

Last week we started this sermon series entitled "Blessed: Wisdom from the Beatitudes of Jesus." We talked about those who are poor in spirit long for God, and those who mourn are those who can't wait for the kingdom of God to come to fruition. We talked about the glimpses of the kingdom of God that we have seen through those in Virginia helping workers who have been furloughed.

Today we continue our second week in our "Blessed" sermon series on the beatitudes where we will study the second beatitude: "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5: 5).

When we think of being meek, we must realize that many of us have spent most of our lives hoping that no one would call us meek. Meek in the eyes of our society is someone who is shy, quiet, or awkward. Someone who must be drawn out of their shell. Someone who gets picked last for kickball, the person who never wanted to be called on during class. In adulthood we see meekness appear in adults who appear uncertain of themselves, in those who miss promotions because they will not go after them. We have been taught to view meekness as a negative attribute in our society, and yet here in these words of Jesus, we see that being meek is an attribute of God.

You see meekness as it is defined in the Bible something that requires great spiritual strength. People who are meek care more about what God thinks than what other people think. John Piper describes it this way: "Meekness is the power to absorb adversity and criticism without lashing back."ⁱ We all should strive to be more meek as we once again recognize the God in whose image we are made.

Jesus Christ was someone who was meek. Many people thought that this promised king would come into the world like a warrior, a military hero, someone fully clad in armor who would save the people and conquer the world through war.

Jesus entrance into the world made him vulnerable. He was born in a meager stable because there was no room for him in the inn. He spent the first part of his ministry alone in the wilderness for 40 days being spiritually formed to do his ministry. He did not enter Jerusalem on a steed, he entered on a lowly donkey. He did not hang out with the popular kids and strategic political leaders in order to rise to power. He modeled a ministry of servant leadership where the lowly were exalted.

Christ responded to most situations in the Bible in meekness, and yet from this example we see that it is a lot harder to possess this attribute of God than it is to be aggressive or overconfident. When we are meek, we are required to put the needs of others above the needs of ourselves and really listen to other people.

In James 1:19-21 James says: "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."

In meekness we come before God recognizing that Christ is the Lord of our lives. Recognizing that we are not in control, recognizing that it is only through humility that we can fully surrender our lives to God. Have you ever experienced a moment when someone you would consider meek shares something profound? We seem to really listen more closely to those who do not dominate the conversation and choose their words carefully.

The good news for our lives today is that as John Piper would say, "meekness is teachable."ⁱⁱ In our Scripture for today from the Gospel of Luke, we find Jesus straight out of his time being in the wilderness for 40 days. We find him in the synagogue reading Scripture. This was the common practice in synagogues during that time. Jesus was trying to share with these people in his hometown, people that he grew up with, that he was the son of God. Clearly people knew something was different about Jesus because they were amazed after he finished reading the scripture because he read it with such great authority, but in their humanity, and not in meekness, they were unable to accept this truth that was right in front of them.

They discounted Jesus' claim that this scripture was being fulfilled through him. They did not accept his new identity, they thought that they knew him better and he couldn't possibly be different because they knew him. The Scripture goes on: "Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22). Jesus was rejected in his hometown, which if you stop to think for a moment, was very hurtful. When we go home, whatever that place is for us, we usually feel safe, love, and valued. Jesus experienced rejection there and so many other places during his ministry, yet the way that other people treated him did not deter him from sharing the good news.

Meekness is teachable through the example of Jesus Christ. So often we are like those who were in the synagogue that day.

We label other people we don't know by judging them, we put God in a box and worship in ways that make us feel comfortable. God is trying to share so much with us every day, yet in our self-importance we are missing it.

Think about James and John, they struggled with meekness. One day they started their request to Jesus this way: "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you" (Mark 10:35). So often we treat God like this, like a genie who is there to make our wishes come true. The brother's continued their request, to sit at the left and right hand of Jesus, but Jesus told them they were not able to do so. They again refuted that they were. In this moment, the brothers had elevated themselves to be just like God. They wanted power, they wanted to feel important. Jesus again explained that we are called to approach God in humility and meekness and Christ said: "Whoever wishes to be first among you must be servant of all" (Mark 10:44).

