.

Now, in that world, *charis* has really four distinct meanings. One is the sense of being charming or graced. Let's say I've even used the word grace there.

But *charis* can be used to talk about beauty or poise or that which, however, is understood to be a natural gift, a gift of the gods or of God to the person who was born such. But primarily, *charis* has one of three meanings. First, it is the willingness of a patron or a friend to give, to be generous, to help someone out who is in need.

So we typically translate charis as favor in that context or as grace. But it's grace in the special sense of the willingness of someone to give. The second meaning charis tends to have is gift, the thing that is given itself.

Often this shows up in the plural, gifts, but it is also used to name the actual help or the actual gift conferred. And the third meaning is gratitude or thanks. It frequently is used with that meaning in prayers and liturgical language or the sorts of kind of spontaneous ejaculations that Paul will make.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift. The first word in Greek there is charis, totheo, grace to God, which isn't grace in the sense of favor. It's grace in the sense of acknowledging favor, giving thanks, and showing gratitude.

And just for the record, the opposite of charis is acharistia, the lack of grace. And that's used primarily to name ingratitude, the failure or the refusal to return grace for grace, to return favor for favor. Now, the three senses held together by this word charis, a giver's favor, the gift itself, a recipient's return of gratitude.

These already implicitly suggest what many moralists from the Greek and Roman cultures stated explicitly. Grace must be met with grace. Favor must always give birth to favor.

If that doesn't happen, grace has been abused, and that which is beautiful has been made ugly and disgraced. A very common image that goes along with this ethos in the ancient world is the image of the three graces. If you were to go to virtually any museum of decent size in Italy, Greece, or even Turkey, you would likely find some representation of the three graces.

The two pictured here both come from Italy, one from Pompeii and one from a villa in Rome, now in the Capitoline Museum at the heart of Rome itself. But you can find the same image in mosaics and frescoes in Cyrenaica, modern Libya, the Roman province of Cyrenaica, and in Asia Minor. I was surprised to find a frieze of the three graces in Hierapolis in Turkey.

I mean, I didn't find it like I discovered it. It was in a museum. But so, this is kind of a ubiquitous Mediterranean image.

And it stands for, it represents this social institution of the giving and receiving and returning of favors. And Seneca, once again, actually points to this image and exegetes this image, as it were, in the course of his book on benefits. He writes that there are three graces.

And just for the record, the graces are held to be divine beings. They are daughters of the gods. And he writes there are three graces since there is one for bestowing a benefit, one for receiving a benefit, and a third for returning it.

Each facet of the cycle or the circle of grace is represented by one of these nymphs, one of these deities. He writes that they dance hand in hand because of a benefit, passing in its course from hand to hand, nevertheless returning to the giver. A gift is never lost to the giver if it is received well and returned well is essentially his point there.

He writes that the beauty of the whole, the beauty of this dance, is destroyed if this course is broken anywhere. It has the most beauty if it is maintained in an uninterrupted succession. So, he's describing then, using this image of the three graces dancing their dance in a circle, to describe this ethos of reciprocity that binds people together, the willingness to help and to extend gift or assistance, and the commitment to value gifts and assistance, and to value the obligation that being gifted, being assisted, places on the recipient, that recipient's commitment somehow to give back to the giver.

This cycle then continues over a lifetime, even over generations, and binds people together in relationships of mutual assistance, support, and cooperation that ultimately get people in this society safely through their lives in a society without safety nets otherwise. Gratitude was considered to be a sacred obligation, while ingratitude could be spoken of as the equivalent of sacrilege. And again, the fact that the ethos and the institution were represented by three goddesses reinforces that.

To give badly or to fail to return is to injure these goddesses, in effect. It is to violate the sacred. And so Seneca could write, to fail to return gratitude is a disgrace, and the whole world counts it as such.

He claims this as another essentially universal value in his context. So, as we think about the New Testament, and we think about grace and the ways in which certain relationships are portrayed in the New Testament, this becomes, I believe, a very important background for us to consider. That urges us to be mindful of several things, including several exegetical questions, as we read any given New Testament text.

