**Strength in Meekness**

(Matthew 5 : 5)

About 12 years ago, I drove from my home town to the big city of Toronto to attend a fund raising walkathon event of the Ontario Lung Association in my capacity as the Chair of the provincial Board of Directors. I took my daughter who was in her early teens with me because I believe she will be thrilled to have the rare opportunity to be walking the track side-by-side with the superstar of Canada at that time – Donovan Bailey who was the gold medalist at the Olympics 100 m run, the fastest man in the world! But because of the Friday night traffic getting into Toronto, we were behind schedule when we checked into our hotel before heading off to the stadium. Worried that we will be late for the opening event to walk with Donovan Bailey, I asked the receptionist to call for a taxi while we went up to put our luggage in our room. But when my daughter and I came down from our room, I was distraught to discover that there was no taxi waiting for us, and that irritation turned into anger when I found out the receptionist didn’t even call for the taxi. (Slide 2) I was furious at the idea that after we have driven 4 hours to Toronto for the main purpose that my daughter can tell her friends that she led a walk with the fastest man on earth, just to be ruined by this inept receptionist. I cannot control myself and just let her have it right in the hotel lobby. A few minutes later, as we were frantically trying to flag down a taxi in the busy Toronto streets, my daughter couldn’t contain herself to let me know how she was so embarrassed by my behavior.

Even at that time, I thought my anger was justified, I succumbed to my sinful nature. It happens a lot the time for me when I felt my rights had been trampled, like an airline ground crew stymied me with all the red tape instead of being helpful when my flight is being cancelled. Does it happen to you? It may happen in the workplace, when you rights are being stomped upon, like when a legitimate promotion, or appreciation for your job well done, is being withheld and given to someone who doesn’t deserve it.

What would Jesus say in these situations? This is what bring us today’s topic the **The Third Beatitude** (Slide 3), on **Matthew 5:5 “Blessed is the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”**

First of all, what does the word “blessed” mean? (Click)In Greek, it means “happy”, a god-like joy.

***What does the word meek mean?***

In some versions, it is translated as “Gentleness”, and even “humility”. In our modern English the word meek is hardly one of the honourable words of life. Nowadays it carries with it an idea of spinelessness, and subservience. It paints the picture of a submissive and ineffective person.

In Jesus time, the Jews were ruled by the Romans who took away their land. A Roman can ask a Jew to carry his load for one mile; he can also take away his coat, which is a valuable outer garment. However, anger and irritation cannot be expressed because the Roman can kill a Jew without giving any account of what he did. Imagine, in that background, to hear that the meek shall inherit the earth would have come as a rude shock to Jesus audience.

Similarly, nowadays we are living in a society where “The survival of the Fittest” is the predominant dogma. Look at our corporate world. Who are the people that have pushed away their competitions, who have succeeded in climbing the corporate ladder? Certainly not the meek; it’s the ones who are forceful, the ones who are aggressive, the ones who are demanding.

Therefore to be told that the meek shall inherit the earth comes to us with a wake-up call – how can we live right side up in an upside down world.

So what exactly is meekness? We are going to look at it from 3 major angles this morning.

**Meekness** – *Gk Praotes* (Click)

1. **Meekness is Power Under Control**

The first way to look at meekness is to look at the original Greek word, praotes . In Greek, it is the regular word for an animal which has been domesticated, which has been trained to obey the master. It is the word for a wild stallion being tamed, its strength is under control for the master’s use. (Slide4)A tamed horse is no less strong than the wild horse, but its strength being contained.

So the first possible translation of this Beatitude is: (Click)

***“Blessed is the man who has every instinct, every impulse, every passion under control. Blessed is the man who is entirely God-controlled.”***

Meekness is one of the Fruit of the Spirit. No one can have self control unless he is God- controlled.

A good example is Abraham and Lot in the Old Testament. God called Abraham to leave Mesopotamia and Abraham left by faith without knowing where he was going, with the promise of God that he would give him his land and his inheritance. His nephew, Lot, went with him, and they became quite prosperous along the way, possessing a lot of flocks and herds. We read in Genesis 13, when they reached Bethel, the land could not support both of them because their possessions were too great. Quarrel arose between Abraham’s herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. Abraham said to Lot, “Look, we are family and let’s not fight with each other.”

