

**Sermon preached by Mr. Michael Bittenbender
at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, September 29, 2019**

THE BEATITUDES (3)

Matthew 5:1-12

This morning's Scripture can be found in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 5, verses 1-11. We are continuing a series on the beatitudes so let's read the entirety of the passage and then we will focus on the third beatitude. Please follow along with me and let us turn our reverent attention to the reading of God's Holy Word.

Matthew Chapter 5, verses 1-11:

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them.

He said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and
falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”

May God bless the reading of His Holy Word.

This morning as I mentioned we will be taking a look at the third beatitude, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” To begin with, I want to define what meekness is because I believe a lot of people get this wrong. I believe this because when I google-searched “meekness” all of the results were regarding “meekness” not being “weakness.” This led me to believe that many people for a while have believed that meekness is synonymous with weakness. The dictionary.com definition gives us “humbly patient or docile, as under provocation from others.” Some synonyms are demure, humble, unassuming and unpretentious. John Stott identifies meek as “gentle, humble, considerate and courteous.”

Rev. Graham Smith identifies meekness as “strength under control.” Meekness is not the same thing as weakness.

I hope for this sake alone that meekness ceases to be equated with weakness in that there are only two people in the Bible that are called ”meek.” Moses and Jesus.

The idea of meekness being rewarded seems counter-intuitive in a world that teaches cut-throat tactics. That in order to get ahead in life you use any means necessary. You climb over others and claw your way to the top. People assume it is the tough, forceful, overbearing people whose sole purpose is to advance. I think there is a lot of human nature’s pride and hubris at play here as well. I am perfectly comfortable standing before you and acknowledging to everyone here that I am a sinner. I don’t think many of you would doubt that. I am perfectly comfortable myself to acknowledge to God that I am a sinner. But if any one of you comes up to me and tells me I am a sinner, I’ll want to fight back. Isn’t that our natural response when our flaws are pointed out? Someone comes up to me and says, “Mike, you are a sinner,” and my first response wants to be, “But at least I am not as bad a sinner as Charles Manson!”. We begin to play this game of comparisons that “at least I’ve never murdered someone.” Let me air some of my dirty laundry out here for a second. Back in college I would watch the TV show *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* so I could tell myself, “at least I’m not those people.” Let me stop right there and remind you all I, too, am in the future. I have been humbled in some pretty amazing ways and now realize I really don’t have a step up on anyone.

The idea of meekness being rewarded goes counter-culture to what is taught and understood in society. But then again that is kind of Jesus’ MO. The beatitudes take normally understood social conventions and flip them on their heads. Jesus instructs His disciples that if you want to inherit the earth, you’ve got to be humble, courteous, considerate, even gentle.

Jesus keeps building on His beatitudes with each passing one. The first being poor in spirit and the realization that we all have poverty of spirit. Then we have the sacred grief that comes from the realization of our deficiencies in light of God’s law. When we recognize our state of sin and need of a Savior, and weep and mourn over our inability to even come close to being good enough, we now are tasked with meekness. Self-righteous confidence has no place in the life of a believer and in the work of salvation. Salvation comes to those who identify their need for a Savior, confess their sins and turn to walk humbly with God. Meekness is the natural next step in the beatitudes, after poverty of spirit and mourning our sin. We now seek to be humble, patient, unassuming, unpretentious and even courteous.

What does an attitude of meekness look like? A commentary on Blue Letter Bible says that “gentleness or meekness is the opposite of self-assertive and self-interest. It stems from trust in God’s goodness and control over the situation. Meekness towards God is that disposition of spirit where we accept His dealings with us as good and therefore without disputing or resisting. In the Old Testament, the meek are those wholly relying on God rather than their own strength to defend against injustice.” It is a meek person that is able to sit back and rest assured that God will be faithful to His word when it says, “Vengeance is mine, says the Lord.”

Part of meekness involves us and our relationship with God. We approach God with meekness, bowing to His will. Just like the Old Testament Israelites who, in the face of seeing the wicked seem to triumph, kept the confidence that they, the chosen people, and all things, are God's. We give up our rights to control and allow God to work out His will and we will inherit the earth.

But part of meekness is also how we interact with each other. Charles Spurgeon points out that "a man's meekness is especially toward his fellowmen. He is not simply meek within himself; his meekness is manifest in his dealings with others." Just like in my sermon back in August about one another there is this vertical aspect with meekness and a horizontal aspect with it as well. How we react to people should be from an attitude of meekness, an attitude of humbleness, unpretentiousness, courage, etc. Spurgeon also argues that "meekness is the ability to handle hurt without retaliating." Proverbs 16:32 says, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty. And he who rules his own spirit than he who captures a city."