We have to remember first where grace language would be at home in the everyday world of the author and his audience. The people who received Galatians or received the letter to the Hebrews knew all about grace long before the author of those letters ever connected it to the grace of the God of Israel shown in Jesus Christ. So, what is the context that shapes knowledge of and expectations concerning grace in the everyday world? Where would the hearers have been exposed repeatedly to this language beyond the religious assembly of the Christian ecclesia? What information

and presuppositions will the hearers bring to the hearing of a text like Galatians from these other settings? What can Paul assume they will supply as he talks about grace, as he presents it as an unthinkable action that sets God's grace aside? We also want to be attentive to the extent to which a New Testament author might seek to challenge or correct the presuppositions or the experience that the hearers may bring to their interpretation of the text or to their interactions with one another, as well as the extent to which an author depends on and builds on that ethos. That is to say, and on the one hand, Paul may import a lot of what we have just been discussing in terms of the ethos of grace and reciprocity into his discussion of our relationship with God and our obligations to God.

But at the same time, Paul may seek to correct some presuppositions about the exchange of gifts in his congregations. One notable way that he does this is to try to impress upon the rich patrons in his Christian communities that they are not, thereby buying a power base within the church to advance their interests against the other rich Christians in that particular community. This seems to have been one of the main problems in Corinth, for example.

The idea that I supply home and food and hospitality to the Christian assembly does not, therefore, mean that I have just made the entire assembly my clientage. Paul will introduce other concepts like stewardship into the equation to counterbalance some of the social expectations that the rich Christian might bring into that new setting. I want to spend a little time at the last part of this lecture thinking a little bit more fully about the ethos of patronage, friendship, and clientage.

Starting with graceful giving, what is the cultural knowledge that the typical first century person might have about giving gracefully? It is very clear that a giver who wishes to live well, a giver who's not just an investor, as Seneca or Ben Sirah, will scornfully speak about the bad giver. It's essential that a giver give in the interest of the recipient, of the beneficiary, not with a view to the giver's own gain through some return that he might or she might be able to get out of that person. Ben Sirah, in his collection of essentially proverbs, caricatures the ungrateful giver in this way.

Gifts from senseless people won't profit you because they look for a lot in return for a little. They will give a little and reproach a lot, and they will open their mouths like a town crier. I don't have a friend.

There's no gratitude for my good deeds. While a giver should not give with a view to getting something in return, should not bank on the reciprocity that the graceful recipient will show, a giver also shouldn't throw away his or her benefits on people known to be ungrateful. They should give, rather, to virtuous people.

Looking to that advice collection to Demonicus, we read, lavish your favors on good people, for a store of gratitude laid up in the hearts of virtuous people is a great

treasure. If you give your gifts to bad people, your reward will be the same as those who feed stray dogs, who snarl both at those who feed them and those who just walk on by. Who, then, is the person to whom one should give? One should give to a person with a reputation for knowing how to be grateful.

A reputation for gratitude is the ancient equivalent of a good credit rating. And there's a fine line here. As Seneca writes, I choose a person as the recipient of my gifts.

I choose a person who will be grateful, not one who is likely to make a specific return. And it often happens that the grateful person is one who isn't likely to make a return, while the ungrateful person is one who has made a return. It is to the heart that my estimate is directed.

So, what Seneca says, for giving to remain pure and virtuous, I want the person to value the gift, but I'm not concerned about what that person might give me in return. In fact, I might enter into a relationship where a person makes a return, but in his or her heart, there's no value in the relationship. It's just an exchange of commodities.

And that's ultimately not what friendship or patronage is all about. It's all about the formation of long-term relationships of mutual other-seeking. Seneca and others urge, occasionally, to give to the ungrateful as well.

And this in imitation of the gods, who cause sun and rain to come down upon the good and the bad alike. If that sounds like Jesus in Matthew 5, it should. It's a stunning parallel.

One can find both Jesus and Seneca urging people to give in imitation of God or the gods, to not let the ingratitude of the bad stop one from being lavish upon all. Public benefactions, the occasional private gift to the ungrateful in the hope of awakening virtue, would be part and parcel of noble giving because, ultimately, the aim was not the return but the doing of good for someone else. At the very same time, there's a clear ethos for receiving well, for graceful receiving of benefits.

While givers are supposed to think only of the recipient, recipients are supposed to think about their debt to the giver. Seneca writes in the same book on benefits that the person who intends to be grateful, even while she or he is receiving it, should turn his or her thoughts to return the favor. Almost all discussions of the virtue of justice in the ancient world include some discussion of honoring one's benefactors and showing due gratitude for favors received.

We have to remember here the image of the dance of grace, the image of the three goddesses dancing in a circle, and the fact that failure to show gratitude steps on your dance partner's toes and ruins the dance. There are no formal sanctions in the

ancient world to enforce gratitude, of course. The ongoing exchange must be voluntary to be grace at all.

