

Sermon – “MEEKNESS, NOT WEAKNESS”
(Third in Series on beatitudes)

March 1, 2009
Matthew 5:5

What is the life God calls us to live?

During these weeks we are finding the answer Jesus gives in the Sermon on the Mount, especially the eight verses called the Beatitudes.

In the first we heard Him say,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven”

Last week we explored the second one:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”

Today we come to the Beatitude that is, I think, the most easily misunderstood by modern-day people, yet one which would, if practiced, bring help to a violent world and peace to every wrangling church.

Listen to the Third of the Beatitudes:

“Blessed are the MEEK, for they shall INHERIT THE EARTH.”

Do you suppose there were some listeners who might have snickered when Jesus first said that?

I don't know, but there are surely many people nowadays who would laugh out loud at something that sounds so foolish, so namby-pamby as this!

Is there anyone here today who aspires to be MEEK?

Any of you fathers who hope that one day your son will grow up to be MEEK?

NO! MEEKNESS rhymes with WEAKNESS...
and for most people, that's what it means.

A MEEK person, in our minds, is a pushover, a milktoast – a teensy, harmless MOUSE of a person...

“meek as a lamb” we say of some people
who will make no waves, and probably make no difference either.

We don't want our children growing up like MICE or LAMBS.

We want them to be strong and fierce – like TIGERS!

“Go get ‘em, Tiger!”

“Don’t let people push you around!”

If you’ve read the Sunday comics over the years, you might be familiar with a big, tough Viking called HAGAR THE HORRIBLE.

In one installment, the lead frame in the cartoon pictured Hagar seated on a stone while a butterfly fluttered nearby.

Eyeing the butterfly, Hagar says, “The meek inherit the earth? Bah! You gotta be tough to make it in this world.”

We all wonder if Jesus has lost touch with things on this one, that meek people will wind up as DOORMATS. So we wind up re-writing the beatitude...

BLESSED ARE THE HARD-NOSED – FOR NOTHING FAZES THEM
BLESSED ARE THE PUSHERS – FOR THEY GET WHAT THEY WANT.

Why would Jesus tell us to be MEEK in a world where it seems only the strong survive, and where aggressiveness and assertiveness seem to pay off?

WHY?

Unless MEEKNESS doesn’t mean WEAKNESS after all.

Take a new look at this word.

The Bible holds up two people in particular as “MEEK” – these two are MOSES and JESUS.

Of Moses we read in Numbers 12:3

Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.

In the NT, Jesus says of Himself in Matthew 11:29

Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart

When you picture these two men, MOSES and JESUS, do you think of them as timid and mouse-like?

NO! They were both strong – yet not in that brutal, aggressive way that is so often the way of the world.

The MEEK person is different,
not because he is WEAK, but because he is “under control”

When the Greeks spoke of MEEKNESS,
a picture they liked to use was of the taming of an animal –
a strong OX, or a spirited STALLION

Such an animal was still POWERFUL, but now under a master’s control.

In the same way, a MEEK person is no weakling,
but rather one whose STRENGTH is controlled for use in a constructive purpose.

The meek person may have strong opinions, strong emotions,
but he or she knows how to channel them.

Both Moses and Jesus were angry on several occasions,
but they did not “fly off the handle” –
instead, they confronted wickedness with firmness and love, obedient to
God’s direction.

Perhaps, therefore, a different translation is in order.

Sydney Harris suggests that we translate this passage as
BLESSED ARE THE COOL – that is,
those who manage to stay calm under pressure.

Charles Swindoll proposes the word GENTLE.

As you begin to see,
staying “cool” and being “gentle” in tough situations requires
not LESS strength, but MORE!

It requires tremendous courage and power NOT to lose your temper in a tight spot!

Would you agree our world needs MORE such people?

That’s what Proverbs recommends: “**A soft answer turns away wrath**”

If there were more meekness on the part of WORLD LEADERS,
many tense situations could be de-fused. Some WARS could be headed off.

If there were more meekness exercised by HUSBANDS AND WIVES,
many a stormy household would be calmer. There would be fewer divorces.

