

Last week we were reminded that the primary purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is about Christ coming to inaugurate or to constitute, to establish His kingdom, and then giving instruction for how His people are to live in the kingdom of God.

We previously presented background Scripture about the Old Covenant saints and their anticipation of the kingdom, we referenced the Scriptures in the New Testament that say Christ came to constitute or establish His kingdom and we learned that the kingdom reality is not yet fully realized or consummated. That will occur with Christ's return.

So, the kingdom has been anticipated, constituted and will be consummated.

And again we are examining the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, which are called the Beatitudes and I want to restate what I said last week about this part of the Sermon on the Mount.

There are three things you ought to notice about this entire passage of the beatitudes, of verses 1-12.

The first is that the Christian mindset is paradoxical to the world's thinking.

Secondly, that the Christian life is a progression--that it starts at one place and moves on toward another, this is progressive sanctification.

And thirdly, that the Christian will live in a constant tension between the present and the future that is yet to come the now - not yet tension.

Today we examine the third beatitude:

Mt. 5:5 "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

\*\*\*None of the Beatitudes sound more contradictory to modern Western culture than the third. Our age calls for the strong, the mighty, those who have polished their self-esteem to the high gloss of a positive and possibility mentality, which considers faith in one's self the great enabler of man. Our age looks to the strong, who only survive, and preaches that the earth belongs to the mighty who take it! And it's into this culture that Christ brings the contradictory concept- "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth." As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones summarizes:

The world thinks in terms of strength and power, of ability, self-assurance and aggressiveness. That is the world's idea of conquest and possession. The more you assert yourself and express yourself, the more you organize and manifest your powers and ability, the more likely you are to succeed and get on...He is an enigma to the world.

This statement would be more difficult to receive among the multitude of Jews on the mount. As mentioned above, they looked for a strong mighty Prince who would sweep away imperial Rome and establish a worldwide kingdom whose hub was Jerusalem. The Messiah they longed

for came from the scroll of Psalm 2, not Isaiah 53, and wielded a Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth." But what is meekness?

It is The Description of the Person's Character-" the meek."

Webster defines meekness as "deficient in spirit and courage" and yet the New Testament's definition is nothing of the sort. The Greek word *praos* means basically "gentle, humble, mild, considerate, and courteous."

The Classical Greek definition comes through Aristotle:

Aristotle has a great deal to say about the quality of meekness (*praotes*)...Aristotle defines meekness, *praotes*, as the mean between *orgilotes*, which means excessive anger, and *aorgesia*, which means excessive angerlessness. *Praotes*, meekness, as Aristotle saw it, is the happy medium between too much and too little anger.

But, biblically interpreted, meekness is the opposite of self-will toward God, you do not try to impose your will on God and you do not show ill will toward men because you have a true view of yourself.

This is why in the order of Beatitudes it follows being poor in spirit and being mournful.

This essence of meekness results in the inner attitude of submission to authority. This person is pliable, moldable and willing to be shaped according to the will of God, be it expressed from God's providential dealings or from God's Word. Hence, Scripture combines this character trait with several other concepts, as Pink observes:

A study of its (i.e. meekness) usage in Scripture reveals, first, that it is linked with and cannot be separated from lowliness (Matt. 11:29) "Learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart"; (Eph. 4:1,2) "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called; with all lowliness and meekness" Second, it is associated with and cannot be divorced from gentleness: (2 Cor. 10:1) "I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ"; (Titus 3:2) "To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men". Third, "receive with meekness the engrafted word" is opposed to "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20,21). Fourth, the Divine promise is "the meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way" (Psalm 25:9), intimating that this grace consists of a pliant heart and will.

So, Christ illustrates meekness in action in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:38-48); Psalm 37:11 is the Old Testament passage that Christ quoted from; Moses models meekness in the Old Testament (Numbers 12:3); Christ in the New Testament (Matthew 11:29; 2 Corinthians 10:1); Matt. 11:29 and Eph. 4:1,2 links meekness with lowliness; 2 Cor. 10:1 and Titus 3:2 links meekness with gentleness; James 1:20,21 and Psalm 25:9 connects meekness with reception of the Word of God.

So let's look at Psalm 37 for a bit because this is Jesus reference point from Scripture as He will give a New Covenant meaning to this Scripture.

