

PROFILES OF DISCIPLESHIP

III. "The Happiness of Being God-Directed"

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BEFORE SCRIPTURE

As we continue our series on the beatitudes, it seems we are taking a lot of time defining words. But, that is important since we often fail to *really* understand the familiar sounding. A few months ago we were visiting our kids in Everett. Our granddaughters have a song they sing for the blessing at mealtimes. "God our Father, God our Father, hear our prayer, hear our prayer. Thank You for the blessings, thank You for the blessings, a-a-men, a-a-men." Polly, sensing a "teaching moment" later asked our three-year-old Abby if she knew what "blessing" meant. Abby said, "No." But, Polly could see the wheels turning in her head. As Polly was trying to think of a way to explain blessings to a three-year-old, Abby said, "It's what's in chicken." She was thinking, "dressing." When we visited last week, we noticed they'd changed the song to, "Thank You for the food..." instead of "blessings." Knowing what words mean is important.

Each beatitude begins with the word, "blessed." I've mentioned in the last two sermons that the word "blessed" is an attempt to translate a Greek word that conveys a happiness untouched by circumstances. The Amplified Bible is a translation that tries to give a series of synonyms in parenthesis to help us understand the word. Usually it is just a couple of words in the parentheses. But I smiled this last week when I read their attempt to get at "blessed."

Blessed (happy, blithesome, joyous, spiritually prosperous— with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions)...

Yes, all that is all included in "blessed." Just try to keep it in mind as we read these beatitudes— I don't want to try to say all 20 of those words for every "blessed." Can you see why it's called The Amplified Bible?

This morning we'll be considering the third and fourth beatitudes. But, as we're doing each week, we'll read them all to keep the context and flow.

Mtt. 5:1-12

INTRODUCTION

TEXT: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (NIV)

You're blessed when you're content with just who you are— no more, no less.

That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought. (Msg)

— Mtt. 5:5

I think it's safe to say, meekness is not one of the most sought after Christian virtues. Have you ever heard anyone say, "I just want to be more meek?" Certainly most of us have said we'd like to be more patient, more loving, more kind, less judgmental— but meek? In our current usage, meek rarely is seen in a positive light. We have that expression, "Meek as a mouse." It brings to mind shy, frightened souls, scurrying around, hiding in the corners of life. We think of the meek

as people who are rather helpless, gutless, and have the strength of a cooked noodle. The meek don't inherit the earth. They get chewed up by it. Someone jokingly said, referring to our messed up world, "It's a good thing the meek will inherit the earth. No one else would take it!"

Here in the March madness of basketball playoffs, I'm sure no coaches are rallying their teams, telling them to go out there and play with meekness. Executives don't send sales people into the field advised to be meek. Yes, indeed, this country honors winners. We extol the ones who push harder and stay longer. The ones who seem to get the honors play the games of power and come out on top. Our 21st century American beatitude might be, "Blessed are the aggressive, for they shall inherit the earth."

But, things are not well with so many of us in our dog-eat-dog world. Americans take 28 **tons** of aspirin, tranquilizers and sleeping pills every single day to escape the stress of living. And, American pollster, Lou Harris, tells us 86% of Americans are chronically stressed-out. Our driven-ness is costly. And, Tom Sine, another analyzer of our culture says, "Never have I seen a time when people are busier with less sense of direction in their lives." Stress— we all know about it and experience it. How well are you handling it? And, how clear is your sense of direction in life?

One of the ways of getting into the Beatitudes is to ask, "What is the disease, the human condition to which Jesus is responding?" What is the particular unhappiness that He is addressing? In these two beatitudes, we see a prescription for two of our most troubling conditions— stress and misdirected living. Both are interrelated.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

As I'm sure you've already guessed, the Greek word here translated "meek" conveys something quite different than our modern ideas of meekness. No single word in our language holds together its nuances. The Greek word embodies two concepts:

1. It is used of an animal tamed, and under control— like a wild horse submitting to control by a bit and reigns. Or, I think of a visit to Sea World where we saw the trainer put her head into Shamu's, the killer whale's, huge mouth. That is power tamed, under control.
2. It also denotes the mean between two extremes:
 - Not prone to excesses;
 - Never angry at the wrong time;
 - And every instinct, impulse, and passion under control.

