

Title: Happy are the Meek
Text: Matthew 5.5
Theme: Channeled strength
Series: Matthew #14
Prop Stmtnt: Christ is our meekness and our inheritance

Read Text:

The more that I prepared for this sermon; the more I thought that someone else should preach this text because I am certainly not an example of this. This, of course, brings up the tension that we all have with this entire sermon that Jesus preached. Many people have looked at the standard that Christ established here and have concluded that this is impossible. Christ certainly could not be serious about this. No one can live this way. So, some concluded that Jesus must be talking about what life will be like in his kingdom, when he comes to reign on the earth. The obvious problem with that view is that Jesus did not say that. Besides, he preached this message to people who were not in the Kingdom. Another insurmountable problem is the fact that Jesus goes on to talk about being persecuted for righteousness sake and being reviled and being on the receiving end of all kinds of evil and that certainly does not fit with the Bible's description of the reign of Christ on the earth. So, if Christ is preaching this, with the expectation that people live this way, how can it be done? Wouldn't this be like exasperating your kids? You know, demanding from them that they try to reach an impossible standard and then punishing them when they fail? After all, the Sermon on the Mount seems like the Old Testament law on steroids. If no one could keep the Old Testament law, then what is value of this? And that is the question that we have to ask.

What was the purpose of the Old Testament law? The Old Testament did three things. 1) It revealed the holy, unchangeable character of God through the moral code that it established. This of course was a problem because the moral code of God's law revealed the condition of our hearts and our desperate need to be forgiven. 2) So, the second thing that the Old Testament law did was it provided a means by which a person could find forgiveness. This was what the sacrificial system was all about. All of the laws about offering up sacrifices were laid out in explicit detail so that people could realize that sin is not only serious, but God has made a provision for sin to be dealt with. The third thing that the law did was that it established a code for the Old Testament people of God to live by. This was to mark them as a nation that was unique on the earth. There were limits to the Old Testament law. God never intended for the Old Testament law to be the end all. The Old Testament law was intended to make people aware of how much they needed a Savior. Even though they had a sacrificial system, it was never enough; which was the point. The sacrifices were not enough. Only Jesus is enough.

So now, Jesus is on the scene. He is preaching to people who have the law. But instead of being humbled by the law because it exposes their sin, they have become proud of the fact that they are the only ones in all of the earth who have the law. Their leaders have been infiltrated by this powerful group called the Pharisees who have an insane number of rules for everything, but who, in many cases are fundamentally evil and self-centered

men. They thought that they had mastered the Old Testament law and they held that over the heads of the people. So, on the one hand, Jesus, in this sermon, blows up the world of the Pharisees, but on the other, he establishes a standard that no one can obtain. This is his point. You have to be completely empty of your righteousness, before you are ready to trust Christ for his. Your righteousness does not work. Your spiritual, religious and moral money is not valid. Now, I know this is hard for you to hear. This is particularly hard for those of you who were raised in a religion that taught you the code that would earn you points or earn you favor. For some of you that code was, get baptized, go through confirmation, go to church (at least periodically), prayer the prayers, go through the motions, say the right words at the right time, take communion and be assured that you are a “good Christian.” For some of you the code was, go to church, learn the right answers, say the right words, wear the right clothes (Since Jesus wore a tie, so should we) do not say any bad words, do not listen to worldly music (unless it is classical, or opera, or certain forms of American folk-style, or bluegrass was okay) but not blues so much, not really jazz, country? Rock? No and definitely not rap. Movies were wrong, unless you rented them and above all, be sure do not ask questions. Don’t think, just do. And be assured that you are a “good Christian” because there are so many so-called Christians who do not keep the code. Oh, by the way, if you ever meet one of them, stay away from them. But it is your duty to tell on them, so they can be shamed into conforming.

Listen; in your heart of hearts, do you really believe that this is what life with Christ is about? Is that really Christianity? We could talk for hours and hours about the various dysfunctional and deformed versions of Christianity that exist. But, here is what we have to face. All of our attempts of making codes and keeping codes as a means of gaining approval from God only add to our condemnation. We have no righteousness that is acceptable in the eyes of God. We have to be emptied of all notions of self-righteousness. This is why Jesus began this sermon with “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” The ones who realize and accept that they are spiritually bankrupt are finally in the position to ask for help. Gone is the pretense that they can do it on their own, or that they just need a little bit of help to get over the top. Gone is the idea that if they suffer a little bit (or a lot) that God owes them something for their pain and discomfort. This person is empty and desperate and sees his sin, especially the sin of self-righteousness and rules-oriented religion and titles, positions, image, reputation, and talents or longevity as the farce for what it is. Now, this person is mourning over their sin. Now, this person realizes that he is a nobody. And Jesus says, “That’s it!” If you are a nobody, then you will get it all. These first three qualities, like the overlapping rings in the Olympic symbol have this dominant theme in common. Christianity is NOT marked by self-assertion, self-promotion and the advancement of one’s own goals.

