

Series: “More Than Happiness” (Part 2)  
“The Meek”

Last week I began a series of messages on the beatitudes – Jesus’ prescription for how to be happy! The word “blessed” in the Greek means a joy and happiness so exquisite that it’s a little taste of the joy of heaven here on earth – a kingdom joy!

Today we’ll look at the third beatitude, “Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). As I said in last week’s message, the Greek here is more emphatic: “*O the blessedness of the meek!*”

When you think about it, who wants to be meek? We probably think of a meek person as some mild-mannered pushover, some mousy little person. A “geek”, a “nerd”! As someone has said, very few people are lining up for “meekness training”! Who comes to mind when you think of a meek person? Maybe Steve Erkle, in the old TV program “Family Matters”? Some of the main characters in the film “Napoleon Dynamite”? How about Barney Fife? Deputy Sheriff of Mayberry!

The word in the New Testament translated “meek” (*praus*) doesn’t mean the Barney Fife’s of the world! For instance, Moses is called “meek” in the Bible. “Now the man Moses was very meek; more than all men that were on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). Was Moses a pushover? A timid little doormat? I don’t think so! Remember, in his early years, in a fit of rage he killed an Egyptian with his bare hands. Later, when the people of Israel openly disobeyed God, Moses in anger broke the tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments.

So, what does a meek person look like and act like? The Greek word *praus* (“meek”) is very hard to translate into English. First of all, *it carries the idea of gentleness*. In fact, sometimes the word *praus* is translated “gentle” rather than meek. Meekness is the opposite of being *aggressive or pushy*. Meek people are not *harsh or brutal or vengeful*. Movie characters such as Rambo, or the Terminator, would *not* be meek! Meek people are gentle.

The Greek word translated “meek” (*praus*) also includes the quality of *humility*. Meek people are *humble* people. They are *open* and *teachable*. So, meekness is related to the first 2 beatitudes. If we recognize our spiritual poverty, and mourn our sins, it will make us *humble* before God.

But there’s another important shade of meaning in the word “meek”. *It was the word used for an animal that has been domesticated, an animal that has been tamed to obey the word of the master*. I often marvel at the horses pulling Amish buggies. Strong animals. They can pull a buggy for miles, go up steep hills. But if a horse goes wild, it would endanger those inside the buggy. All that power is brought under control to take an Amish family where they want to go.

Nancy and I had an aunt who had a big German Shepherd. Before she got it the dog had served on the police force. I would not want to be a criminal if that dog attacked you! Yet this powerful animal was as gentle as a lamb with our aunt, and with us when we visited. That’s what meekness is!

*See, meekness is not weakness.* It's being strong, yet allowing yourself to be brought under control – especially *under God's control*. When we're meek, we are *open* and *teachable* – so we can be brought in line with God's will and purposes.

*That's what happened to Moses:* When he killed the Egyptian in a fit of anger, he wasn't meek. But afterwards he spent 40 years in the desert, getting to know God. And this fiery, passionate man became tamed and harnessed to the purposes of God. As someone has said, "Moses took himself in hand by putting himself in God's hand."

*Jesus is also described in the Bible as a meek person!* Jesus said this: "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am *gentle* and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29). The word translated "gentle" is "praus" (meek)! Jesus was no wimp, no Casper Milquetoast! He took a whip and drove the moneychangers out of the temple. He stood up to the powerful religious establishment. He didn't cower before kings and governors. Jesus had the unlimited power of God at His fingertips! He could have with a word annihilated those who orchestrated His crucifixion. Yet, He was willing to allow that absolute power to be harnessed to the purposes of God, even to the point of being a humble servant, and giving His life away on the cross.

*Meekness is one of the 9 fruit of the Spirit.* "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, *gentleness (praus)* and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). When the Holy Spirit controls us, it will show itself by our having a gentle spirit!

***Are you a leader in the church?*** In the New Testament, meekness, or gentleness, is listed as one of the qualities church leaders are to have! "Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money" (1 Timothy 3:2-3). Again, the word translated "gentle" is the word for meek.

