

## THE BEATITUDES: JESUS' CALL TO HAPPINESS

Matthew 4:17-5:12

*“Blessed are the Meek...”*

Matthew 5:5

*“Blessed, happy, are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”* is not a comfortable beatitude because it seems so foreign to what we understand to be true; it seems contradictory to reality—even absurd. Still, it is one that Jesus personally identifies with when he says later in Matthew’s gospel, *“...I am meek...in heart...”*

A meek person is often seen as one who can be pushed around, walked over, abused, sneered at, insulted, and mishandled without any response. Meek people are identified as spineless and wishy-washy. Is this the kind of person that Jesus was? And is this the kind of person that Jesus is referring to in today’s beatitude? And further, is this the kind of person that Jesus says will inherit the earth?

With our modern definition of meek in mind I ask you: Was it a **meek** Jesus that became so angry with people who were improperly using the temple that he ran them out with a whip? Was it a **meek** Jesus that washed his disciples’ feet? Was it a **meek** Jesus that dared to stop the execution of a prostitute saying, *“Whoever is without sin let them be the first to condemn her?”* Was it a **meek** Jesus that refused to allow his disciples to defend him when he was arrested? Was it a **meek** Jesus that on several occasions dared to challenge the teachings of the recognized religious authorities? Was it a **meek** Jesus that offered no defense to charges brought against him, and without protest walked to his execution? Was it a **meek** Jesus that died for what he believed in?

Let’s consider for a moment the kind of world that Jesus was born into; the kind of world that he taught and ministered in. The Jews, Jesus’ own people, were arrogant about their race—they believed that they were racially superior to others. The Romans, who ruled Jesus’ world, were arrogant about their power—they believed that they were superior in strength to all others. And, the Greeks, the scholars of Jesus’ day, were arrogant about their knowledge—they believed that they were superior in intelligence to everyone else. And along came Jesus calling the people to happiness through meekness; even saying, that the meek will inherit the earth—rather than those who arrogantly consider themselves to be superior.

Probably the best way for us to grasp what Jesus means by meek is to listen to Paul's words as he describes Jesus in his letter to the church at Philippi. *"Although being in the form of God, Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but rather emptied himself; taking the form of a servant...He humbled himself and was obedient, even to the point of death."*

According to Paul, Jesus chose not to exploit his relationship with God—to be arrogant about it. Instead, Jesus chose the role of servant—washing the feet of his disciples as a household servant would in that day. Jesus humbled himself; yet, he would come to the defense of any who were being mistreated or abused. Jesus chose to be obedient to God.

Throughout Jesus' life he demonstrated a disciplined strength. His strength was united with gentleness. When he says, *"Happy are the meek"* Jesus is saying, *"Happy are those with a gentle disciplined strength."* Happy are those who do not turn their strength into arrogance. Happy are those who do not use their strength to exploit their relationship with God. Happy are those who do not use their strength to abuse others. Happy are those who use their strength in obedience to God's will. Happy are those who are willing to be servants; to use their strength in caring for others—especially those who have difficulty caring for themselves.

Today's beatitude and the beatitude from two weeks ago are very closely related: *"Happy are the poor in spirit,"* or as we translated it, *"Happy are those who recognize their need of God."* Both of these beatitudes, meekness and poor in spirit, indicate that happiness is a product of dependence upon and obedience towards God. However; the beatitude on meekness has the added dimension of also speaking to how individuals are to relate to each other. The meek person is willing to be obedient to God but also servant to others. The meek person recognizes their strength but chooses to harness it in service to God and others—to live a life of disciplined gentle strength.

Jesus says that the meek will inherit the earth. The meek, those with disciplined gentle strength, who serve God and others, will have influence on the earth far beyond the arrogant. Let me put it this way, the teachings and the lives of people like Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and Martin Luther King Jr. will have far more lasting influence and effect than any Hitler, Osama Bin Laden, or Saddam Hussan.

The key to Jesus' call to happiness through meekness is found in choice. Jesus chose not to exploit his relationship with God. Jesus chose to embrace the role of servant. Jesus chose to be obedient to God. Jesus chose to harness his strength for goodness and for service.

We too must choose. We can choose to use our strength to exploit others, to take advantage, to manipulate, to be arrogant; or, we can choose to use our strength in obedience to God and in service to others. In essence my friends we choose the kind of legacy we will leave on this earth. We choose how we will be remembered.

A few years ago at the Special Olympics in Seattle nine mentally challenged children lined up for the 100 yard dash. At the sound of the gun they all came out sprinting as fast as they could. Then, one of the children stumbled and fell down. He began to cry in shame, disappointment and embarrassment. The other eight children heard his cries. They slowed down, they turned around, and they went back to him. They helped him up and then all nine children held hands and walked to the finish line.

At first, the crowd was absolutely silent; and then, when they realized what they had seen, they stood and cheered. And those who saw it are still telling the story **today**; the story of seeing mentally challenged children choose that winning the race was not nearly as important as caring for a hurting soul. That crowd witnessed in those children Jesus-like gentle strength. That crowd witnessed the third beatitude, "*Happy are those who discipline their strength for good, for they shall be remembered.*"