

Blessed are the Meek - Sermon 10th July 2016

Reading: Philippians 2: 1- 13 (NIV) - Imitating Christ's Humility

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mind-set as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

Introduction

Over the last few weeks we have been looking at the Sermon on the Mount.

- I want to continue this by thinking about the third Beatitude
- *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.* (Matt. 5:5)
- As we have noted in previous weeks
- Blessed in this context means attitudes and attributes that are to be admired
- The people we look up to
- Those we aspire to be.

However, many of the attributes Jesus says are admirable,

- Are not qualities necessarily admired in the world we live in
- And of all of them this is surely most true of 'meekness'
- Meekness is associated with weakness and timidity
- An inability to stand up for yourself.

Self-belief and self-assertiveness

- That is what we want today
- And you can easily find books and courses to help you achieve these.
- But I would be amazed if you could find a book on
- 'The Secret of Being Meek'

When Captain Kirk set out to explore Space – the final frontier

- He didn't meekly go where no one had been before
- Even in church we sing "Be Bold, Be Strong"
- But never 'be meek'

We could argue that the benefit of 'meekness' is eternal

- Therefore, would not be recognised in the world
- But Jesus has not given us this option
- By saying the Meek shall inherit the earth
- It's the only beatitude that promises reward on earth.

So we must conclude that Jesus meant something different by meek

- It must have a slightly different sense than we understand
- So this morning we are going to look at what Jesus means by meekness
- Think about examples of Meekness
- And the benefits of meekness.

What is Meekness?

In the New testament the Greek word translated meek is 'Praiūs'

- Jesus uses it twice
- Once here in the beatitudes
- And once of himself in Matt. 11:29'
- Where it is translated as gentle

'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle (meek) and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt.11:28-30)

We find the word used a third time in Matthew

- This time as Jesus enters Jerusalem for the last time
- When the Prophet Zechariah is quoted
"Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle (meek) and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" (Matt 21:5)
- Interestingly in the passage in Zechariah the word is translated as lowly

In his first letter Peter writes to encourage Christians to be meek in their attitude He says

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15)

So we have several words used to describe meek

- Lowly, humble, gentle and respectful.
- In the IVP New Bible Dictionary defines gentleness and meekness differently
- Saying '*In the N.T. Meekness refers to an inward attitude whereas gentleness is expressed rather in outward action*'
- In other words, they are saying Meekness is an attitude of heart
- Gentleness is then the behavioural characteristic arising from meekness

In that wonderful passage in Philippians we read at the start

- Pauls gives what I feel is an excellent definition of a meek attitude
- In verse 3 he writes
"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

But meekness in the bible is not primarily about our attitude towards each other

- Although that is part of it
- It is first and foremost about an attitude toward God
- About trust in his righteousness
- In his purpose for our lives.

In the example Paul gives us in Philippians 2

- To live lives with a meek attitude we should consider Jesus himself
Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6-8)

So part of meekness in an attitude of trust

- The IVP New Bible Dictionary again says
- '*The meek do not resent adversity because they accept everything as being the effect of God's wise and loving purpose for them, so they accept injuries from men also, knowing that these are permitted by God for their ultimate good*'
- This suggests something about meekness we haven't touched on yet
- Confidence

To be truly meek in the biblical sense of the word requires great confidence in God

- It is not a weakness but a trust that allows the meek to accept circumstances
- Where others become anxious or frustrated
- The meek trust in God's ultimate plan.

When others see evil flourish and good plans go awry

- When our good intentions are misconstrued
- Or we meet unfair opposition
- A meek heart trusts in God and is confident in His righteousness

This is what the Psalmist was saying in Psalm 37 read at the start of the service.

- ¹ *Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong;*
- ² *for like the grass they will soon wither; like green plants they will soon die away.*
- ³ *Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.*
- ⁴ *Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*
- ⁵ *Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:*

Now we are beginning to see how the meek may inherit the earth

- Because their happiness or mental equilibrium is not overly affected by circumstances.
- Paul goes on in his letter to the Philippians to talk about contentment
"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:11-13)

What he is saying is that because he trusts God

- He can face all circumstances without losing heart or faith.
- This is a much misquoted verse
- Possibly from the Authorised or King James translation that says
- *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."*

Paul is not promising victory in all our endeavours

- The context is clear
- He is saying with a meek heart and trust in God
- I can cope or endure all circumstances.

