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The Beatitudes – “Blessed Are the Meek”

Intro to Worship

This morning we jump back into our worship series on the Beatitudes, where Jesus paints a picture for all who will listen, describing what it looks like when we are blessed to be a blessing – when we live out the love and heart of God each day. Over the past two weeks, we’ve explored “Blessed are the poor in spirit” and “Blessed are the merciful,” wrestling with our dependence on God’s Spirit in our lives, and our call to alleviate the suffering of others. This morning, we turn to the third Beatitude, “Blessed are the meek” to unpack what meekness looked like in the Biblical context, and what kind of meekness we are called to live out today. With our thoughts turning toward meekness, let us sing this refrain together about rejoicing in God’s blessings.

Psalm 37

Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday. Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices. Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;

though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

Matthew 5: 5 - "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

Sermon

How many of us would be happy to be called meek? Not very many! We're raised in a culture where it is actually dangerous to be weak... you could easily get walked all over (like a doormat), you could be bullied, abused, taken advantage of, or even oppressed. Meekness, is seen in our Western culture as WEAKNESS. In fact, when you look up the definition of meek in the dictionary, you will find this "*quiet, gentle, and easily imposed on; submissive.*" That's not really something that most people would aspire to! So what in the world is Jesus saying here in this Beatitude: Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

To decode this Beatitude, we're going to need to go back to the Greek word and learn more about what meekness meant as it is used in our scriptures. Of all of our Biblical texts, this Greek word *PRAUS* is only used to describe two people – and based on our contemporary understanding of the word, you would never guess that these two characters would be Jesus and Moses! The two Biblical giants of our Old and New Testaments! Amazing, charismatic, strong leaders who weren't afraid to speak truth even when it upset and challenged people. They were anything but submissive... quiet, gentle, and easily imposed on. Moses is more of a lion, leading all of the people of Israel out of slavery and through the wilderness to the edge of the promised land, roaring at them when they turned their backs on God. And Jesus, was not afraid to be counter-cultural, challenging the Pharisees and temple leaders, publicly breaking Sabbath restrictions to make a point, commanding unclean spirits, and turning the tables in the temple courts. Meekness **MUST** have meant something a whole lot different if these are the two people described as meek.

It so happens that the word meek--in Greek *praus* was one of the great Greek ethical words. Aristotle has a great deal to say about meekness, and as was his way, he defined every virtue as the mean between two extremes. Aristotle defines meekness as the mean between excessive anger and excessive angerlessness – the happy medium between too much and too little anger. And so the first possible translation of this beatitude is: "*Blessed is someone who is always angry at the right time, and never angry at the wrong time.*" It's a righteous anger... one that rises with injustice, but does not seek

revenge or payback. It is not an anger that leads one to sin, or cause harm to others, but one that seeks peace and justice for all. I could get behind that kind of meekness!

But the word *praus* has a second standard Greek usage. It was regularly used to refer to an animal that had been domesticated, that had been trained to obey the word of command, that had learned to answer to the reins. It is the word for an animal which has learned to accept control. So the second possible translation of this beatitude is: *"Blessed is someone who has every instinct, every impulse, every passion under control. Blessed is someone who is entirely self-controlled."* Or, if we're applying this concept to our faith walk, it would look more like God's guidance in our lives – that we are God-controlled, rather than self-controlled, obedient to the will and heart of God. So meekness here is not self-serving, but God-serving, allowing yourself to be utilized as an instrument of God's peace, love, and work on earth. Also a concept I can get behind.

But there is still a third possible way we can look at this beatitude. The Greeks always contrasted meekness with "lofty-heartedness" or excessive arrogance. Which means that meekness also encompasses a sense of humility that banishes all pride. In many ways, religion is grounded on this humility, an acceptance of our own weakness, the understanding that we don't know it all, and that we need God in our lives. And so the final possible translation is this: *Blessed is someone who has the humility to know their own ignorance, their own weakness, and their own need.*

This beatitude, as it comes together from the deeper meanings of its original context is about righteous anger, obedience to God, and humility. This meekness is no "doormat theology", instead it is subversive power, loving our enemies, clarity of heart and mind, and strong gentleness of power under control to do God's work. That's Jesus! That's Moses! And we're reminded, this can be us too! We are called to use the power God created within each of us to humbly serve God and neighbor, and to work toward building communities of justice and love.

In his book, "Beatitudes from the Backside" J. Ellsworth Kalas wrote about power and how it's used appropriately and inappropriately. He wrote this:

Let me put it in very simple terms. Who is stronger? The one who strikes back, or the one who doesn't need to? If a very small child strikes a man, the man doesn't hit him back, unless the man is

immature. The man has the power to do what he wants with the child, but he has an even greater power, the strength to hold his superiority under control. A bully is a bully because he or she doesn't have the strength to be anything else. A bully is never really a strong person. The bully suffers the inestimable weakness of having to prove that he or she is tough. Incidentally, bullies are not limited to the world of fists and weapons, but are also to be found among executives, managers, even among teachers and preachers, if they use their tongues and some measure of their intelligence to humiliate or control others. The meek person knows they don't have to be a bully. They know who they are, so they have nothing to prove. They have the inner strength to control their power.

The power and blessings of meekness does not look like the kind of power that our world celebrates and thrives on – power over, domination, brute strength. Meekness encompasses a different kind of power... a power from within. Jesus preaches here that we will be blessed when we are meek – in fact, we will inherit the earth. In a world where the strong and powerful take what they can, possess the land and its wealth along with it – these words ring with hope for a different way, a quieter way, one that is entirely God-focused with a heart for justice. We are called to and blessed by this meekness – NOT WEAKNESS – but God inspired mission.

If you're a Lord of the Rings fan, you'll know that this is the meekness that we see in Frodo Baggins as he steps forward to deliver the ring of power to its destruction. Frodo is not a powerful wizard like Gandalf, or a wise elfin lord like Elrond, or a conquering warrior like Aragorn or Gimli son of Glain. He's small, he's weak, he is lowly and unremarkable. But he is humble, he is driven, and he knows that his task has a bigger purpose than even his own life. And it is his meekness that makes him the perfect ring bearer. His self-control and humility are the qualities that make him able to resist the seductive power of the one ring, forged by the Dark Lord Sauron. Frodo's meekness is his superpower, and it is the only power capable of saving the world from the evil that threatens to take control.

Jesus said it's the meek that will inherit the earth. The meek, those who know that they are worthy and that they have power, and yet hold onto that power for a time that is appropriate. Those who embrace a righteous anger, the anger that acknowledges that God's vision for the world is yet to be and that we have work to. I pray that as we live into the spirit of the Beatitudes, we

come to know and celebrate the blessing that come through meekness – and that through them – the whole world would be blessed with justice and peace. Amen.