

Blessed Are The Meek

A Sermon by Rev. Frank Rose

Do you sometimes feel that your life is out of control, or that you wished you had more mastery over yourself and over your world? The Lord was talking to this need in the third of the Beatitudes, but as in the other blessings His words come as something of a surprise. He says "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." The appearance is that the earth belongs to the strong. We see in history examples of men who are powerful who had a clear ability to make decisions, who were ruthless, who were conquerors. The meek, the gentle, would find themselves overrun by stronger forces than themselves. Of course, if you stop and look a little more carefully at these dominant figures in history you come to find another side. Imagine the dictator in one of the new republics in Africa who has risen to power on the basis of murder or imprisoning thousands of people. Yes, he can look out of his palace and say, "I'm lord and master over all that I survey." But he's looking through barred windows. He is surrounded by bodyguards and can never move without being protected. He drives through the country in a limousine that has bullet proof windows. In a sense, he is imprisoned by his own position of power. He is in constant fear of being overthrown and eventually the day may come when he is stripped of power, stripped of wealth, cast into prison, and he realizes that his days of glory were very short lived. Or think of the successful executive. He is quick to make decisions. He's aggressive and knows what he wants in life and goes out to get it. He achieves success. He's respected and feared and goes home at night and finds that one thing he cannot control is his wife or his children. That boy that is growing up to be a man, that he pictures as one day the manager of the firm, drops out of school and lives a life of drug abuse and is totally ignorant of all responsibility. His daughters hate him and as soon as possible they will get married and leave home. And not only that, he is powerless over his own feelings - his times of depression or his anger or his frustration. So what exactly is he in control of, or is he being ruled by his own success? Some such people come to the point where they acknowledge their powerlessness and they begin to look at their life a little differently. They become softened by bitter experiences. They get in touch with their poverty of spirit. They experience the reality of grief and mourning. They become softened people.

Once a person has reached that stage would you say he is more in control of his life or less so? From external appearances, it seems that the old spirit has gone, but Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." A dear friend of mine was sharing with me her experience with trying to quit smoking. What she realized after years of struggle was that the big problem was that she thought she was in control. So she would say to herself, "I can stop whenever I want to." And every now and again to prove that to herself, she would quit smoking for a few weeks, but always in the back of her mind was the thought "I can start any time that I want because I can stop anytime that I want. I'm in control of this situation." Then she would find herself after two or three weeks without a cigarette, waking up at two o'clock in the morning, dressing, going out to an all-night convenience store to get a pack of cigarettes. She realized that she is not in control. That experience broke the illusion that she was in control, and brought her into a completely different attitude toward this addiction. She said she finally knew what it was and what it felt like to hand something in her life over to the Lord, and to say openly, "Lord, I cannot control this without your help." The marvelous thing was that immediately, the addiction was gone and she no longer classified herself as a smoker who was trying to quit. She just said, "I'm not a smoker anymore because I've handed that over to the Lord." You see, through that surrender, she achieved what she could not achieve through conscious control.

Now this teaching that "The meek will inherit the earth," is one of the most difficult of all of the teachings of the Lord for people to grasp. It runs so contrary to the appearance. It seems as if we are alone, in the fact that we continually struggle to bring our life into order and make sense out of our life. I knew someone who loved the book - "How to Take Control of Your Time and Your Life." Such a wonderful promise! You can take control of your time and your life. What an illusion that is! Because if we try to take control merely from our external man, merely from an external point of view, we will find that we are constantly being defeated. In order to take control, we need the quality known here as meekness.

Now this is a very difficult word to translate. We usually think of the word meek as being weak or insipid. But the word meek in both the Hebrew and the Greek languages comes from the root - "To be tamed" or in the case of a field - "To be plowed." When a farmer goes to prepare a field he knows that the soil is too hard to receive the seeds so he'll plow the

field to loosen the soil, to soften it, to make it receptive. Then it is literally true that the meek, or the plowed field, will inherit the earth more than one that is hardened and tough. With a horse they would use the same word - 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 person who is meek is a person who 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. It's remarkable; you read in the Old Testament and 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!" And went back repeatedly, until finally Pharaoh had to yield. And yet Moses was called meek. In what sense was Moses a meek person?

We find in the story of the battle with the Amalikites a clue to the power that Moses had. The children of Israel went from Egypt into the wilderness and there they became very vulnerable not only to the danger of starvation and thirst but also to the marauding bands of the Amalikites. They attacked the Amalakites at the rear of their camp. The soldiers were at the front line, so they attacked them at their most vulnerable spot. They were in the wilderness and suddenly their whole lives were at stake. In the story you will find that Moses left the battle scene and went up upon a hill. Moses raised his hands and while his hands were raised, the children of Israel were victorious. When his hands fell from fatigue, they began to lose the battle.