We see this more fully as we look at some examples of meekness

Examples of Meekness

Obviously we see meekness most perfectly displayed in Jesus

- Especially in his endurance of the torture of the crucifixion
- His patience when falsely accused
- His forgiveness towards those who wronged him

We also see it in the garden of Gethsemane when he sweats blood and prays

- *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* (Luke 22:42)
- An amazing prayer but wholly consistent with a life spent in trust and obedience
- As Jesus himself, told the Pharisees
"Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. (John 5:19)

This obedience and confidence in God marked him out as different

- When Jesus preached people noticed
- Luke tells us
All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What words these are! With authority and power, he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!"
(Luke 4:36)

There is another good example in the Bible

- Moses
- In Numbers we are told
Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth. (Numbers 12:3 AV)

That is quite surprising

- This is the same Moses that in his youth killed a man in anger for abusing a Hebrew slave.
- Yet in his eighties he is called by God from a burning Bush
- Despite his fears he declares God's word to Pharaoh – "Let my people go"
- He pronounces plagues upon Egypt until Pharaoh succumbs
- Then he leads God's people across the wilderness for forty years
- I doubt the first thought that comes to mind is "What a meek man"

Yet God saw something in his gentleness in leading the people

- His obedience in speaking God's message to Pharaoh
- And also his patience when his leadership was challenged
- This was the occasion when God describes him as meek

We read in Numbers 12:1-3

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. ² "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this.

³ *(Now Moses was a very humble (meek) man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)*

Moses does nothing to defend himself against this slander

- He patiently endures it and wait for God to act
- Which God does
- He summons Miriam and Aaron before him and tells them off
- Miriam is struck down with a skin disease
- And it is Moses who then begs God for her healing and forgiveness

A wonderful story of an amazing man

- It made me think of other men in history who we might describe as meek
- It occurred to me men like Gandhi, Martin Luther King,
- And Nelson Mandela might fit the description

I know none of them were perfect

- And aspects of their past could be called into question
- Just like Moses
- But Gandhi and Martin Luther king stand out for their pacifist stance
- The strength that allowed them to stand up for justice
- To take the abuse of their oppressors
- Yet at the same time refuse to do resort to violence

Nelson Mandela likewise endured years of unfair imprisonment

- Yet when released led his country into reconciliation and healing.
- Insisting that the nation find forgiveness rather than retaliation
- It has to be one of the most incredible events in any counties political history

These men are still admired today

- They stand in stark contrast to some of the petty self interest
- The gloating
- The deceit and disrespect we have seen from all sides of the political divide in recent weeks

Maybe this is what Jesus means when he says

- It is the meek who inherit the earth
- It is those who show respect who are respected
- Those who listen and give a gentle answer who have authority
- And those whose confidence is in God who withstand the trials of life.

A few years ago there was a competition for Britain's favourite poem

- Much to everyone's surprise it was won by Rudyard Kipling's 'If'
- But it seems to me to say something about the meek inheriting the earth

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings
 And never breathe a word about your loss;
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
 ' Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,
 if neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
 If all men count with you, but none too much;
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
 And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

Benefits of Meekness

I want to finish by looking at the benefits of Meekness

- In a world where everyone is fighting for their share
- Where, in order to succeed you have to put others down
- There must be great benefits to meekness

The confidence in God that gives us peace

- The secret of being content with what we have
- Enduring hardship knowing God is in control
- As Paul writes to the Colossian Church ((Colossians 3:1-4)
Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

As a consequence of having our mind set on Christ

- Our confidence and security in God
- Paul tells us to
"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature" (vs. 5)
- But instead (vs. 12)
"clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility (or meekness), gentleness and patience.
- And
- *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and*

songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Conclusion

As we said at the beginning

- We should *'have the same mind-set as Christ Jesus'* (Phil. 2:5)

Amen