Putting those together, the word translated "meek" denotes great power and strength under control. In this case, it is God's control. So we could define meekness as: God-controlled strength, balanced, and directed energy for God. To paraphrase this beatitude: "Blessed and happy are those whose strength and energy are controlled and directed by God, for they shall inherit the earth!"

Two Biblical characters reinforce this. Moses in Num. 12:3 is referred to in the KJV as the meekest man in all the earth. Certainly he is not weak in confronting Pharaoh, in leading Israel, over a million people for 40 years journey in the wilderness. But, he was under God's control. Jesus is the other example I'd highlight. He was the perfect expression of all these beatitudes,

including meekness. In Him you see great energy and power under control:

- In throwing the money changers out of the temple;
- In confronting the hypocrisy of the religious establishment;
- In teaching thousands daily in the open countryside– just think of the kind of voice needed for that– certainly it had to be booming and strong;
- In His suffering in garden and all the indignities before Pilate and on the cross when He could have called 72,000 angels to deliver Him.

In contrast, we see Saul of Tarsus, rushing around Palestine like a wild animal, raging against Christians, throwing them in prison and killing them. He was snorting with anger. But, on the road to Damascus, he was corralled by God. His conversion was the beginning of God's taming. Before, he was *breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord*, (Acts 9:1, KJV). After his conversion, he was *fervent in spirit; serving the Lord* (Rom 12:11 KJV). He was God-tamed, meek, yet at the same time full of creative energy, power, and passion in working for God. He was so transformed, his name was changed to Paul. There is nothing wimpy about the Paul we see in the New Testament.

How does this idea of meekness then apply to the stresses, anxieties, driven-ness, and tensions of life? Tension is created by two opposing pulls. Here's a rope. I can pull it all I want and there is no tension. Tension is created when someone is on the other end of the rope, pulling against me. So, when we feel tension in our lives, we can ask the question, "Who's pulling the other way?" On the one side, we have the demands of life. On the other side we might have: self-preservation; fear; a sense of duty or obligation; feelings of inadequacy; guilt; frustration at not getting what we want; or selfishness. The tension is produced by not just too much to do, but when what we have to do contradicts what we want. We are stressed when our inner agendas conflict with the demands of life. Pressure can be creative. It's when we pull back the tension is created.

Are you beginning to see where balance and the God-controlled strength of meekness fits into relieving stress? This allows our inner agendas to be in harmony with our outer world, so there is no pulling back. We've surrendered our agendas to His desires for us, openly seeking His guidance. God loves us perfectly and knows us far better than we can ever know ourselves. He is even able to bring good out of evil. He is sovereign and in control of all things. So, if we've truly surrendered control to Him, and are openly seeking His guidance daily, we can "just go with the flow." Here's where I think Eugene's decision to translate meekness as contentment comes in. It gives us the emotional feel of this.

You're blessed when you're content with just who you are– no more, no less.

That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought. (Msg)

You see, when you're living your life with God in control, you will be more yourself than ever– more in harmony with your creation. And you won't be running around crazy trying to find contentment in this or that or trying to bolster your self-esteem by what you have. When we are meek, there is that relaxed acceptance in knowing God is in control.

Meekness is a life surrendered to God's control. That may sound like bondage rather than freedom on the surface, but actually it is an incredible freedom as anyone who has made that choice will affirm. Maybe a crude analogy between a dog and coyote will help. The coyote seems free, uncontrolled by anyone. But, that is not really true. He is driven by fear, hunger, danger, and need. On the other hand, a dog gives up something in being "tamed." But, with a good master, he enters into a greater freedom. His master takes care of all his problems— he has nothing to worry about. His food is provided at the same time every day. He has warm, comfortable housing. If he is sick, he gets the care of a doctor. His social needs are met in his master's love. A well-cared for dog, stretched out in front of the fireplace on a cold day, is a picture of contentment.

As Christians, we have placed ourselves in the care of the Lord of the universe. He is perfect love, perfect goodness, perfect in knowledge, all powerful, and has accepted us under His care. Is there anything then for us to be concerned about? Could we have a better master? Could we be more secure? He has promised to care for all our needs.