The body of Christ continues to survive in this age because there are people who come before God in humility and meekness. There are so many in our charge who live out this godly attribute. They are the ones who serve usually behind the scenes. Those who get no public recognition, but also those who do not need it because their rewards are in heaven. As we think about our Scripture from 1 Corinthians, we must remember we are all equal in the eyes of God:

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

When we realize this truth, we can start to see other people the way that God sees them. We can start to give thanks to God for the body of Christ, and the many members who all have different gifts and abilities, but who are vital to the mission of our church to make disciples.

I have to tell you, and you probably already know this about me. I struggle with meekness. I am a very confident and sometimes overconfident person. I have never had a hard time sharing my mind about anything. For the most part this confidence has helped me excel in life and ministry, but a couple of year ago I realized it also was a detriment to my ministry.

I used to be uncomfortable in meetings or bible studies where there was silence. I always felt the silence needed to be filled so I was the one to fill it.

In practicing ministry this way, I was not allowing room for the Holy Spirit, and I was not leaving room for those who were meek to speak wisdom or to speak up. What I have found is that people are sometimes scared to share their opinion or lives in a large group. They are fearful they will be rejected, they fear they will say the wrong thing, they also have fear of the unknown. We have to create safe places for all different kinds of people to share, because we are all one in the body of Christ and what we all have to share with each other is valuable.

The best gift we can give one another is the gift of listening. For when we stop speaking, we view others as equally important and we are able to see the embodied gifts of Christ in them.

I will never forget after returning from a pastor's retreat and being reminded about the importance of holy listening, a woman had made an appointment to meet with me, let's call her Martha. I thought I knew Martha well. She came weekly to a service I led every Thursday, but she was quiet. She was extremely faithful. Prayer was the foundation for her spiritual life. Although she volunteered to set up and tear down, she never volunteered to read Scripture or give her testimony. She is someone I would have considered meek and mild. I thought I knew her.

I didn't know what the meeting was about, but a pastor's first thought is have I offended someone? So, I racked my brain trying to think about something I could have said or done that would have offended this lady. I couldn't think of anything, but I approached the meeting with fear and anxiety not knowing how it would go.

We sat down on the couch in my office and we made small talk for about 30 minutes. Why was this woman here to see me? I could have dismissed her after that amount of time and thanked her for coming in, but being reminded what I had just learned about listening I asked her, so is there anything you wanted to come and share with me about? She was silent...I waited...it became uncomfortable...I waited some more...then out came the truth. "I wanted to ask if you would testify on my behalf so I can get full custody of my children" and then she started crying. "Of course, I will, I said."

This meeting was not about me, it was about being the body of Christ. It was about being part of a family that "when one member suffers, we all suffer together with [them]."ⁱⁱⁱ My friend Martha was suffering. She had made some bad decisions a couple of years earlier and had lost custody of her three children. She had now cleaned up her life and was ready to get them back.

I showed up for that court case to testify on her behalf as a character witness, but I was not the only one who showed up that day. Another member of the church showed up, and so did the Children’s Minister. All three of us testified on her behalf. I witnessed a miracle in that courtroom that day. Martha, one of the meekest people I knew showed up that day with confidence, and took on the case with a fortitude and giftedness that would rival any top lawyer. She did her homework, she was prepared, and she was impressive. I certainly had underestimated her.

We had to wait a whole month to hear the judge’s ruling. So, we showed up a month later, Martha and us. We held hands as the judge read her verdict and Martha was granted full custody of her three children, all because she trusted God, and because she relied on the body of Christ to help her. On that day, our Scripture from 1 Corinthians rang true: “If one member rejoices, we rejoice with them” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

This woman who had approached me in meekness, a conversation that almost did not happen because of my lack of meekness, took on this difficult case because she trusted God, and because she loved her children and she won. Had I had not made room to listen to Martha that day in my office, I would have missed yet another glimpse of the kingdom of God.

In that moment Martha was awarded custody I was reminded of this beatitude, that the meek inherit the earth. The meek inherit the earth, because like Jesus Christ, they share the truth of God not to gain power or prestige, but to further the kingdom. That day in court Martha shared the truth because she wanted to be with her children. To this day church is a vital part of her families’ life and I believe they are furthering the kingdom of God through meekness. May we never discount meekness and strive to embody this amazing attribute of God. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

ⁱ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/blessed-are-the-meek>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 12: 26.

Additional Resource

Keck et al. “The New Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary.” Vol. VIII. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1995. P. 180.