Notice the parallel between verse 11 and verse 9. Verse 11 says, "The meek shall possess the land." Verse 9b says, "Those who wait for the Lord shall possess the land." So I would conclude first that the meek are people who wait for the Lord. But what does it mean to wait for the Lord?

We get a picture of those who wait for the Lord, that is, the meek, if we read verses 5-8.

5) Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.

6) He will bring forth your vindication as the light, and your right as the noonday.

7) Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over him who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

8) Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

What are these people like who, according to verse 11 are meek and according to verse 9, wait for the Lord? Well, verse 5 says they commit their way to the Lord and trust in the Lord. Verse 7 says they are quiet or still before the Lord and do not fret over others who prosper. And verse 8 says they refrain from anger and forsake wrath. So let's try to put all this together into a portrait of the meek.

Meek people begin by trusting God (verse 5b). They believe that he will work for them and vindicate them when others oppose them. Biblical meekness is rooted in the deep confidence that God is for you and not against you.

Next, meek people commit their way to the Lord (verse 5a). The Hebrew word for "commit" means literally to "roll." Meek people have discovered that God is trustworthy, and so they roll their "way"—their business, their problems, their relationships, their health, their fears, their frustrations—they roll all this onto the Lord. They admit that they are insufficient to cope with the complexities and pressures and obstacles of life, and they trust that God is able and willing to sustain them and guide them and protect them.

Next, according to verse 7a, meek people are quiet or still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. First, they discover that God can be trusted. Then, second, they commit their way to him. And then, third, they wait patiently in stillness for the work of God in their lives.

This doesn't mean they become lazy. It means that they're free of frenzy. They have a kind

of steady calm that comes from knowing that God is omnipotent, that he has their affairs under his control, and that he is gracious and will work things out for the best. Meek people have a quiet steadiness about their lives in the midst of upheaval.

And so the fourth thing about them (in verse 7b) is that they don't fret themselves over the wicked who prosper in their way. Or, as verse 8 says, they refrain from anger. Their family and work and life are in God's sovereign hands; they trust him; they wait patiently and quietly to see how his power and goodness will work things out; and so the setbacks and obstacles and opponents of life do not produce the kind of bitterness and anger and fretfulness that is so common among men.

So the portrait we have of meekness so far, based on the closest Biblical parallel (in Psalm 37: 11) to the third beatitude, is that it begins by trusting God. Then it commits its way to the Lord in the confidence that he will use his power and mercy to do good for us. Then it waits patiently and quietly for the outcome. And, finally, it does not give way to anger and fretfulness when faced with opposition and set backs.

So it is clear already, in this preliminary sketch from Psalm 37, that meekness has very much to do with God. It consists in a peaceful freedom from fretful anger and is based on trusting God and rolling all our ways onto God and waiting patiently for God. Meekness has very much to do with God.

Now let's add some detail to our portrait with some other Biblical instances of meekness. Numbers 12:1-4 describes an occasion when Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses severely.

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman; and they said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" And the Lord heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth. And suddenly the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting."

What happens in the following verses is that the Lord rebukes Miriam and Aaron and

vindicates his servant Moses.

Now what is the point of calling Moses meek right here in this context—right between bitter opposition and God's vindication? I think the point is that meekness means committing your cause to God and not needing to defend yourself. Just where we would expect the text to tell us what Moses said to justify himself against the charge of Miriam and Aaron, the text says he was the meekest man on the earth. Moses doesn't say a word. Instead he waits patiently for the Lord. He frets not over these critical words. And God comes to his defense.

So we can add to our portrait of meekness this: not only does it trust God, and commit its way to God, and wait patiently for God, and refrain from anger; it also refrains from revenge and defensiveness. Meekness loves to give place to wrath and leave its vindication with God. Meekness is the power to absorb adversity and criticism without lashing back.

To see another feature of the portrait of meekness let's turn to the book of James. We will read 1:19-21.

Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

James has in mind two kinds of people here. He pictures on the one hand a person who does not like to listen to what other people have to say, especially if they speak with authority. This person is quick to speak and quickly becomes angry if the words of others cross his opinion or call his behavior into question. He is not receptive to the word of God. He filters it through his own desires and receives it selectively, if at all.