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

I. What is Meekness?

There are several descriptions of it in the Bible, plus examples. Let’s look at them and then put them together into a working definition.

A. Strength under control – Matthew 11.29-30;

Meekness is not weakness, nor being cowardly. Meekness is not being submissive and subservient because you do not have a choice. It is not accepting your lot in life because you have no strength or resources to fight back. Meekness is choosing not to break your opponent in two even though you are twice his size and three times his strength. Meekness is getting hit with a pitch and laying down your bat and taking your base without threatening the pitcher. Meekness is getting cut off by an aggressive driver and not tailgating him for the next mile (maybe half a mile).

When Mr. Rickey, the owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers was considering bringing Jackie Robinson into the major leagues, he wanted to know if Jackie could take all of the abuse that was going to be dumped on him. This story is told in the recently released movie, 42. In his office, Mr. Rickey is pushing Jackie with his words to see how Jackie will respond. Finally Jackie says, “You want someone who doesn’t have the guts to fight back?” and Mr. Rickey says, “NO! I want someone with the guts NOT to fight back.”

B. Freedom from self-promotion – Matthew 27.11-14;

When Jesus was being falsely accused, he was not driven into a rage over it. In fact, in his case, he simply accepted it, because it was all part of the plan for him to go to the cross. A number of years later, when Paul was in Philippi (Acts 16), he was arrested and beaten even though as a Roman citizen he was entitled to due process. In his case, he was concerned about the reputation of the gospel. He spoke up about his rights that were violated, not because it was a personal matter, but because this would protect the church that was being established there. Meekness frees you from interpreting everything as if it was about you.

C. Consideration of others over one’s abilities or position – John 13

The night before his trial and crucifixion, Jesus spent the evening with his disciples in the upper room observing the Passover Meal. It was customary for the lowliest servant in the household to wash the feet of the guests who came into the house. But in this setting there were no servants, only guests. So, who was going to do this most menial task? The water was there. The basin and the towel were there as well. So, Christ, after it was clear that no one else was going to do this, without saying a word, took off his outer robe and took the pitcher and basin and towel and washed the feet of the disciples. This single act was an illustration of his entire life and ministry. In this act, he left his position of honor (at the table) as he had left his position in heaven. He took on the appearance as a lowly servant in spite of the fact that he was God, the Son and the Son of God. He knelt before those who should by all rights have knelt before him. He gave of himself to make them clean as he would lay down his life on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. This is meekness. He did not consider his equality with God something that prevented him from being considerate of others. In fact, it was because he was so prominent that he cared for others. This consideration is a genuine concern for others that is evidenced in caring actions and in a mild and gentle demeanor with others.

D. **Submission** – Matthew 17.24-27

Meekness is submission. In those days, every citizen paid a temple tax. The temple tax collectors asked Peter if Jesus paid the tax. So, Jesus asks Peter about it and says, “What do you think? Who pays taxes? Is it the sons of the king, or the citizens of the kingdom?” Peter says, well, the citizens, of course. The sons are free.” Jesus made his point very well. He was not obligated to pay the tax, but because he did not want this issue to be a point of offense and contention, he gave instructions to Peter as to how to get the money in order to pay the tax.

E. **Greatness of soul from wholly and patiently accepting God’s Sovereignty** – Job, Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Jesus

There is no panic in meekness, because the meek person does not have to take charge and demand that everyone hears him and bows to his threats. He is content to wait upon God. Therefore, *meekness is the quiet, patient, yet unshakeable confidence that comes from a complete trust in the goodness and power of God.* It is rooted in God. It is realizing that God will judge. God will take care of the lowly and will not forget those who wait on him. This was a powerful statement and went completely against the

Pharisees – self-promotion through religion and guilt

Zealots – self-promotion through violence, revenge and power

Sadducees – self-preservation through political concession and compromise

Essenes – self - preservation through escape and disassociation

Romans – Empire promotion through fear, power

Meekness is Christ. His daily life is not in a palace or court, but in the streets with the poor, in the villages with the neglected, in the countryside with his disciples, and in the darkness with His Father. He is born in poverty. He is raised in obscurity. He has no degrees. He rides a donkey, not a horse. He rides in fishing boats and has no home. In contrast to those who say that you have fight for your own and fight back when you are threatened, meekness is marked by a calm, patience that does not look to retaliate or defend oneself.

