

September 9, 2015

The Happiness of the Meek

Matthew 5:5 (NASB), **“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”**

We live in a world that has but a vague familiarity with the concept of meekness. With the likes of Donald Trump who continually reminds us of his immense wealth, and Hillary Clinton’s refusal to apologize for breaking the law, and the in your face actions of same sex couples in a small court house in Kentucky, there is very little meekness in our culture. Even yesterday Mike Huckabee; candidate for President and former pastor, marched Kim Davis out to a rally to the theme song of Rocky?

Not only are we unfamiliar with meekness today but so were the people who were listening to Jesus in first century Palestine. Like the first two beatitudes which we have looked at thus far, this one was just as shocking and perplexing (maybe more so) to Jesus’ listeners as they are to us today.

The audience that Jesus was speaking to would have known how to act in church so to speak. They were a spiritually proud people and viewed themselves as spiritually self-sufficient. They were skilled at putting a religious face on many things. They believed in the depths of their souls that the Messiah was coming soon and would commend them on their good behavior. The Messiah would at long last, give the Jewish people their rightful place above all other people because after all they were God’s chosen people.

They anticipated that the Messiah would deal with them very gently and would deal with their oppressors very harshly. At this point their oppressors had been the Romans for nearly one hundred years. After the Maccabean revolution which temporarily freed them from oppression, the oppression of Greece, they experienced a very brief period of independence. Roman rule which was not as cruel and destructive as that of Greece was however much more powerful.

The Jews despised Roman rule so much that at times they even refused to admit that it existed. In John 8:31-33 Jesus had an unusual exchange with the Pharisees: **“So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.’ They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’”** Talk about delusional! Israel’s history was one of almost constant conquest and oppression whether it by Egypt, Assyria, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks, and, at that very moment in time, Rome. Apparently pride would not allow those Pharisees to acknowledge one of the most obvious facts of their nation’s history and of their current situation.

All Jews hoped for deliverance of some sort. Many were expecting this deliverance to come through the Messiah. For example the Pharisees expected the Messiah to come with great fanfare

and a mighty show of supernatural power. They assumed the Messiah would miraculously throw off the burdensome yoke of the Roman Empire and establish a Jewish state, a sort of theocracy. The materialistic Sadducees hoped for change through compromise. The monastic Essenes, isolated both physically and philosophically from the rest of Judaism, lived largely as if Rome and the rest of the world did not exist.

The Zealots were the most vocal and the most active advocates of deliverance. Many of them expected the Messiah to come as some sort of conquering military hero who would conquer Rome in the same way that Rome had conquered them. They however did not wait patiently for the Messiah, but instead were determined that, whenever and however He might come, they would be prepared for it and would do their part to help Him. Their numbers and influence and power grew until A.D. 70 when the Roman general Titus brutally crushed the Jewish resistance. Titus and his army completely destroyed Jerusalem and massacred over a million Jews.

In Jesus' day the aggressive, rebellious Zealots were not many in number, but they had the sympathy and moral support of many of the people, who wanted Rome to be overthrown, however it was done.

The result then was that in whatever way all of these various groups of people did indeed expect the Messiah to come but they certainly did not anticipate His coming humbly or meekly. Yet these were the very attitudes and attributes Christ, the one whom John announced as the Messiah, was practicing and teaching. The idea of a meek Messiah leading meek people was far from any of their concepts of the messianic kingdom. The Jews understood military power and miracle power. They even understood the power of compromise, unpopular as it was. But they did not understand *at all* the power of meekness.

Years ago I was leading a Bible study in which a young man said something along the line of, "It was easier for people to believe back then because Jesus was right there and He was doing all those miracles." The reality is far from that, the people as a whole eventually rejected Jesus and the primary reason was that He did not fulfill their expectations of what the Messiah was supposed to be. He even had the audacity to preach against the means in which they had put their hope. They first rejected Him, then hated Him, and then they finally killed Him. Why? Because instead of approving their religion He condemned it. Instead of leading a rebellion against Rome He rejected revolution and offered ways to be even more subservient.

In their minds there was no way He could possibly be the Messiah. The final "nail in the coffin" so to speak was His crucifixion. In Deuteronomy 21:23 they had been taught that anyone who hung on a tree was **"accursed by God."** As He hung dying on that Roman cross some of the Jewish leaders could not help themselves and taunted Him and His claim to be the Savior and Messiah. In Matthew 27:42-43 it says, **"He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"**

The rejection of Christ began long before the crucifixion though. When He began the Sermon on the Mount by teaching humility, mourning, and meekness, the people sensed something was

wrong. This strange preacher could hardly be the deliverer they were looking for. Great causes you see are fought not by the meek but by the proud. You cannot win victories if you are mourning, and you certainly could never conquer the Roman Empire with humility and meekness. In spite of all the miracles of His ministry, the people never really believed in Him as the Messiah, because He failed to act in military or miracle power against Rome.

Jesus' teaching seemed to these listeners and too many people today, to be unacceptable simply because God's Word, just as it was then, was neglected and misinterpreted. They did not recognize, just as many do not recognize today, the humble and self-denying Jesus as the Messiah because they did not recognize God's predicted Suffering Servant as the Messiah. That was not the kind of Messiah they desired or wanted.

Tomorrow we will continue to take an in-depth look at this verse and what the meaning of meekness is. Then we will look at the evidence of meekness or rather how it is to be played out in our lives. We will then see what the result of meekness should be and what the necessity of it is. I pray that this will be just as much a blessing to you as it is to me as I study and write these.