

Blessed Are the Meek • Matthew 5:5

Isn't it interesting the way we selectively remember things from our childhood? For example, we remember things with vivid detail that really are quite insignificant and then someone asks you the name of a third or fifth grade teacher that you listened to and looked at for 180 days of the school year and you can't remember anything about her. We have long forgotten many of the things our parents told us to always remember, yet we remember casual comments they may not even know they said.

One of the things that I remember from my childhood occurred on numerous occasions when riding in the front seat of the car while my mother drove.

It was something my mother often said when another driver showed special courtesy or consideration. As an example, we might be trying to pull out of a super-market parking lot into a

busy stream of traffic. Car after car would pass, the drivers sometimes speeding up to make sure we would not squeeze in. At last someone slows down and waves you in front of them and when that would happen, my mother would invariably say, "He must be a Christian." My mother operated on a basic biblical presupposition, and that is that a Christian is someone who thinks and behaves differently than a non-Christian.

Jesus believed the same thing! When he described Christians in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5, The Sermon on the Mount, he described men and women who think and act Christianly. And that is very different from the thinking and the behavior of those who are not Christians.

In Matthew 5:5 Jesus said, "*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*" Now to some, meekness means weakness; but not to Jesus and not to Christians. To understand the meaning of "meek," we need to go back before Jesus because these words were not original with him. In fact, he was quoting Psalm 37:11, "*The meek will inherit the land, and enjoy great peace.*" To get to the meaning of "meek" we have to look at the Hebrew word which is variously translated as "obedient," "poor" and "humble."

Meekness means humility toward God. It describes the person who fully trusts God, who does what God wants and is not bitter or

angry toward God. It is not the person who shakes their fist heavenward and says, "I deserve better. You shouldn't have done this!" but rather someone

who approaches God with simplicity and humility.

During my growing up years, our family physician was a doctor who had served in the Pacific after the Korean War. One of those vivid memories of childhood was overhearing a conversation between my father and the family doctor. He was describing how one day he was asked to treat a famous general who had a reputation for being brusque. As a young physician he was understandably nervous. The general was a powerful man and rather intimidating in his army uniform with all the stars. But, the doctor explained, the General was quite different in the examining room with his clothes off. He was not intimidating when he was naked! He was

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grateful for the doctor's care. He was obedient, doing exactly what he was asked to do. He was humble. He was meek.

That is what a Christian is before God. As Christians we go before God and we take off the uniforms we otherwise wear that may be intimidating to other people. We leave all the power outside the room and we stand before God naked, obedient, grateful, meek. Meek means "humility toward God."

But when Jesus spoke he wasn't speaking in Hebrew, he was speaking in Aramaic and the record is given to us in Greek. So to fully understand what Jesus meant by "meek," we must add the meanings of the Greek word as well as the Hebrew. The Greek word may be best defined by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle had a philosophy of "balance" wherein he taught that the virtues of life are often at the balanced middle between inappropriate extremes. For example, in describing a worker the two extremes would be laziness, the person doesn't do anything, and the workaholic, the person who can never relax. What's best is to be a hard worker balanced between the two extremes.

Aristotle explained that the word "meek" is the word in the middle between the extremes of the abuse of anger. On the one extreme is the person who never gets angry about anything, closing his eyes against injustice, and at the other extreme is the person who gets angry all the time about everything, ignoring the damage her outbursts incur. Meekness is the balance between the two extremes. Aristotle would say meekness is anger under control.

I like the way the Scottish writer William Barclay describes it, "When anger is for our own sake, it is always wrong. When anger is for the sake of others, it is often divinely right." Jesus is a perfect example. Remember when Jesus heard the religious leaders

objecting to his healing a handicapped man with a shriveled hand just because it was the Sabbath day? They insisted that you couldn't heal somebody on the Sabbath day because you were not supposed to work on that day. Jesus "*looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts*" (Mark 3:5), went ahead and healed the man. He was angry at their lack of compassion and misunderstanding of God's commandment.