On the other hand James pictures another kind of person. This person is slow to speak, and quick to listen (vs. 19). This person recognizes the limitations of his knowledge and the fallibility of his thinking, and so is eager to listen and learn anything valuable that he can. If he hears something new or contrary to his own view his first reaction is not fretful anger. He is slow to anger. He listens and considers. And when it comes to the Word of God, he receives it

with meekness.

So the new feature of our portrait of meekness is teachability. To receive the word with meekness means that we don't have a resistant, hostile spirit when we are being taught. It doesn't mean we are gullible. It doesn't even mean that we will never get angry about what some people teach. Verse 19 says that we should be "SLOW to anger," not that we should never experience anger. Jesus said in Matthew 11:29, "I am meek and lowly in heart." But in Mark 3:5 it says he became angry and grieved at the hardheartedness of the Pharisees; and Matthew 21:12ff he drove the merchants out of the temple and turned over their tables.

Meekness does not mean that there is the absence of passion and conviction and even indignation for the glory of God. But it does mean that we don't have hair-triggers. It does mean that our disposition is one of readiness to listen and learn. It does mean that we are slow to write a person off, slow to condemn, slow to anger.

Let us be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves in discerning what is meekness and what is pride.

This becomes even clearer in James 3:13 and 17. Verse 13 says, "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom." This is a very beautiful phrase, "the meekness of wisdom." The truly wise people are also the truly meek people. Why?

Look at verse 17: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason..." Notice that the reason the truly wise person is also the truly meek person is that true wisdom is peaceable, gentle and open to reason." But these are the marks of meekness! Isn't it remarkable that the marks of Biblical wisdom and Biblical meekness are the same?

Wisdom in the Bible is never a merely intellectual affair. It is a disposition of the heart as well as ideas in the head. And therefore, in a sense, meekness and wisdom are one thing. They are both peaceable, gentle and open to reason.

You can see how that ties back into James 1:19-21. Back there we saw that meekness meant being quick to listen and slow to criticize and condemn. Here meekness is open to reason. What a beautiful thing it is to sit on a church board or in a business meeting where, when a man speaks, the others listen and then deal reasonably with what was said instead of just

blurting out something irrelevant or making a quick judgment without thinking through the reasons for it.

Does not this Scripture teach us that there is a correlation between meekness and reasonableness? And is not reasonableness basically the willingness to listen to another person's reasons for his opinion and the willingness to give reasons for yours? If I put forward my opinion without giving any reasons for it except that it is my opinion—I would not be acting in meekness, no matter how soft-spoken I might be. On the contrary, I would be acting in an authoritarian way, because I would be appealing to nothing outside myself.

Then we come to The Statement of the Reason for the Blessedness-

"For they shall inherit the earth."

Evidently Jesus paraphrased Psalm 37:11 when He gave the third beatitude. Psalm 37 contrasts the wicked with the humble and seeks to answer the question concerning the wicked's seeming prosperity. No doubt the Jewish audience on the mount would interpret Jesus' words in light of Psalm 37, which promised the humble people of the Lord that they "will inherit the land. Follow with me for a moment.

The conflict in this psalm is between the righteous and the wicked. (Note the repetition of "the wicked" in verses 10,12, 14, 20-21, 28, 32, 34-35, 38, and 40) It appears that the wicked are winning and the righteous are losing. Then what should the righteous do? Meekly submit to God's will by trusting in the Lord (v.3), delight in the Lord (vs. 4), committing their way unto the Lord (v.5), and resting in the Lord (vs. 7). The result is that they shall "inherit the earth (land).",

And yet, without a new heart, they could not truly trust, delight, commit or rest in the Lord. The Jews, in general terms would understand the phrase as a land promise, they would only see the type, the shadow, a here in the present promise. They would not see it as an eschatological kingdom promise, a not yet promise fulfilled in the consummation of the kingdom as is the way we must see it.

"Many have tried to earn the earth through military might-Ghenghis Khan, Alexander, Hannibal, Napoleon, Hitler, and Stalin, but all have failed. God's people will inherit the earth in the future."

But our Sovereign Lord has told us who are the poor in spirit and who have mourned over our sin that being meek is part of the character of those who will be with Him for all of eternity in the consummated kingdom on a recreated earth that will be filled with His glory. A kingdom

that will be established not by military might by the mighty God Himself who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Let us pray.

PAGE

PAGE 11

Baptist Church of Evans Dec.4 2005 Sermon #3