

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday, January 16, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

MATTHEW 5:5

⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM #3 THE POWER OF MEEKNESS

When I was a kid, I used to dream about growing up and finding a "Genie in a bottle." I was heavily influenced by the television show "I Dream of Jeannie," and a fully functioning desire to acquire. I thought that Larry Hagman's character, Major Tony Nelson, had it made! Anything he wanted could be given to him in the blink of an eye. The show's premise was that getting everything you could want didn't always end up exactly like you thought that it would, but that didn't matter to me. I wanted to acquire the world. Somewhere along the line, I grew up. I found out that genies were just make-believe and that if you really wanted the world, you needed money. And, if you wanted money, you had to work hard. So I did. I went to college, graduated, got a graduate degree, and a decent paying job. I became one of the wealthiest men on planet earth. Put me in a room with nine other people, and I am typically the wealthiest one in the room.

I know what you're thinking. Brian, this has to be someone else's story. You are a pastor. You are certainly not one of the wealthiest men on earth. But, it's true! According to U.S. News and World Report, my household assets exceed that of 90% of the world's population. I'm not in the top 1%, but you are, if your household assets equal \$500,000 or above.¹ Now, let me tell you what your incredibly wealthy pastor has found out. No matter how much money I have, it seems like what I really need is just a little bit more. Can you relate?

So, what if the genie in a bottle thing was real? What if you discovered a genie in a bottle? Would you feel like you just inherited the earth? What if you could be the next Donald Trump, Warren Buffet, Bill Gates, or Mark Zuckerberg? Would that bring satisfaction?

Former heavyweight boxing champion George Foreman, in his book *God in My Corner*, explains how money couldn't buy him happiness. He writes:

"Before I met God, my attitude was about as bad as it could get. Even when everything was going well for me, I couldn't see it. And I didn't appreciate it. When Muhammad Ali fought me for the heavyweight championship, I received a five-million-dollar paycheck. That purse was an astronomical amount of money in those days, and would be worth

¹ U.S. News & World Report, 12/18/06

many times more than that amount in today's dollars. No fighters had ever been so well-paid in the history of boxing. You'd think that being a multimillionaire would bring instant joy to my soul.

It didn't. Because I lost the boxing match, I couldn't enjoy my money. I had five million dollars in the bank, but couldn't find pleasure in even one penny of it!

I chose to see the worst in my situation, and my stomach was tied up in knots as a result. My sour attitude caused me to sink into deep depression, even though I was filthy rich. Five million dollars could buy me anything I wanted—except happiness.”²

Pretty amazing, isn't it? Five million dollars wasn't enough to buy George Foreman happiness. Think it would be for you? Or would you need, “Just a little bit more?”

I talk to people regularly who play the lottery. They tell me, “If I could just hit the jackpot, then life would be good.” Last week, two couples, one from Washington and one from Wyoming split the second largest jackpot in U.S. history, a \$380 million prize. That is a lot of money. Maybe the money will help their lives be better. Probably not. The Wyoming winner, Holly Lahti has been abused by her husband over the years. He has been arrested 15 times for a number of different infractions. Estranged from her husband, Lahti is weighing whether or not she wants to share the prize with him. It will be the first of many difficult decisions for her over the next several years.

“In December 2002, Jack Whittaker won \$314.9 million in the lottery. He opted for the lump-sum payout of \$170 million, which was \$93 million after taxes. But (5) years later, he seems to have been another victim of ‘the lottery curse.’ Whittaker's wife has left him, his drug-addicted granddaughter died, his daughter has cancer, and he's struggled with alcohol and gambling. He claims he doesn't have any friends and has been involved in 460 legal actions since hitting the jackpot.

Ironically, Whittaker was a multi-millionaire before winning the lottery. He had built a pipeline business worth \$17 million. Even after adding \$93 million to that amount, the 59-year-old West Virginian said, “I don't have any friends. Every friend that I've had, practically, has wanted to borrow money or something and, of course, once they borrow money from you, you can't be friends anymore.”

Whittaker said, ‘I'm only going to be remembered as the lunatic who won the lottery. I'm not proud of that. I wanted to be remembered as someone who helped a lot of people.’ Jack Whittaker bought a Powerball ticket and learned the painful truth that money can't make anyone happy.”³

² George Foreman, *God in My Corner*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), pp.71-72.