Now, what about gratitude? Gratitude could take a variety of expressions. Very often, it fell into one or more of three categories, the first being bringing honor to the benefactor through one's own demeanor toward that benefactor and through one's testimony. Seneca urges recipients, let us show how grateful we are for the blessing that has come to us by pouring forth our feelings and let us bear witness to them not only in the hearing of the giver, but everywhere.

This happens in the case of public manufactions in the forms of inscriptions, which will bear stony testimony for all time to a benefactor's generosity, or statues erected in the case of even more valuable gifts, or honoring a benefactor at a public event and the like. This is, incidentally, a frequent motivation for honoring God in one's speech, for bearing testimony or for uttering a psalm of thanksgiving and praise. One finds in the apocryphal book Tobit, for example, the angel Raphael urging those whom God has recently saved from disaster to bless God and acknowledge him in the presence of all the living for the good things he has done for you.

With fitting honor, declare to all people the deeds of God. Don't be slow to acknowledge him. Reveal the works of God, and with fitting honor, acknowledge him.

The honor was one important component of a return of gratitude. So was service or some other such return for the gift itself. Seneca writes that the generous disposition of the giver is repaid when we receive it gratefully.

The other part of the favor, which consists of something material, we have not yet repaid, but we still hope to do so. The debt of goodwill, of favorable disposition for favorable disposition, has been discharged by a return of goodwill. The material debt requires a material return.

Here, we have to understand material rather broadly as any kind of assistance or service in the real world or the physical world. And thus, I can't repay the emperor for a gift in any material means, but I can repay the emperor by doing the emperor's bidding when he needs something done, or by doing plenty of the governor's bidding when he needs something done, and offering that service freely as part of my return. You can probably already intuit the connection of this with God.

I can't repay God for anything, but I can give God what I can do, a lifetime of acts of obedience and service as an expression of gratitude for what God has given me. And a third component of a grateful response is loyalty to one's benefactor. As I had mentioned earlier, patrons were often in competition with one another, and so

loyalty to the person who has shown me a favor in the past is a very important expression of gratitude and connection.

I can't just be a noble person and go off to the party who seems to be winning. I should stand by the person who, in the past, has stood by me by giving me assistance and help. Seneca writes that this loyalty must be placed above any considerations of personal advantage.

He writes it's the ungrateful person who thinks I would have liked to have returned gratitude, but I fear the expense. I fear the danger. I shrink from giving offense to other people with whom my patron is out of favor.

I would rather consult my own interests. In a letter from Seneca, he writes that no one can be truly grateful unless he or she has learned to scorn the things that drive the common herd to distraction. If you wish to make a return for favor, you must be willing to go into exile, pour forth your blood, undergo poverty, or even let your very innocence be stained and exposed to shameful slanders.

That is to say, you have to put your connection with your patron above all other considerations. And if he or she has fallen upon hard times, you must accept the fact that those hard times will fall on you as well because of your connection with her rather than break that connection in order to gain personal advantage. We hear a lot of bad things about Herod the Great because, you know, by and large, he was kind of a jerk.

But he knew how to be a loyal client. In his younger days, before he went completely mad, he was a loyal client of Mark Antony. And for a long time, that worked out pretty well for him until Antony found himself in a civil war against Octavian, who would become the emperor Augustus and all the legions of Rome that weren't stationed in Egypt with Antony.

And, of course, we know Antony lost miserably in 31 BC. So, what is Herod going to do now that his patron has died in disgrace? Herod comes before Augustus himself, Octavian himself, and says, I'm not going to lie to you. I'm not going to try to downplay my connection with Antony.

He was my patron and my friend. And I showed loyalty and support for him to the end. And I do not repent of that.

But what I would offer to you now, Augustus, now Octavian, is the fact that I know how to be a loyal client and friend. I'm reaching there. That's about the only good thing I can say about Herod.

But he did know that much. We've talked a lot about the word grace in terms of this social context. I simply want to throw out quickly that the word faith also has a natural home in the context of these relationships.

It is not nearly as exclusive as the word *charis*, as the Greek word *charis* does in terms of this social institution, but a prominent location for talking about faith and its opposite is in patron-client or friendship relationships. *Pistis*, the Greek word that we commonly translate faith or trust, is used to talk about trust in a patron's reliability or a friend's reliability to give what was promised. And it's also used to talk about the client's dependability, his or her reliability to maintain faith, to keep faith with a particular patron or friend.

The opposite of *pistis* is *apistia*, commonly distrust or disloyalty. So we find it used to talk about a failure to trust a patron's or a friend's or even a client's reliability. Or as a manifestation of disloyalty, unfaithfulness to this relationship.