Jesus was often angry on behalf of others. But when he was hurt, when people lied to him and about him, when they spit at him, when they shouted profanities and obscenities in his face, when they beat him and even when they crucified him, he showed no anger at all. In fact he prayed, "*Father forgive them.*"

Meekness is anger under control. It's anger that is appropriate. And it's gentleness — especially gentleness towards others. Our family has a black Labrador retriever named, Anya. To those who first see her, she looks a little scary. But she is actually a very gentle dog. If you reach out to pet her, she won't snarl at you, she shows her appreciation and approval and delight in your touch. When you bump into her she just gets up and gets out of your way. If we feed our other pets first, Anya patiently waits for her turn. She isn't pushy or demanding. But that is not to imply that she is a weak dog. She is strong and healthy and has a great set of teeth and claws. She could tear your hand off without any trouble, if she wanted to. But in all the years she has been part of our family, I have never seen her snarl or bite. The only time I saw her angry was when she sensed one of us was in danger. Then she growled and bared her teeth. Anya is a "meek" dog.

And Jesus wants us to be "meek" Christians — not weak! Let there be no doubt that there may be great strength, great power,

but it is never used in harshness or in inappropriate anger toward or against anyone. It is restrained, it's controlled, it's gentle. We may have the capacity to tear a person apart with our tongues, the power to lash out at other people in anger, but the person who is a Christian does not do that. The Christian is to be under control. Balanced. Kind. Meek.

Now to those who are meek, Jesus promised certain possessions. The first of them has to do with blessings that are for here and now. "Blessed are the meek." The promise is present tense. You will recall that "blessed" means "happy." Or as one contemporary German translation puts it, "God-loved are the meek." I like that. God loves the meek and gives his very best to Christians who are humble toward him and gentle toward others. And how does that blessing come? Surely it comes in a sense of the presence of God and in God's control of circumstances for our best interest. For God is providentially active in all the affairs of our lives: at school, at home, on the road, in paying the bills, in dealing with medical matters, in relationships with people. God is always there on our behalf and that is part of the blessing. But I'd go so far as to say that some of the very best of the benefits that we experience here and now from meekness come from meekness itself. For humility toward God is a happy way to be. It is a reward in itself, just as it is a reward in itself for Christians to be gentle and not to be angry toward others. Anger that is always lashing out and cutting other people down often ends up making the angry person the most miserable. Blessed are the meek.

The second possession promised to the meek is benefits later. When these words were

first written, back in Psalm 37:11, it was a promise that the meek would inherit the land. The early readers of the Psalm took it, and rightly so, to be referring to the promised land of Palestine. God was promising to give his people villages, towns, valleys and mountains where they would prosper. But Jesus expanded the meaning of that when he spoke of a land that was an eternal land, a new earth and a new heaven. It is a land still to be inherited — a place to be the eternal home of those who are Christians. God promises that the land of eternity goes to the meek, to bask in the love and presence of God. God is populating his eternal land with those who are humble and gentle, with those who are Christians.

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Now there are some people who may say, "I'm convinced. I'm going to quit being proud and start being humble. Starting tomorrow I'm going to be meek." Some that say, "I'm not going to be angry anymore. I am going to get under control. I'm going to swing that pendulum to the middle. I'm not going to tell people off. I'm only going to have the kind of anger that is appropriate and in the best interest of others." But did you notice that Jesus never told anyone to try to be meek? All he said was that the meek are blessed and will inherit the earth. Jesus doesn't tell us to try and be meek because he knew it couldn't be done. He knew there was no way by ourselves that we could ever demonstrate these characteristics.

It is God and God only who makes meekness. It is the God who gets inside of people and transforms us, changes us to be something that otherwise we could not be. It is a revolution. It is a new birth. It is from the inside out. It's God who makes a Christian

meek.

Here's how. First, one has to become a Christian. Don't ever think that if you're meek you become a Christian, because it's the other way around. You become a Christian and then you become meek. God offers us salvation from our sins. All we must do is accept in faith. Accept Jesus as Savior from sin and Lord of life. Then he transforms the way we are in our relationship to him and in our relationship to one another. We are not only spiritually reborn, but we are spiritually charged with God's power so that we can do exactly what Jesus is describing in the Sermon on the Mount. We're changed from the inside out. We're meek and we're blessed.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

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