³ *Houston Chronicle*, 9/14/07 as cited in, *In Other Words*, September 2007, Issue #2.

Today, we look at the third of Jesus' Beatitudes. Already, we've seen that Jesus taught those gathered around Him using a form of teaching that we know as paradox. Using paradoxical truth, Jesus turned the thinking of those gathered around him, upside down. Remember, Jesus was teaching to a Jewish audience. Matthew's Gospel was written to the Jewish people. Jesus, the Fulfillment of both the Old Testament law and the prophets, revealed the deeper truth behind the law that the people of Israel had observed - many of them with half-hearted devotion. He showed that the way of the Kingdom of Heaven was different than that which they had been taught.

John Stott writes, "There is no doubt that the Sermon on the Mount . . . drives them (many people) to despair. They see in it an unattainable ideal. How can they develop this heart-righteousness, turn the other cheek, love their enemies? It is impossible. Exactly! In for this sense the Sermon is 'Mosissimus Moses' (Luther's expression); 'It is Moses quadrupled, Moses multiplied to the highest degree', because it is a law of inward righteousness which no child of Adam can possibly obey."⁴

If you're just joining us, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew 5. Let's look at Matthew 5:1-5:

¹ Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

Two weeks ago, we learned that to be "poor in spirit" was to intellectually recognize your spiritual poverty. There is nothing in and of yourself that is worthy of God's forgiveness. It is by grace that any of us have been saved.

Last week, we looked at that which spiritually follows intellectual acknowledgement of our spiritual poverty. Our hearts our moved at what God has done and we begin to see our sin as He does. We mourn over our sin, and God, in His grace, comforts us.

The third Beatitude is "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." It's another one of those statements that causes us to pause and wonder what Jesus meant. The meek shall inherit the earth? That's not what the world teaches! It's the strong that inherit the earth. It's the bold, confident leader. It's the nation who has achieved superpower status. It's the shrewd businessman. It's the brilliant woman who has it all together. The meek? What?

Martyn Lloyd Jones writes, "This statement must have come as a great shock to the Jews of our Lord's own day . . . They had ideas of the kingdom which, you remember, were not only materialistic but military also, and to them the Messiah was one who was going to lead them to victory. So they were thinking in terms of conquest and fighting in a material

⁴ John Stott, *The Message of The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), pp. 36-37.

sense, and immediately our Lord dismisses all that. It is as though he says, ‘No, no, that is not the way. I am not like that, and my kingdom is not like that.’ – Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.’ It is a great contrast to the Jews’ way of thinking.

But further, this Beatitude comes, alas, in the form of a very striking contrast to much thinking within the church at the present time. For is there not a pathetic tendency to think in terms of fighting the world, and sin, and things that are opposed to Christ, by means of great organizations? Am I wrong when I suggest that the controlling and prevailing thought of the Christian Church throughout the world seems to be the very opposite of what is indicated in this text? . . . (But) ‘Blessed are the meek’, not those who trust in their own organizing, not those who trust in their own powers and abilities and their own institutions. Rather it is the very reverse of that. And this is true, not only here, but in the whole message of the Bible. You get it in that perfect story of Gideon where God went on reducing the numbers, not adding to them. That is the spiritual method, and here it is once more emphasized in this amazing statement in the Sermon on the Mount.”⁵

Meekness isn’t one of those words that we use all that much. I have yet to hear someone say, “You know what I appreciate about Joe? It’s his meekness.”

So, what is meekness? What is it that Jesus wants us to understand about those whom He says will inherit the earth.

Like we have done each week of this series, we shall begin by looking at what meekness is not.

1. Meekness is not weakness. It should go without saying, but I must say it. Jesus isn’t calling us to be weaklings. He isn’t calling us to be some sort of spiritual wimp. What He calls us to actually takes more bravery than most people I know. The one who is truly meek is stronger than those the world considers strong. Every martyr for the Christian faith is someone who has been a living example of the spiritual quality of meekness. And you may say, “Well then, how did they inherit the earth? How did God follow through on His promise to the meek?” We’ll talk about that in a moment.