Jesus says, "O the blessedness of the meek...!" *How meek a person are you?* Some of us by nature are passive, timid – we don't assert ourselves. *That is not being meek.* Just being unsure of ourselves, and having low self-esteem, isn't meekness! Others of us are more pushy and aggressive. We tend to want to manipulate or control people. We want our own way. Maybe we're kind of bullish or bull-headed. That's certainly not being meek! Meekness is strength and power under God's control!

*Meek people are humble. Do you have a humble, open, teachable spirit?* Know anyone who thinks he or she knows it all? They're always right. Their view is the only one to have. How open and teachable and humble are some of our politicians? How open to other opinions are the news presenters on MSNBC or Fox News? Jesse Kelly, on "The First", has a program called "I'm Right". (It's a play on words– he's "right", or conservative). How humble and open to other views are the ladies on "The View"?

There are *Christians* who display this “I know it all” attitude, instead of having a humble, teachable spirit. *Their* interpretation of the Bible is always the correct one. *Their* stance on any moral question is the only possible one to have!

Many of you know that one of my mentors in the faith was Rocky Riedel, my pastor during my teen years. He taught me so much, gave me a grounding in the faith. And yet, many years later, when he was in his 80’s and serving a church, he was open to my teaching and my help in terms of how God had brought growth to several of the churches I served. I offered to meet with his leaders. He checked with them, and some were interested. I remember when he called me on the phone to set up some sessions with his people, he said, “I don’t know what to do.” He was humble enough to ask for my help – after teaching me in my early years.

*Then too, when we’re meek, we allow God to tame us - to bring our power and strength under His control? Maybe you have a strong, dominant personality. Maybe you’re a person with strong opinions. Will you surrender these parts of your personality to God, so God will help you to be a strong, but humble and gentle servant of others?*

When I think of a person whose strength has been tamed by God I think of an African-American man I came to know when we were both counselors during a week of camp at Pocono Plateau. He was big hulk of a man. He made up for about 2 of me! He was not only *physically* towering, but he was a man of strong convictions, for Christ, and racial justice. Yet there was a kindness about him, a humility, like all that power had been brought under control. Soft spoken, he preached a devotional at one of the camp services that was inspiring and powerful. In it he quoted a beautiful poem, all from memory. Here was a strong man, *tamed by God! A gentle giant of a godly man!*

*Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek...” - the gentle, humble, God-controlled, God-tamed people – “for they shall inherit the earth”* Isn’t that weird? The *meek* inheriting the earth! This beatitude of Jesus is almost a direct quote from Psalm 37:11: “But the meek shall inherit the land.”

What did Jesus mean when He said the meek would inherit the earth (or the land, as it says in Psalm 37)? Does the “land” here mean the “promised land of heaven”? That when God’s kingdom comes, the meek will get into that kingdom? They will! But I wonder if Jesus isn’t saying that even now, the meek are the ones who inherit this earth?

It seems kind of ridiculous to think that! After all, isn’t it the pushy people who get ahead in this world? The elite, the influential, the people with clout? This beatitude of Jesus seems way off base and out of touch with the real world! The atheist philosopher, Nietzsche, thought so. He wrote of this teaching of Jesus, ‘I regard it as the most fatal and seductive lie that ever existed.’

But maybe it isn’t a lie after all! Think about it, the mammoth creatures that once terrorized the earth are gone. Dinosaurs are extinct. Their bones stand in museums. But *sheep* still graze the earth! It’s not the Osama ben Ladens or the Vladimir Putins who inherit the earth.

Oh, they have their moment in the sun. They make a lot of noise, and do horrific things, but they're soon gone, no longer able to wield their destructive power. Adolph Hitler boasted that the Third Reich would last 1,000 years. Less than 7 years later, he's hunkered down in a bunker 50 feet below the ground in Berlin, screaming that his generals are guilty of treason. In a short time he's gone. Committing suicide. But Moses – the meek man Moses – still lives on in his influence for Christians and Jews – and the whole world

Mark it down, the world does not belong to the *mad*, but to the *meek*...the Ghandis, the Nelson Mandellas, the Mother Therasas, the Martin Luther King, Jr.s.

And the meek Man Jesus. His life and teachings are still transforming individuals and shaping the world. And like Him, those who are meek and lowly in heart who follow Him will inherit the earth...and ultimately the kingdom of God.

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