All that to say, as we read through the New Testament, it's not always the case, but it's often the case that the words faith, faithfulness, distrust, and disloyalty happen in the context of relationships of grace, of patron-client relationships with the patron often being God or Jesus and the client being the human disciple. To close this lecture, I want to look at an episode from the life of Jesus that shows us patronage, brokerage, and clientage at work in a real-life setting from the Gospel. This comes from Luke chapter 7. After Jesus finished presenting all his words to the people, he entered Capernaum.

A centurion had a servant who was very important to him, but the servant was ill and about to die. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to Jesus to ask him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they earnestly pleaded with Jesus.

He deserves to have you do this for him, they said. He loves our people, and he built our synagogue for us. Jesus went with them.

He had almost reached the house when the centurion sent friends to say to Jesus, Lord, don't be bothered. I don't deserve to have you come under my roof. In fact, I didn't even consider myself worthy of coming to you.

Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. I'm also a man appointed under authority with soldiers under me. I say to one, go, and he goes, and to another, come, and he comes.

I say to my servant, do this, and the servant does it. When Jesus heard these words, he was impressed with the centurion. He turned to the crowd following him and said, I tell you, even in Israel, I haven't found faith like this.

When the centurion's friends returned to his house, they found the servant restored to health. Now, let's just look at a few of the dynamics at work in this story. A centurion, a Roman, an outsider, and a man who seems to know himself to be part of the oppressing class in Judea, in Galilee, actually, in this case, needs something.

He needs something that ordinary people can't provide, that his own paid physicians can't provide. He needs healing for a household servant who's been a dear and trusted member of his household for a long time and whom the centurion cares deeply. Jesus has a reputation for having something: the power to heal.

Already, by this point in Luke's narrative, he is famed for being able to exorcise demons, heal the sick, and do all manner of divine wonderworking. The centurion wants what Jesus can give, and he thinks about how to get it. So, he doesn't go himself because he's a Roman oppressor.

He doesn't know how he'll be received as such, but he has people who, to put it a bit crassly, owe him something. The elders in Capernaum have enjoyed the patronage. In fact, the whole Jewish community of Capernaum has enjoyed the patronage of the Roman centurion who lives in their midst, wishing to be, you know, not the ugly Roman, but the good Roman.

He has lavished resources on the community of Capernaum, apparently having constructed a synagogue for them. By the way, the synagogue of the first century, not the foundation of the first-century synagogue, can still be seen in Capernaum to this day. It's really kind of cool to see that there underneath the fourth century limestone synagogue and think perhaps this centurion laid this foundation.

So, he sends those whom he has benefited, and those elders of the Jewish community are probably only too glad to finally have an opportunity to really do something good for their local patron in return for the good that he's done them. So, they go to Jesus, and they are selling the centurion's virtue with all their might. He's worthy to have you do this for him.

He's built us a synagogue. He loves our people. He is a worthy recipient of favor.

He's not your typical Roman. So, they act as mediators, as brokers, approaching someone that they can approach, a member of their own people, a member of the Jewish people, on behalf of someone who needs something. And they do it because they themselves know themselves to be recipients of the centurion's favor.

And therefore, indebted to him for his generosity. Now, that's already a great illustration of these dynamics at work. Jesus agrees to go.

Jesus is persuaded. And along the way, the centurion does something even more astounding. He sends another group of people out to Jesus who are called, incidentally, his friends later.

So, people, part of his household, part of his extended clientele. He sends these friends to say, stop where you are. I don't deserve to have you come under my roof.

But I know that you've got the authority to do this, and all you have to do is say the word. Hence, all this, I understand authority. I know what it is to say to someone, do this, and he does it.

And I know you have that kind of authority when it comes to divine favors. And that is an astounding example of trust, of *pistis*, that word we were talking about. I know you can come through with this favor.

I've got no doubts. You're completely reliable. And Jesus recognizes that that's precisely what the centurion is saying.

He says, wow, this kind of trust, this kind of confidence in my reliability, I haven't found in Israel, but I find it here. And he grants the favor to this centurion. So, in the story, we actually see many of the dynamics at work.

Mediation, reciprocity, the elders are trying to do what they can to give back to this incredibly generous Roman officer, and faith is also at work. In our next lecture, we'll try to look at one text, the letter to the Hebrews, through this lens and see how much this cultural background can illumine in a New Testament letter.

This is Dr. David DeSilva in his teaching on The Cultural World of the New Testament. This is session 3, Patronage and Reciprocity.