

## Hard to Be Humble?

Matthew 5:1-5

Crossroads Christian Church

Psalms 131

March 1, 2015 Lenten Series

We love the beatitudes because Jesus said them. They were important to him. They're beautiful in their simplicity and their depth. And they're just confusing enough that if anybody else would have said them, we would have chuckled, and said, "Yeah, sure. Tell me another." At first hearing, many of them sound contradictory, like last week's "the happy sad." Today's beatitude, "Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth," or in the older translation, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," is like that. Maybe we think of quiet little mousy people who blend into the woodwork, who go through life trying not to be noticed. Maybe we think of people who always give in, who always accommodate, who are nice even when their rights are trampled upon. If you don't stand up for yourself, even if you do inherit the earth, someone stronger will up and take it away, right?

That's not quite what Jesus had in mind. We usually think of the word meek or humble as being weak or insipid. But the word meek in both the Hebrew and the Greek languages are agricultural words. They come from the root - "To be tamed" or in the case of a field - "To be plowed." A farmer goes to prepare a field because the soil is too hard to receive the seeds, so he'll plow the field to loosen the soil, to soften it. So it is literally true that the meek, or the plowed field, will inherit the earth more than one that is hardened and tough. They would use the same word with a horse - to tame a horse. The tamed horse still has plenty of energy, plenty of power, but power and energy is now directed by something other than the horse, so its energy is directed or steered.

A meek person has gone through some kind of experience in life in which his self-control has been softened and his illusion about dominating his world or himself has been broken. In the Old Testament you find that Moses is described as being very meek more than all men who were on the face of the earth. And Moses was the man who went into Pharaoh, the most powerful person in the world, confronted Pharaoh and said to him, "Let my people go!" repeatedly, until finally Pharaoh had to yield.

The Rev. Frank Rose tells us that "The strong conquer the earth; the meek inherit the earth. And what does it mean to inherit? A beloved child of a rich father will find that one day he suddenly owns things that he did not earn by his own strength. He comes to possess a wealth that doesn't really belong to him simply because he inherits it. The meek inherit the earth, which means that they come to experience all the wealth that the Lord provides in heaven and on

earth. Your life can be rich and full - not by conquering it, not by dominating the world, but by that beautiful quality of inner surrender. Just let the Lord be the God of your heaven and your earth and you become His child, you become like Him and therefore you inherit everything that belongs to Him. You inherit the world; and this gives a person an inner peace and contentment."<sup>1</sup>

Rev. Ed Hamilton of Morning Star Presbyterian Church in New Jersey offers another way to look at it. Someone who has the character quality that the Greeks called *praus*, is someone who:

1. Has taken charge of her life. She understands that there are choices to be made, and makes those choices with integrity. Self-control might be another way to describe this quality. He tells of a young woman who was seeing a psychologist. Her life was a wreck: her nerves were shot from too many all-night parties and discos. Too many drugs and wild sex. One day her therapist asked her, "Why don't you stop?" Her startled reply was, "You mean I really don't have to do what I want to do?"
2. This character quality is also about managing your anger. If you are *praus*, you can manage your anger. You're assertive enough to express anger appropriately, but you don't fly into a wild rage. Your anger is managed.
3. The third dimension of this word *praus*, is humility. And here, I don't mean putting yourself down. Someone who is humble knows who she is. She has done a serious inner assessment of his character, abilities and behavior. The one who is humble knows that he needs forgiveness (nobody's perfect) and also knows he needs to learn (nobody knows everything).<sup>2</sup>

When you get down to it, the reason that this or any beatitude make sense is this—not only did Jesus say them, Jesus lived them. Jesus gave his will, his life, all he had, to faithfully follow God; to love us. Jesus was meek—not timid, but absolutely faithful. Not weak, but disciplined. In this kind of meekness is a strength greater than we can ever imagine.

Charles Rann Kennedy wrote a Lenten Drama many years ago, called "The Terrible Meek." It's set at the cross. A Roman captain, a soldier under him, and Mary are trying to sort out what was happening upon the cross. The captain describes his life's work as death's work—using the power of killing to create a great empire. "I tell you, woman, this dead son of yours, disfigured, shamed, spat upon, has built a kingdom this day that can never die. The living glory of him rules it.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Frank Rose, "Blessed are the Meek," sermon preached at Sunrise Chapel, Tucson, Arizona, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Paraphrased from Rev. Ed Hamilton, Morning Star Presbyterian Church, Bayville, NJ, [www.morningstarchurch.org](http://www.morningstarchurch.org).

The earth is his, and he made it. He and his brothers have been molding and making it through the long ages; they are the only ones who ever did really possess it: not the proud: not the idle or the wealthy, not the vaunting empires of the world. Something has happened up here on this hill today to shake all our kingdoms of blood and fear to the dust. The earth is his, the earth is theirs, and they made it. The meek, the terrible meek, the fierce, agonizing meek, have entered into their inheritance."<sup>3</sup>

This Roman soldier figured it out. It is the meek—God's ordinary, humble people—who are the true stewards, the true inheritors of the earth that God given to them, as an inheritance and a blessing. Let us remember this Beatitude and received its blessing. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Rann Kennedy, *The Terrible Meek*, Harper Brothers, 1912, p. 37.