Aren't there still things we need to resist in life? Certainly there are. We have unreasonable demands by others. There is a lot of evil in our world. Many things within us pull against God's will. But, it simplifies the struggle when we ask in each thing, "What is God's will here?" That is how Jesus handled all the various pressures put on Him. When we determine what God wants in a given situation, we are not just obeying or resisting the person or thing that is trying to push us around, but we are operating on a higher plain, obeying God. And, as we obey Him, we find His strength— the strength that comes with surrendered meekness to His Lordship.

The promise of this beatitude is, that we inherit the earth! What a promise! And, this is the assurance we need to trust Him completely. The major factor in our inability to trust God is the feeling that we need to look out for ourselves. We think we need to carve out our niche, hold onto our place or be wiped out. We're afraid there is no future and no inheritance if we're not aggressive and in control. Here, Jesus assures us we can relax. He'll give us everything we really need. The way is not grasping, but receiving what God gives by letting Him be in control. He will see to it you have everything that's really worth having.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God.

He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat. (Msg)

—Mtt. 5:6

Now, lest meekness be interpreted as being without passion, in this next beatitude, Jesus defines what our passion should be, describing it as a consuming hunger and thirst. Don't you like to see people come alive when, in a conversation, you touch on their consuming passion? It might be a hobby, a sport, their life-work, or a person they love. Previous to that, they may have seemed listless and rather blah in their demeanor. Suddenly, when they begin talking about their passion, you see boredom and discontent vanish. There is motivation and energy you have maybe never

even suspected is there.

Jesus is driving deeper here, saying there is foundational need in all our lives that is as elemental as hunger and thirst. It is inevitable and everyone has it. Augustine expressed it as, "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." Many centuries later, Pascal, with his scientific bend put it, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in every man." The hunger and thirst is for God himself, although people may not realize it and try to fill the void with all kinds of other things. Jesus summarizes that God-desire in the word "righteousness."

Righteousness, like meek is not a word that has an entirely desirable feel about it today. It brings to mind things like self-righteous and holier-than-thou attitudes. But righteousness is a quality of God himself, and Jesus is the interpreter of what means. Jesus is called the "Son of Righteousness." And, I think we all find Jesus attractive. To be righteous is to be like Jesus. Jesus gives further substance to this when says,

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never hunger and he who believes in me will never thirst.

So, this means we hunger and thirst after the nature and character of Jesus.

We are becoming more aware of nutrition in our day. It is not enough to fill yourself with food. It needs to be the right kind of food. It is possible to feel full and still be lacking in essential nutrients. Or, the cholesterol, fat-laden foods we eat will subtly, over time, kill us by clogging our arteries. Jesus is here telling us what it is we need to live.

Our chief problem with this beatitude is that we live in a world filled with junk food. We stuff ourselves with TV fare. We buy things to assuage our inner unhappiness. The hectic pace and busyness of our lives covers over our soul's inner longings. There is so much junk calling to us, "Try this, do this— this is what you really need." Our souls still all have a basic longing for God, but with the clutter of the stuff of our day, we can miss that. We need to stop, get quiet, and listen to discern what is really important and discover what our souls need. Then we find that only God really satisfies that need. As the Psalmist says,

*As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. (Ps 42:1-2a)*

Please note, it doesn't say, "Blessed are the righteous." We only have to be on the way, have the passion and desire to be thus blessed and happy. We'll never become truly righteous apart from Christ. But, the hunger, the search, and the journey itself is one of happiness. We'll never get there during this lifetime, but the seeking and passion for it will bring constant joy and fulfillment.

CONCLUSION

Please note the subtle progression in these first four beatitudes.

- They begin with humility, recognizing our need— the poor in spirit.
- Then they move to repentance (mourn) for our sin and the wrongness of the world.
- Now, we've discovered the need for the Lordship of Christ in meekness.

- And finally, the desires that will bring growth.

In conclusion, let me say, “Congratulations to you if you realize your need. If the stresses and uncertainties of life have revealed to you the need for God's control and direction, invite Him in to tame all the divergent pulls of your life. Let Him bring about a gentleness marked by power under control. Your inheritance and future is beyond what you can imagine. And, if you are dissatisfied with life and the emptiness of trivial pursuits, let a Godly passion orient your living. Seek Him. Jesus really satisfies.”