Why did Moses raise his hands? What was the gesture here? It was the gesture of prayer. He was praying for all the people on that mountain top and he could not sustain it so he had to be supported by Aaron and Hur. But as long as he could maintain an attitude of prayer and submission to the Lord's will, then the soldiers in the valley could be victorious. So it might have seemed to them as if the battle depended upon their courage, on their weapons, on their strength. But the real issue was being fought on the hilltop - the issue of submission or meekness. As long as Moses could maintain that attitude of prayer, then they had an inner strength in what they did.

Think about how this may apply to your life. The battles that we fight are mainly internal battles. We fight the enemies of fear, of depression, of anger, and in most lives of people these emotions sweep over them like an invading army. Now if you try to control your emotions just by self will, you will find repeated failure, like the man who tries to control his temper just by will power and will power alone. He's using Satan to cast out Satan. If a person tries to overcome his depression by telling himself - "Cheer up" - he'll only get more depressed because he'll have a sense of failure in not being able to accomplish that simple task. Of ourselves, we cannot govern or control our emotions. Our emotions will, more likely, control us and overwhelm us like a flood.

Just before the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus went into the wilderness and was tempted by the devil and in the third of those temptations the Bible says the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and said that Jesus could have all those kingdoms if only He would bow down and worship him, the devil. How can the devil offer all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus who is Lord of all? Well, doesn't it appear as if the world is run by human ambition, by greed by the love of money, by raw power? Doesn't it appear as if the only way to influence people is by an appeal to their lower self? Doesn't it seem as if the only way to be successful in life is to compromise your principles? - To be strong - to be courageous - to be in control.

But once again, the real issue is on the mountaintop. On the mountaintop you must maintain an attitude of prayer - the prayer that the Lord's will be done. So in our life there will be times in which we feel as if we simply cannot control the things in our life and we're brought to that position to understand the quality of meekness. On Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, it was said "Behold your King is coming, meek and sitting on a donkey, a colt the foal of a donkey." Sometimes you hear the expression, gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Yet what did Jesus do when he entered Jerusalem? He went straight to the temple, saw the people buying and selling, overthrew their tables and said, "It is written My house shall be a house of prayer and you have made it a den of thieves!" Was that meek behavior? But later when Jesus was arrested and brought before Pilot, was accused and threatened with death, it is written that "He opened not his mouth." As the lamb before his slaughter is dumb, he opened not his mouth. Why did not Jesus speak at that time - why didn't he call for legions of angels to come down from heaven and free Him and destroy His enemies?

Because the issue here was whether He is going to be led by the internal forces or by external loves and ambitions. He could feel within himself the anger to the mistreatment that he was enduring. He could feel within himself the frustration and the pain of looking at human behavior at its worst. He also realized that you cannot answer evil with evil, and if you want to inherit the earth you have to submit to something higher and in this case He referred to the Father, and by the Father He was talking about the Divine Love. He had to become passive so the Divine Love would operate through Him. And we all, at one time or another in our life, have to learn what that quantity of passivity is; what is it like to be passive and have the Lord be active.

Listen to this teaching from True Christian Religion, "The Lord alone is active in a person and the person, by himself, only passive. But he is moved to activity by the inflow of life from the Lord." And again, "Those who are governed by the Lord are passive and have no power of themselves. They are powerless to act and feel anything of themselves and they know it. With them there is only a passive force. These are called poor and also needy. And they are so esteemed by those who suppose that they, themselves are strong. These weak ones who can do nothing of themselves are governed by the Lord. He himself takes care of them. "The meek shall inherit the earth!"

Those who have that inner quality surrender to something higher than themselves. What they're surrendering to is the power of love. As we read, "Rational good never fights no matter how much it is attacked because it is gentle and mild, long suffering and yielding, for it's nature is that of love and mercy. But although it does not fight, it nevertheless conquers all. It does not ever think of combat nor does it glory in victory. It is of this nature because it is divine and is, of itself, immune from harm for no evil can assail what is good."

"The meek shall inherit the earth" - The people who are willing to let their lives be ruled by the gentle qualities of love. They don't get trapped in the illusion that somehow they can control their inner world, they can control other people they can control circumstances. Notice the word inherit,

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.

This third Beatitude was actually a quotation from the Psalms and all that Jesus did was to add the word blessed or blissfully happy. It says in Psalm 37, "The meek shall inherit the earth." In contrast to the evil doers "Who will be cut off." As the Lord said, "Come to me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden light."

Amen

Lessons: Exodus 17, Psalm 37:1, Matthew 4, AC 1802