II. **How does this connect with the others?**

Those who recognize and accept that God is Creator and they are creation, that God is Infinite and they are finite, that God is white-hot righteous and they are a rebel, worthy of justice, but a recipient of amazing mercy, are humble (v.3). This honest assessment of one’s life causes one to be sensitive to their own sin as it relates to the holiness of God and realizes that if God were to judge us on our own merits, we would be damned. This weighs upon us (v.4), but in such a way that it causes us to run to Christ. Christ alone provides forgiveness and restoration and joy! When you trust in Christ, you are given a new standing, a new position, a new identity, and a secure future. But, you did not earn it and you cannot take credit for it. So, all of this that you have in Christ – which is

everything, is not yours to brag about, but it is yours to accept and enjoy, because, it is true. This is the grounding of meekness.

But, there is something else going on here. We are finding out that these beatitudes are getting increasingly difficult. The first two seem to be more in relationship with God, while this one deals with our relationship with others. So...

III. How do I know if I am meek?

Let's go through the examples of meekness and see if they are characteristics of our lives.

Do you use your position, abilities or strength to intimidate others?

Do you try to put yourself in the best possible light, even if you have to use a false humility to accomplish it?

Do you consider others as being more important than yourself?

How kind are you to people that you will probably never see again?

How much care do you provide to people who have nothing to give back to you?

Do you see your position as an opportunity to serve others or as a chance to make others do the tasks that you don't like?

Do you grumble or complain?

Are you moody?

Do people avoid you because they tire of every conversation being about you?

Do you complain about rules that make no sense to you?

Are you able to bear up under a long night of the soul with patience and even joy because you are absolutely convinced that God will keep his promise?

Well, how do you respond when others treat you in a manner that is consistent with your own confession? In other words, you and I can sit here and agree with God that we are big sinners. But what happens when someone else calls us that, or points out a weakness or an inadequacy or a failure in our lives? If I confess to you that I am a sinner and that I am humbled by the realization of my own sin, there appears to be a certain virtue, even attractiveness, to that level of humility. However, if you call me a sinner and treat me as such, then it will be revealed whether or not I consistently believe the very thing that I just confessed.

IV. How can I be meek?

A. **Admit that you are not.**

Meekness is not natural. Weakness and shyness may be natural, but not meekness. "I want someone with the guts to fight back!" Jackie could not do that on his own.

Meekness is not natural. It is supernatural. We need help.

B. Admit that you cannot will yourself to be meek.

You might be able to change some habits and behavior from time to time, but meekness is a character quality. Meekness is an attitude, a disposition that comes from God working in your life.

C. Realize that Jesus is.

This is the most important thing that you can hear. In this sermon Jesus is telling us what he demands of those who follow him. He demands it because Jesus is holy and righteous. Therefore, those who follow him must be holy and righteous. But, here is the problem. We are not. He is, but we are not. How can we follow Jesus when we cannot rise to the standard of being a disciple? Are you ready? He did it for us. He was meek for us. He was holy for us. He was righteous for us. He was perfect for us. He was pure for us. When he died on the cross, he died as a sacrifice that paid the debt for your sin. That day he offered himself up in your place. He was perfectly righteous for you.

D. Trust Him for meekness (and all righteousness)

When you trust in Jesus as the only One who can rescue you from your sin, he not only forgives you but he credits you with his righteousness. You are given a new standing before God. You are declared righteous. You are re-made, from the inside out. You are credited with meekness. But there is more.

When you trust in Christ, he gives you the amazing of the Spirit of God who lives within you. God dwells in you. God enables you to grow and change into looking more and more like Jesus. The Spirit of God helps you grow in meekness. How? The Spirit uses the Word of God to remind me that I have a Father who knows, who provides, who is Sovereign, who is intentional, who is carrying out his plan, who loves me, who knows my name, who knows my needs, who will handle the slights of others, the injustices that are done and will bring everything to a perfect completion through Christ. I see from the Scriptures, that the end of all things is an eternal city where God dwells with his people in unimaginable joy, where you experience love and security that has no end because you are not only loved by the Father as much as He loves his Son Jesus, but what is more, you actually know it and believe it and enjoy it. But, there is still more.

V. The Meek get it all!

The end of the story tells us that one day, Christ will return to the earth. He will be installed as the King over it all. Those who are his followers will be in his kingdom and will not only live with him; we will reign with him, forever. If you have Christ, you get it all, because he gets it all. We are co-heirs. When he gets it, we get it. We share in his inheritance, because we are in Him. All of this is so counter-intuitive. Christ is so un-like any other king and his kingdom is unlike any other empire, large or small. He shows up in the middle of a conquered, yet proud people. He tells them that only the humble, the broken, the mourning, and meek can follow him. He exposes the failures of the powerful

and the hypocrisy of the religious. So, they kill him. Seriously, who would believe this message anyway, it makes no sense. And yet, 2,000 years later, you cannot stop the message of Jesus, nor his true followers. In spite of those who corrupt it, twist it, reflect poorly upon it by sinful lives, you cannot stop it. In spite of those who try to outlaw it, and stop people from talking about it, it survives and even thrives. Like our Master, our King, the meek shall inherit the earth. Life now, is simply making plans for what is coming.