If there were more meekness in the hearts of PASTORS AND CHURCH LEADERS
many divided congregations might still be together.

Our Lord knew that.

And so, to encourage the practice of such disciplined meekness,
He added a promise:

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK, FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH.

What can He mean?

If we look around, the opposite seems true.

The tough guys rule the streets – it is the meek who must give ground.
The hard-nosed folks hold the deeds, while the kind and gentle pay the rent!

Already in the early centuries it was so:

Roman Emperor Julian confiscated the homes and properties of
the Christians, and then wrote mockingly in a letter:

“Leave heaven for them...that is where they belong”

INHERIT THE EARTH? Where? When?

In the Old Testament, God focused the hopes of His people
on a little strip of real estate 200 miles long & 50 miles wide – the “Promised Land”

But Jesus expands that hope and bursts the boundaries.
Not just Canaan, but the whole earth is what God plans to give his people.

In the Mitford books by Jan Karon, Father Tim Kavanagh adopts a poor boy named
Dooley Barlowe. Dooley has nothing except what Father Tim provides week
to week.

But a wealthy old woman named Miss Sadie takes a liking to the boy, and sets
aside a large trust fund for the boy – over a million dollars, to be given him
when he turns 21.

“Dooley Barlowe is a millionaire – but he doesn’t know it yet!” reflects Father Tim.

So are you!

For God has set aside for us not just a million dollars, but the **WHOLE EARTH!**

We have not received it yet,
but it WILL happen when history comes of age, when Jesus returns in glory.

On that day, says the Bible, the new Jerusalem will come “down out of heaven”
to earth, and the “dwelling of God will be with men.”

On that day when God finally establishes His kingdom,
those who now possess the earth by violence will give it up,
but those who have renounced the world and carried the cross
shall inherit the earth and rule it with Christ!

BLESSED are such people, for their hope rests in Christ,
and their inheritance is secure.

When ridiculed, they hold their peace.
When treated with violence, they endure it patiently.
They do not make a scene when they suffer wrong.

Though they may not OWN a square foot of it,
already the meek know how to ENJOY the earth.

BLESSED ARE THEY!

But how does anyone get to be meek?

We said earlier that meekness means living life UNDER CONTROL.

The secret lies in who does the controlling.
I do not control my SELF. Jesus does.

Meekness is not a virtue that we learn through years of hard work.
It is the Gift of the Holy Spirit to those who put their trust in Jesus.

Do you aspire to be MEEK?
Then, says Jesus, “**Learn of me, for I am meek.**”

Jesus, you know, was a STRONG MAN who submitted Himself to the control of His
heavenly Father. Peter writes:

**When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he
did not threaten; but he trusted to Him who judges justly.**

He submitted himself to the cross with bravery and strength.

That's MEEKNESS in action – for you and for me!

LOVE like that can tame the wildest of people.

It can win them over.

It can turn them from snorting, raging beasts
into calm, productive work horses for God!

Look at PAUL.

Once he was Saul, fiery-eyed persecutor who **breathed threats and murder**
against the Christians.

Then suddenly he became Paul, a man willing to take what he had once
dished out.

HOW?

“**The love of Christ controls us**” is how he explained it in 2 Corinthians 5.

What about YOU?

Are you OUT OF CONTROL? Do you go smashing into people,
bellowing for your rights,
returning curse for curse?

“Learn of me” says Jesus.

I suggest that we must learn from Him the same way
a wild stallion learns from the cowboy who climbs on and rides him.

We must let Jesus climb into the saddle.

Begin by examining your life

to see where some CONTROL needs to be exercised.

Is it your temper? Your tongue? Your appetites?

CONFESS to Him that you cannot control these things.

YIELD these areas prayerfully and daily to Him.

TELL another Christian to pray with you about it.

Let me add that God is not asking you to stop being YOU –

whether you are talkative or temperamental, spontaneous or stubborn.

What He asks is that these qualities in you be placed AT HIS DISPOSAL,
into HIS SERVICE.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK.

I hope you will heed this call of Christ,
not as a summons to weakness,
but as an opportunity to experience the **POWER** and **JOY**
of a life under His control.

Now may the peace of God...