Listen to what Martyn Lloyd Jones wrote, “The meek man is one who may so believe in standing for the truth that he will die for it if necessary. The martyrs were meek, but they were never weak; strong men, yet meek men. God forbid that we should ever confuse this noble quality, one of the noblest of all the qualities, with something merely animal or physical or natural.”⁶

⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 52-53.

⁶ Jones, p. 56.

2. Meekness is not being a coward. It doesn't mean that we are afraid of a fight. It doesn't mean that we are afraid to stand up for ourselves or for the truth. Again, some of the bravest men and women the world has ever seen have exhibited true meekness. The pages of Scripture are full of men like Gideon, Abraham, David, Peter, Andrew, Stephen and women like Esther, Ruth, Mary, Lydia; champions of the faith who have shown themselves to be meek.
3. As Jones' alluded to, meekness is not the natural state of being an introvert or shy. The meekness that Jesus is talking about is characterized by the Spirit's work in our lives. It's not a natural thing, it's a spiritual thing. Like the fruit of the Spirit, meekness is the work of the Spirit in us. It compares favorably to the spiritual fruit of gentleness, and it's a rare thing in our world.
4. Meekness is not simply being nice. There is a difference between being a kind person and being a meek person.

Kent Hughes writes, "In classical Greek the word was used to describe tame animals, soothing medicine, a mild word and a gentle breeze. It is a word with a caress in it. The New Testament bears the same sense. John Wycliffe," writes Hughes, "translated the third Beatitude, 'Blessed be mild men.' Gentleness and meekness are, indeed, caressing words.

Meekness/gentleness also implies self-control. Aristotle explained it is the mean between excessive anger and excessive angerlessness. So the man who is meek is able to balance his anger. It is strength under control. The meek person is strong! He is gentle, meek, and mild, but he is in control He is as strong as steel."⁷

A.W. Tozer once wrote, "The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is in the sight of God of more importance than angels. In himself, nothing; in God, everything. That is his motto."⁸

What a motto! In himself, nothing; in God, everything! That is how a meek man or woman lives.

So, what does it mean to be meek? Essentially that.

Hughes writes, "The one who is meek has a gentle spirit because he trusts God. Indeed, there is a caress about his presence. At the same time the meek person possesses immense strength and self-control, which he exhibits in extending love rather than

⁷ Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway books, 2001), pp. 34-35.

⁸ *Today in the Word*, September, 1989, p. 19.

retaliation against those who do evil. He stands up fearlessly in defense of others or of the truth as the occasion arises. . . Of course, no one perfectly manifests meekness in his or her life. No one's life is a perpetual caress. No one is so strong that his or her only response is love. No one totally escapes pride and self. Nevertheless, Jesus' warnings are clear.

- *Harshness*: If you are mean in your treatment of others, if there is an absence of gentleness in your treatment of others, take heed.
- *Grasping*: If you make sure you always get yours first, if *numero uno* is the subtle driving force in your life, if you care little about how your actions affect others, beware.
- *Vengeful*: If you are known as someone never to cross, if you always get your 'pound of flesh,' be on your guard.
- *Uncontrolled*: If rage fills your soul so that life is a series of explosions occasioned by the 'fools' in your life, watch out.

Again, this is not to suggest that you are not a Christian if you fall into these sins, but rather to point out that if they are part of your persona, if you are a self-satisfied 'Christian' who thinks that the lack of gentleness and meekness is 'just you' and people will have to get used to it, if you are not repentant, you are probably not a Christian."⁹

"John Bunyan puts it perfectly. 'He that is down need fear not fall.'"¹⁰ Do you get it? If we don't exalt ourselves, and only exalt Christ, then we don't have to worry about the fall. Christ will lift us up in due time. And that is essentially what the reward is in this Beatitude.

Blessed are the meek, why? For they shall inherit the earth.

And, it's not some "I Dream of Jeannie" type of inheritance. It is something far better. It is something that is far more satisfying and far more valuable. Listen to these passages that describe the truth that the meek will inherit the earth.

Romans 8:17 says, "17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

Christian, you will one day share in Christ's glory. You will be a co-heir with Christ. You will literally enjoy blessings beyond the wildest dreams of the earth's richest men and women. Listen to the first half of 1 Corinthians 6:2. "2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" There will come a day, when we will judge the world with Christ. The meek! They will judge the world? It sure doesn't sound like something that the meek will do, does it?

