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The Beatitudes: Matthew 5:1-12 - The Character of the Kingdom
Part Four: Blessed are The Meek - Matthew 5:5

By Tal Davis

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Everyone loves Superman, right? We've all seen the movies. For people born since the 1980s that is how they learned about the "Man of Steel." When I was a boy, the main way we enjoyed Superman was in comic books. Every month I looked forward to the newest issue of Superman or Action! comics. There was a whole imaginary universe which revolved around this imaginary character. We also watched Superman on TV. Admittedly the special effects of him flying were, by today's standards, completely lame. Nonetheless, at the beginning of each episode the announcer would talk about Superman's great powers, but then added this, "Superman, who disguised as a mild-mannered reporter... fights a never ending battle..."

The "mild-mannered reporter" was, of course, Superman's secret identity, Clark Kent. As you remember, Clark was something of a geek who was constantly being teased by fellow reporter (and Superman's "girlfriend") Lois Lane. It was ironic that the strongest man in the world acted like a weakling. But, in truth, Clark Kent exhibited moral qualities and strength of character that were equal to those of his alter-ego.

Maybe that's what Jesus had in mind when, in the Beatitudes, He told His disciples, "Blessed are the meek." The word "meek" in Matthew's Gospel is in Greek *praeis*, a form of the adjective *praus*. The New International Version (NIV), and most other

English translations, render the term as "meek," as does the King James Version. The New American Standard Bible (NASB) translates it as "gentle." The Christian Standard Bible (CSB) has the first phrase as, "Blessed are the humble." "Meek," "gentle," or "humble" are all valid translations of the Greek word. The same word is used in Galatians 5:22-23 as a fruit of the Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness (meekness- KJV), self-control; against such things there is no law. (NASB See also: 1 Cor. 4:21; 2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:25; James 1:21; 1 Pet. 3:15)

But just knowing the literal meaning of the word does not clearly explain what Jesus meant by "the meek." In this part four of our ten part study of the Beatitudes, we will analyze this Beatitude number three. As with the first two, we will begin by explaining what meek, or meekness, does not mean.

First, meekness does not refer to a weakness of a person's personality. Many think that being a Christian requires a person to be a sort of Casper Milquetoast who walks around wearing a sign that reads, "Please Tread on Me." They believe followers of Jesus must be timid and weak. But is that really what Jesus had in mind? Definitely not! Jesus' notion of meekness is not physical or mental weakness, but rather refers to exercising Divine strength under God's control.

Second, meekness does not mean we don't care what people think of us. To say it positively, Christians should care what other people think of them. As

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representatives of Christ we should want to be the best people we can be so that the world will see Jesus in us. That being said, we should not care what people think of us if it is because we are followers of Jesus and are doing what is right. Jesus promised that we will be persecuted. More about that in a later installment.

Let's face it, many people simply do not like Christians and will cast aspersions upon us or make fun of us. We see this so often in the media. Christians are usually portrayed in TV shows and movies as weird, mentally deranged, or the objects of ridicule. In too many instances we hear of the scandalous or greedy behavior which only feeds some critics' antagonism towards us. Obviously that bothers us, but we cannot let what the world thinks hinder us.

Third, meekness is not an attitude of compromise. As believers, we are to stand firm in our convictions. We must uphold the high standards of Christ and live according to His ways. Meekness is not weakness of moral or spiritual character. In fact, it is the opposite.

Finally, meekness is not a false humility. A friend of mine use to say in jest, "I'm humble and proud of it!" People who are truly humble do not brag about their humility. That's a contradiction of logic. People who draw attention to themselves, even by doing good deeds, are not being meek, they are being hypocritical.

So now we have determined what meekness is not in Jesus' statement. But, as with all the Beatitudes, just what does He mean? And how do we exhibit meekness? Furthermore, what does He mean by "they shall inherit the earth?" Let's see.

First, meekness is our attitude toward ourselves and how we express it toward others. In other words, if we understand who we are in relation to God, we can better relate to others. By reminding ourselves that we are sinners saved by grace, that makes us more humble and allows us to act with gentility and grace. Granted, those qualities are not particularly valued in our culture (or probably any other for that matter), yet we should seek to be Christlike in our interactions.

Second, meekness is an absence of pride, yet being firm on matters of principle. As we said earlier, being meek does not mean we are to be weak or willing to compromise our convictions. Sometimes we must take a stand, but do so in ways that honor God. We can hold tight to our beliefs without arrogance or hostility if truth, justice, and righteousness are on our side.

Third, being meek means being willing to accept criticism if it is justified. We all make mistakes. Sometimes we act impulsively. Sometimes we act or speak without considering the consequences. And sometimes we do things we know we should not. Red Skelton used to have a skit character he called "the Mean Wittle Kid." His favorite line was, "If I dood it I get in twouble... I dood it anyway!" There is a Mean Wittle Kid in all of us.

Meekness, in this case, is being able to receive criticism when it is warranted. Sometimes being corrected can be a hard pill to swallow, especially if it is unsolicited. Yet, being willing to accept a reprimand from another person we respect can be in our best interest. Of course, the key to right correction, whether we are giving it or taking it, must always be speaking truth in love. *Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 John 3:18 NASB)*

I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have

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received commandment to do from the Father. Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. (2 John 4-5 NASB)

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8 NASB)

So we can see what meekness is in Jesus' teaching, but what exactly did He mean by His promise that the meek "shall inherit the earth"? "Inherit" is *kleronomeo*. "Earth" is *ge*, which also means "land." Together they harken back to the Israelites who inherited the Land of Promise (Psalm 37:11). In the New Testament that image is used by Jesus and the other writers in relation to inheriting (or not inheriting) the Kingdom of God and everlasting life. Consider the following passages.

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life." (Matthew 19:29 NASB)

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" (Matthew 25:34 NASB)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10 NASB)

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (1 Corinthians 15:50 NASB)

Envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:21 NASB)

He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (Revelation 21:7 NASB)

So in this instance, we can assume this is what Jesus had in mind. Those who exhibit meekness and humbly receive Him as Savior and Lord shall receive eternal life in His kingdom.

So Clark Kent was a meek and mild reporter when he was not being Superman. Good for him. He kept his power under control. But we know he was only a fictional fantasy character. Jesus is real and, as Paul reminds us, in Him this attitude of meekness was perfectly demonstrated. So should it be for us.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11 NASB)

In the next installment we will examine the fourth Beatitude:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Matthew 5:6 (NASB)

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