



REAL: AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY IN A WORLD OF COUNTERFEITS
Meekness: The Lamblike Disposition of Jesus

Matthew 5: 1-12

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¹ Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Introduction

If you want to go to heaven, you must be real. It's not enough simply to assume you're real or say you're real. For as Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Nor will it work simply to act or pretend like you're real. For Jesus again cautions: “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’” (Matt. 7:22).

Instead, if you want to go to heaven, you must *be* real. God must make you real: give you a new heart, new birth and new sight—to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And you must really respond with repentance and faith, turning away from trusting in yourself and to Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection alone is sufficient to save you. That's how you become real; that's what it means to be real.

But what does it *look like* to be real?

Nowhere in the Bible do we find a crisper and more compelling picture of what it means to be real than in the opening portion of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins his most famous sermon with what we call Beatitudes; these are blessings he pronounces upon those who are real, who really and truly live under his Lordship as authentic Christians. There are nine beatitudes in all, but all nine can all be boiled down to this one word: meekness. For that is the essence of what Jesus calls for and expects in the lives of the citizens of his kingdom.

Meekness is *the* spirit of a real Christian. While real Christians reflect God's character in lots of ways—from the love of truth to the pursuit of justice—there is something especially important about this quality called meekness. It's at the heart of Christ and the core of the gospel. Therefore, it must be your heart and core, if you're real. If you're real, your life is marked by meekness.

Meekness: Love's Response to Injuries

Meekness, however, isn't a word we use very often, not even in Christian circles. Perhaps it's because it's not a very appealing or appetizing word for most of us. When we hear the word meekness, the impressions and images that come to mind aren't particularly motivating or inspiring. We don't think of the brave soldier or the courageous leader or the champion athlete; instead, in our mind's eye we see a doormat that gets walked all over by others. For many of us, that's what meekness means.

Real meekness, however, is an expression of profound strength. Meekness is the word the Bible uses to describe how real Christians respond to injuries from others. Of course, there are few things in life more difficult to bear than being injured by another person: examples. Meekness is how you respond to those kinds of injuries. We can define it this way: *meekness is love's response to injury*.

Meekness is what we see in Moses. In fact, the Book of Numbers says Moses "was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth" (12:3). And it was a good thing too, because the children of Israel were constantly belly-aching to him about his leadership and bad-mouthing him behind his back. How many countless injuries did Moses have to endure from his own people during those forty long years in the wilderness?

The opposite of meekness is what we see in a man named Abishai, one of King David's loyal followers. As David and his entourage entered a small village in Israel, a man came, saw David and began to curse at David, throw stones at him, berate him, call him a worthless bum and accuse him of all manner of evil. In response, Abishai said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head" (2 Sam. 16:7-9).

Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God

But if we want a perfect picture of meekness, then we must look to Jesus Christ. He is the model of meekness. Indeed, meekness is *the lamblike disposition of Jesus*. Meek is what Jesus Christ is. Of all that is said of Jesus in the four gospels, nothing is more consistently highlighted than his loving response to the injuries of others. Jesus himself says:

This is why Jesus is called the Lamb of God. Not only because of what he does: "'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). But also because of *how* he

does it: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearers is silent, so he opens not his mouth” (Acts 8:32).

You see, lambs aren’t aggressive creatures. They’re not pugnacious or rowdy. They don’t eat their young. They don’t pose a threat to their owners. They don’t bite small children. Instead, they’re gentle creatures. And so too is Jesus Christ in the midst of insults and injuries, from friends and enemies alike.

Jesus was the lamb led to the slaughter. He was misunderstood by the masses. He was disowned by his own family. He was demonized by religious leaders. He was betrayed by a close associate. He was abandoned by his most intimate followers. He was derided and cursed in a court of law, the Jewish Sanhedrin. He was belittled by a big-man who played the judged, Pontius Pilate. He was mocked mercilessly by ignorant soldiers. He was insulted by a crucified criminal. He was jeered at by the crowds.

And yet, what do we see in this Lamb of God who was led to the slaughter? Combativeness or vindictiveness or bitterness? Do we see him verbally lash out at Pilate or bring down a bolt of lightning on Judas? Does he draw on his omniscience to defend himself before his accusers, or call upon an eloquent archangel to argue his case? What do we see of the perfect God-man in his hour of greatest testing and greatest need? How do the perfect strength and courage, power and authority of the Son of God reveal themselves?

Not in the exercise of fiery passions; not in fierce and violent speeches, and vehemently declaiming against, and crying out of the intolerable wickedness of opposers, giving ’em their own in plain terms; but in not opening his mouth when afflicted and oppressed, in going as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers, is dumb, not opening his mouth; praying that the Father would forgive his cruel enemies, because they knew not what they did; not shedding others’ blood; but with all-conquering patience and love, shedding his own.¹

How Meekness Reacts

You see, if you’re real, you’ll increasingly look like Jesus, the Lamb of God. Your life will be increasingly marked by his lamblike disposition, the mark of meekness.