⁹ Hughes, p. 35-36.

¹⁰ Jones, p. 58.

It's one of the things that is most striking about the trial of Jesus. As He stood before Pilate, Jesus was the embodiment of the meekest man ever to live. God in the flesh lived a life of ultimate meekness. In front of him stood Pilate, proud, a ruler in the most powerful government on earth. To this day, we talk about how vast the Roman Empire was. One author has written, "The two figures are opposite ends of a tragic paradox. Jesus Christ, the prisoner, was the free man. He was in absolute control. Jesus, the meek, would inherit not only the earth but the universe. On the other hand, Pilate, the governor, was the prisoner of his own pride. He could not even control his soul. He had no inheritance."¹¹

Friends, when we are meek, we are truly free. There are future rewards, but that freedom is part of our current reward. When we choose to live meek lives, we can approach life from an eternal perspective.

Kent Hughes has written, "There is a sense in which those who set their minds on riches never possess anything. This was given classic expression by one of the world's wealthiest men when asked how much is enough money. 'Just a little bit more,' he answered. He owned everything, yet possessed nothing!

It is the meek who own the earth now, for when their life is free from the tyranny of 'just a little more,' when a gentle spirit caresses their approach to their rights, then they possess all."¹²

So, how do we become meek people?

1) First, we ask the Holy Spirit to produce the quality of meekness in us. Galatians 5:22-23 is a list of the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in our life. That list reads this way, "22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

In that list is the word, "gentleness," another word for meek. We must recognize that apart from the Holy Spirit's intervention, we will never produce gentleness in our lives. I think that list of qualities is so important that the first series that I preached at Woodbury Community Church was on the fruit of the Spirit. We've seen many new people begin attending since that time and I'd encourage you to go to our church website and listen to those messages. Like this series we took one week at a time to devote to learning what it meant to be people who exhibited, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

2) What is the second way we develop meekness? We recognize the progression of the Beatitudes. We can't be meek until we recognize our spiritual poverty and begin to mourn over our sin.

¹¹ Hughes, p. 33.

¹² Hughes, p. 37.

Max Lucado writes, “Remember, Matthew 5 is not a list of proverbs or a compilation of independent sayings, but rather a step-by-step description of how God rebuilds the believer’s heart.

The first step is to ask for help—to become ‘poor in spirit’ and admit our need for a Savior.

The next step is sorrow: ‘Blessed are those who mourn . . .’ Those who mourn are those who know they are wrong and say they are sorry. No excuses. No justification. Just tears.

The first two steps are admittance of inadequacy and repentance for pride. The next step is the one of renewal: ‘Blessed are the meek . . .’ Realization of weakness leads to the source of strength—God. And renewal comes when we become meek—when we give our lives to God to be his tool.

The first two beatitudes pass us through the fire of purification; the third places us in the hands of the Master.

The result of this process? Courage: ‘. . . they shall inherit the earth.’ No longer shall the earth and its fears dominate us, for we follow the one who dominates the earth.”¹³

There is a third thing that we must do. Kent Hughes calls it “yoking ourselves to Jesus.”¹⁴ In Matthew 11:29-30 Jesus said the following to His disciples, “29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Jesus was the Ultimate Example of meekness. We need to attach ourselves to Christ. When we do, He promises that we will learn from Him. I can think of no one better to learn from. We’re a few weeks into this year’s challenge to read through the Bible in a year. One way that we learn from Christ is to study His Word. As you look at the example of Jesus, you grow. Ask Him to help you have the courage to leave cares of this world behind and seek that which truly lasts.

Have you bought into the world’s lie that it’s the rich, powerful, and famous who inherit the earth? It’s not true. Don’t fall for the lie.

Max Lucado opens and closes his chapter on meekness in his book, *The Applause of Heaven*, with this illustration: “He was a professional thief. His name stirred fear as the desert wind stirs tumbleweeds. He terrorized the Wells Fargo stage line for thirteen years, roaring like a tornado in and out of the Sierra Nevadas, spooking the most rugged frontiersmen. In journals from San Francisco to New York, his name became synonymous with the danger of the frontier.

