

“Life Attitudes-Meek, but not Weak”- Matthew 5:5, Matthew 20:20-28

Some of my favorite reading in life has been books by the author J.R.R. Tolkien. He was a professor who taught at Oxford University in England. He wrote *The Hobbit* and the *Lord of the Rings* Trilogy. He wrote these stories for his own children. These fantasy books that have been made into movies are about the exploits of hobbits named Bilbo and Frodo Baggins that go up against the evil forces of the world and win. These are humanoids: human like beings small in height and have personalities that are very low key and are known to not having any real ambitions in life. They have no real urge to travel anywhere. They are very unassuming and somewhat boring beings. They mind their own business. They do not live in towering fortress but in small earthen huts. They give presents to others on their birthday. They are true and very loyal friends to each other. They lack the desire for power. Yet those who have read the books or have seen the movies want to cheer them on. They become unlikely heroes in Tolkien's books and in the movies. Someone once said that Tolkien made them small in order to challenge our obsession with things that are big. For hobbits, bigger is not always better and small can be beautiful. There are some in our society today that might call these characters weak and meek.

We are in the third of our sermons on Life Attitudes as we look at the Beatitudes at the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes challenge us to go deeper to discover the transformation that God has for each of us. The Beatitudes are not pious hopes of what shall be, but are congratulations of what is. So this morning we look at our third beatitude: Blessed are those who are meek for they shall inherit the earth.

In our society today we cannot fathom that anyone meek would be blessed. We tend to pity the meek. We want to avoid the meek. We might even poke fun at the meek and pick on those who we perceive are meek and weak. If you describe yourself as meek on a resume you might not get the job. Hollywood rarely has any movies that depict anyone who is meek and weak. Many of us like John Wayne, Rambo, or the Terminator kind of movies. Many, especially men, are taught not to show meekness and weakness of any kind because people can

smell weakness and exploit it. I was raised with the attitude that men don't cry. I was taught along with many of you to never show emotion in public. We want others to respect us. We want and expect people to be tough. We don't want to be victims. But Jesus did not mean weak when he said blessed are those who are meek. So what does it mean to be meek?

Meekness is not weakness, but rather a gentle spirit. Meekness has been described as a median between anger and indifference. It denotes self-control. To say it another way is to say, "Blessed is the person who has self-control: is angry at the right time and not angry at the wrong time." A person who is meek is one who has every passion, instinct, and impulse under control because they are God-controlled. Blessed are those who have been able to master themselves. No one can lead others until they can control and lead themselves.

To understand meekness, let us look at the life of Jesus. Jesus was standing before Pilate with a crown of thorns on his head being judged and beaten. To the Romans and to the Jewish leadership Jesus was a very dangerous individual. Pilate had a tradition of letting a prisoner go free and the people and leaders cried out to release Barabbas, a known terrorist of his day. You see they feared Jesus more than Barabbas because Jesus was God-controlled. This is meekness.

In Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of Christ", there was a scene where Jesus was beaten. His flesh was being torn but he could not be broken. In his defiance against Pilate, he cries out, "You don't take my life; I lay my life down." He had mastered the weapons of the spirit. He could not be bought, bullied, or broken. This is what it means to be meek. On the surface it appeared that Gandhi, MLK, and Nelson Mandela were meek and weak and they faced insurmountable odds; yet all three men won their revolutions without firing a shot. Like Jesus they mastered the weapons of the Spirit. They kept self-control with God's help and won the world over. This is what it means to be meek.

Being meek also means being a servant. In Matthew 18-20, Jesus teaches his listeners about a new community. One of those characteristics found in the passage that was read from Matthew 20 was servant hood. James and John's mother came to Jesus with them in tow and asked Jesus, her nephew, to allow

her sons to sit at your right and left hand in the kingdom. This of course exposes the nature of selfish ambition. The other disciples showed their indignation thus exposing their desire to be first in the kingdom. Jesus, however in verse 28, gives the model as to who is the greatest. "If you wish to be great, you must become a servant for others."

The question asked in the Kingdom of God is, "How many people have you helped?" The question we all are to ask if we are to take seriously the characteristic of being meek is, "Where are we serving?" Only what we do in serving will last beyond us. Everything else becomes rust. Jesus is saying that the future of the world is in the hands of who serves the world. The future of the world is in the hands of those who have servant love. Servant love is personal power used to help those who can serve or help themselves. This is what it means to be meek. The world measures success by the number of servants one has; the Kingdom of God is measured by the number of times one serves.

Joyful are we who discover that our strength comes through gentleness and deep appreciation for all that God has done for us. Joyful are we who have the humility to know our limitations, weaknesses, and our needs. Blessed are the meek for they will inherit all of the earth.