This will mean, first of all, that you greet resistance or rejection from others with patience rather than pugnacity. When you lack the meekness of Christ, you get incensed if people don’t do or see things your way. In Luke’s gospel we’re told of a time when two of Jesus’ closest followers, James and John, lost their cool when they weren’t received well by the residents of a certain village in Samaria. Rather than bearing this injury with meekness, they instead became extremely hot-headed—no pun intended—and asked Jesus: “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (9:54).

Second, meekness means you receive criticism or rebuke with an eagerness to learn from it rather than reject it out-of-hand. Pride cannot tolerate criticism of any kind, much less a face-to-

¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, p. 351.

face rebuke, even when it is offered in love. That's why the Bible says the proud are fools; they have very little or no capacity to learn from those around them—or even God himself—about who they really are. “A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke” (Prov. 13:1). On the other hand, the meek are ready to learn from the criticism or rebukes they receive, even when they're not offered in love; or even when the criticism they get aren't particularly fair or accurate. “A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool” (Prov. 17:10).

Third, meekness means you respond to accusations often with serene silence rather than with loud protest. Here we must follow in the footsteps of the Lamb of God. As the Apostle Peter reminds us:

“For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1Peter 2:20-23).

Fourth, meekness means you respond to yours enemies by praying for forgiveness for them rather than pleading for vengeance to come upon them. Of course, this is where the rubber of meekness meets the road of real life. And this is where the intersection of these two is often messy and painful. And yet this is precisely what we see in our Lord's example, as he hung from the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). This is the same example we see in Stephen, as an enraged mob took his life by throwing stones at him: “And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:60).

Of course, this means retaliation is out of the question, as is revenge, or what the Bible calls repaying evil for evil. “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:17-18). But so, too, is harboring grudges or stewing in a bitter spirit toward someone for days, weeks or even months. This is also why Jesus himself threatens such serious consequences for being unforgiving: “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (Matthew 18:35).

Motives to Meekness

Pastors need meekness. Anyone who faithfully serves in the leadership of the Lord's church is going to be the object of attack. There is simply no getting around it. That's why the seasoned pastor Paul tells young Timothy: “So flee youthful passions...” (2 Tim. 2:22). Now I don't think Paul has in mind the youthful passions of lust but the youthful passions of hot-headedness and combativeness. Pastors must flee that stuff and instead pursue meekness. For, as Paul says, “the

Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness" (2 Tim. 2:23-24).

But people who love Jesus need meekness too. If you're living for the gospel and doing things in gospel ways for gospel purposes, then you'll no doubt receive pushback, if not outright opposition. "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," (2 Timothy 3:12). And if that's true, then you'll have plenty of opportunity to strike back at those who are persecuting you. But the call of the gospel and the life of Christ within you lead in another direction: the way of meekness.

How do you get meekness? *The only way to be meek is to trust unswervingly in the sovereignty of God.* If you're going to be meek in the face of injuries, you must believe that God's sovereign hand is ultimately superintending everything that's happening to you. Here we must remember what Scripture says about God's sovereign hand in bringing to pass that greatest of all injuries, the crucifixion of God's own Son. Scripture says that Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). God both foreknew and foreordained the betrayal and murder of his own Son! It wasn't an accident, an unforeseen travesty of justice, which God tried hard to prevent. No, it was Plan A from God's perspective.

And so when the apostles are released from prison, they lift up their voices in prayer and acknowledge the Lord as Sovereign, saying that Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and the people of Israel did to Jesus "whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place" (Acts 4:28). God ordained every demeaning word that belittled his infinite worth, every ounce of spit that struck his holy face, every drop of blood that flowed from his open wounds. So, too, the Father ordains whatsoever comes to pass in your life, even the painful stuff.

The only way to be meek is to trust unswervingly in God's just judgment. No one endured greater injury and insult than the sinless Son of God, Jesus Christ. And yet no one exhibited greater meekness than him. But the source of his meekness was his unswerving confidence in the just judgment of God the Father. The Apostle Peter tells us the secret to his meekness: "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, *but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly*" (1 Peter 2:23). If you don't believe in God's just judgment—the Final Judgment—you will have a very difficult time bearing up meekly under the abuse the world will inevitably throw your direction.

The only way to be meek is to remember the meekness of God toward you. It is the meekness of God that explains why you're still alive—why any one of us is still alive. Imagine how incensed you can be when someone wrongs you, criticizes your actions, judges your motives, and impugns your character. Now, just imagine how an infinitely holy and perfectly good God must feel as he endures countless millions of insults and injuries to his character each and every day. If we were God, we would have used our omnipotence and incinerated the world long ago! But don't forget: It is the meekness of God that leaves open the door of salvation even for the worst of sinners and vilest of offenders (cf. Rom. 2:4).

Finally, the only way to be meek is have the life of Christ living within you. Jesus Christ invites anyone who would follow him to come to him and learn from him. His invitation is to imitate him, see into his soul and imitate his way of life. And in two important respects:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28-29).

Conclusion

Meekness is an essential mark of real Christians. This is the spirit of authentic Christianity. And this is the mark that will make all the difference in your life—because meekness empowers you to bear injuries from others without those injuries souring your soul.

Meekness is love’s response to injury; it is the lamblike disposition we see in Jesus. “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). And this is what it means to walk in his footsteps, to follow his example, to be real.

Amen.

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