¹³ Max Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven*, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1999), pp. 83-84.

¹⁴ Hughes, p. 37.

During his reign of terror between 1875 and 1883, he is credited with stealing the bags and the breath away from twenty-nine different stagecoach crews. And he did it all without firing a shot.

His weapon was his reputation. His ammunition was intimidation.

A hood hid his face. No victim ever saw him. No artist ever sketched his features. No sheriff could ever track his trail. He never fired a shot or took a hostage.

He didn't have to. His presence was enough to paralyze.

Black Bart. A hooded bandit armed with a deadly weapon.

He reminds me of another thief—one who's still around. You know him. Oh you've never seen his face, either. You couldn't describe his voice or sketch his profile. But when he's near, you know it in a heartbeat.

If you've ever been in the hospital, you've felt the leathery brush of his hand against yours.

If you've ever sensed someone was following you, you've felt his cold breath down your neck.

If you've awakened late at night in a strange room, it was his husky whisper that stole your slumber.

You know him.

It was this thief who left your palms sweaty as you went for the job interview.

It was this con man who convinced you to swap your integrity for popularity.

And it was this scoundrel who whispered in your ear as you left the cemetery, "You may be next."

He's the Black Bart of the soul. He doesn't want your money. He doesn't want your diamonds. He won't go after your car. He wants something far more precious. He wants your peace of mind—you joy.

His name?

Fear.

His task is to take your courage and leave you timid and trembling. His modus operandi is to manipulate you with the mysterious, to taunt you with the unknown. Fear of death, fear

of failure, fear of God, fear of tomorrow—his arsenal is vast. His goal? To create cowardly, joyless souls.

He doesn't want you to make the journey to the mountain. He figures if he can rattle you enough, you will take your eyes off the peaks and settle for a dull existence in the flatlands."¹⁵

Lucado then shares the difference that comes when we move from the false securities of the world to the way of the meek, following in the steps of Jesus Christ. It's a life that is characterized by freedom. Like Jesus before Pilate, those who the world thinks stupid, God rewards, both now and in the future!

Lucado then closes with these words, "(Scripture is full of promises of future and present rewards for those who follow Christ – my words, not Lucado's). Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. [God] justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

If you are in Christ, these promises are not only a source of joy. They are also the foundations of true courage. You are guaranteed that your sins will be filtered through, hidden in, and screened out by the sacrifice of Jesus. When God looks at you, he doesn't see you; he sees the One who surrounds you. That means that failure is not a concern for you. Your victory is secure. How could you not be courageous?

Picture it this way. Imagine that you are an ice skater in competition. You are in first place with one more round to go. If you perform well, the trophy is yours. You are nervous, anxious, and frightened.

Then, only minutes before your performance, your trainer rushes to you with the thrilling news: "You've already won! The judges tabulated the scores, and the person in second place can't catch you. You are too far ahead."

Upon hearing that news, how will you feel? Exhilarated!

And how will you skate? Timidly? Cautiously? Of course not. How about courageously and confidently? You bet you will. You will do your best because the prize is yours. You will skate like a champion because that is what you are! You will hear the applause of victory.

Hence, these words from Hebrews: "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." (Hebrews 10:19, 22)

¹⁵ Lucado, pp. 79-81

The point is clear: the truth will triumph. The Father of truth will win, and the followers of truth will be saved.

As a result, Jesus says, don't be afraid: "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:27-28)

Earthly fears are no fears at all. All the mystery is revealed. The final destination is guaranteed. Answer the big question of eternity, and the little questions of life fall into perspective.

And by the way, remember Black Bart? As it turns out, he wasn't anything to be afraid of, either. When the hood came off, there was nothing to fear. When the authorities finally tracked down the thief, they didn't find a bloodthirsty bandit from Death Valley, they found a mild-mannered druggist from Decatur, Illinois. The man the papers pictured storming through the mountains on horseback was, in reality, so afraid of horses he rode to and from his robberies in a buggy. He was Charles E. Boles—the bandit who never once fired a shot, because he never once loaded his gun.

Any false hoods in your world?"¹⁶

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth! May you embrace the life of the meek, and may the Holy Spirit produce the fruit of gentleness in you!

¹⁶ Lucado, pp. 88-89.