Viktor Frankl, the neurosurgeon who survived the holocaust at Auschwitz is famously quoted as saying, "The one thing you can't take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one's freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance." Even as he stood exposed to the Nazi guards, Viktor was going to make it his choice how he responded to them. Romans 12:17 says, "Do not repay evil with evil, but evil with good." The Bible does not support the idea of being a doormat. We do not take abuse for the sake of abuse. We do not allow ourselves to be taken advantage of or beaten. We do not intentionally, foolishly, or recklessly put ourselves into harm's way. Removing yourself from a situation where you are in danger of harm from someone around you is the right thing to do. The Bible does not advocate otherwise.

What meekness addresses is if someone wrongs you, we do not then go and seek our own justice. We allow God to execute His justice, knowing that all things are His. Rev. Graham Smith says, "Meekness is power controlled by love so that even if you could blow someone away, you don't." Here is an old tale of revenge. A truck driver was stopped at a diner eating when a group of Hell's Angels comes in. One of them goes up to the truck driver and takes his plate of spaghetti and spills it on the gentleman's head. The biker then takes the trucker's iced tea and pours it in his lap and walks away. The truck driver immediately gets up, pays his bill and leaves. After the bikers are finished, they chat it up with the cashier and remark, "Not much of a man, not fighting back and all." The cashier responds with, "Yeah, but not much of a truck driver, either. He ran over ten motorcycles on his way out."

Jesus does this on the cross. Jesus could have saved Himself. He could have called down heaven's armies to exact His revenge and justice on those who wronged Him, especially when Jesus had done no wrong. Jesus, in His unlimited power, was controlled by unlimited love for the one whose will He came to fulfill. Jesus does not fulfill His Father's will through might, but meekness. His entire life, ministry and death were an example of perfect obedience to His Father. Just as we seek to follow God's will, we restrain ourselves and humbly bow down to our creator. When we do this, we inherit the earth.

So who are the meek? Spurgeon identifies them as, “Those who are submissive to God’s will, those who are flexible to God’s word, those who are humble, gentle, patient, forgiving and contented.” We see how Jesus was submissive to His Father’s will. It is the proud man that questions his Maker and asks, “Why have you made me” as mentioned in Romans 9:20. It is the grace-filled person who responds that they are content with whatever God may will for their life. Those who are flexible to God’s word seek to learn from God’s word. The idea here is the difference between exegesis and eisegesis. The idea of take-out of Scriptures, truths about God and truths for our lives. The opposite is what is to be avoided. The idea of coming up with our own truths and then searching for verses to prove our point. We do not put into Scripture our own ideas about what we think it should say. We are flexible in our approach to God’s word. We pray, “Lord, reveal your truth to me today at this reading.”

So how does this impact our lives? As I mentioned this vertical and horizontal aspect to meekness, let us seek and submit to God’s will. That whatever happens we allow God to have control over the situation rather than ourselves. With the horizontal aspect let us consider different situations that could lead us into exacting our own justice.

Rev. Smith gave 5 examples of situations where we may take matters into our own hands and then responses for each of them. I just want to briefly mention them but ask you to reflect on whether you have been in any of these situations and how you handled them. The first is, when people serve you, like in a restaurant, secretaries, receptionists, etc., to be understanding, not demanding. Having worked in the food industry for several years, I felt as though it gave me the right to be demanding – I know the job, I know the expectations, and so when those expectations were not met, I would let the server know. I was not understanding. I was demanding. The second is when people disappoint you: be gentle, not judgmental. When someone messes up, when someone fails to live up to your level of perfection, be gentle, not judgmental. The third is when someone disagrees with you, be tender with no surrender. Meekness is not compromising your morals. It does not mean you always give in,. That would be weakness. We gently instruct, rather than argue. The fourth is when someone corrects you, be teachable, not unreachable. The fifth and last one is when someone hurts you, act, don’t react. Retaliation is reacting, whereas responding with Christian grace and forgiveness is to act, to take initiative.

As we go through life, as we age and grow in wisdom, as we seek the Father’s will, let us not fret, let us not grow weary. Let us seek meekness instead of mightiness. Let us seek to be forgiving rather than bitter. Let us seek submission to God rather than our own self-righteous ways. Psalm 37 says it beautifully this way:

Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;
for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.
Trust in the Lord and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
Take delight in the Lord,
and He will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord;

trust in Him and He will do this:
He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.
Be still before the Lord
and wait patiently for Him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.
Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret – it leads only to evil.
For those who are evil will be destroyed,
but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.
A little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look for them, they will not be found.
But the meek will inherit the land
and enjoy peace and prosperity.
The wicked plot against the righteous
and gnash their teeth at them;
but the Lord laughs at the wicked,
for He knows their day is coming.

The day is coming when God will exact His justice and judgment on the world. Will you stand on your own footing, your own way of handling life, or will you seek meekness, submitting to the will of God for your life?