Then Abraham let Lot choose wherever he wanted to go. Now Abraham was both his uncle, which means he has familial rights, and he was also the man whom God has given his promises, so in both ways, Abraham would have the right to pick whichever land he wanted to go instead of letting Lot to choose. We know that Lot chose unwisely, and he ended up somewhere near Sodom. Immediately after that had happened, God said to Abraham, “Look to the East, and to the West, look to the North and South and you will inherit all this land. “

Abraham was a man who held his rights very loosely. He didn’t even begin to assert it when he could have and he ended up literally inherited the land. This is meekness in action. What has enabled Abraham to do this? Why did he leave his home? It is because God gave him a promise that he would give him the land. Abraham came trusting that. That’s why he was able to hold his rights to the land very freely, because he has a promise that God was going to give it to him anyway and no one can take it away from him. So this meekness is something that flows out of his trust in God’s promise and therefore in God’s ability to guard that trust for Himself.

When I was not getting the service I believed I deserved from that receptionist in that hotel 12 years ago or when I was dealing with an airline ground crew who was not helpful when my flight was cancelled, or whenever I believe my rights were denied, **if** I can just remember this dimension of meekness at those occasions, and hold my rights loosely. I may end up getting better service, and literary inherit the land.

Power under control (Click)is ***the refusal to exercise power aggressively to safeguard our right***. This does not mean that we don’t stand up for our rights, but it is the refusal to use our power to aggressively demand our rights.

Meekness ***is persuasive***. (Click) Proverbs 25:15 b (NCV) “A gentle word can get through to the hard-headed.”

At work or at home, I know screaming never works. All it does is create fear and resentment in the person you are screaming at. They will have no choice but become defensive. Wise and mature people are pleasant, fools and idiots are rude. I was certainly a fool and an idiot at that hotel lobby that day, and my daughter did not waste time in telling me that afterwards. I came to learn that I am never persuasive when I am abusive.

If you are the boss, even though you have the right, and I certainly had a lot rights when I served as CEO in my career, I don’t believe you have to exert your position to say, “Do you know who I am? Do you know what I can do to you?” **(Click)**

***If we have the right opinion of our self before God, it will spill over into our relationship with our fellow human being, at home and at work***.

**(Slide 5) Meekness is self-control that keeps quiet when criticized**.

Imagine after you have meditated on the Beatitudes before God, declaring your desperate need to depend on God (1st Beatitude – poor in spirit) – you have nothing to be proud of. And you also realized that there is a lot in you that you need to confess to God (2nd Beatitude – mourning). Then imagine a friend came along and confirm that those two things about you are true, how would you react to him? Will you be angry and think how dare of him to criticize you? Will you be defensive, or will you want to attack him back? As a person who has been married for over 36 years, I confess that this happens very often between husband and wife, and I can tell you that I find it is far more difficult to keep quiet when I am criticized by my wife, and vice versa.

Moses was the man who was explosively angry in Exodus 32 when the Israelites built a golden cow when Moses was up in the mountain with God, he felt that God’s honour was at stake, and he smashed the tablets and grinded the golden cow into powder. But the same Moses was silent when his own honor was attacked by Mariam in Number 12, when Mariam and Aaron came up to speak again to Moses. “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Has he also spoken through us?” Before Moses said anything, the text tells us that the anger of God burned against Aaron and Mariam, and they were judged. Mariam was struck with a skin disease. When Aaron pleaded with Moses, “Please do not hold against us the sin so foolishly committed, Moses didn’t say, “That’s God’s judgment, nothing to do with me!” Also inwardly he could have said, “That’s what happens to people who mess with me. After all I am God’s chosen!” But he didn’t. Instead he cried out to God to heal Mariam.

He was quiet when he was criticized, when his own honor was at stake. This time when God took over and he didn’t say anything, he was also free from the desire to say something back. He just simply prayed.

That’s why Number 12:3 tells us that “he was a very meek man, more meek than anyone else on the face of the earth.”

Therefore meekness begins when we put our trust in God. When we trust him, we will be able to roll our anxieties and anger onto God. Like Moses we check our wrath and hand our cause over to God, and let him vindicate us *if he chooses*. And then, as James says, in this quiet confidence we are slow to speak and quick to listen

Similarly Jesus also kept quiet during the trial.

You and I don’t have that big massive job to lead a nation. We have to live out our lives in the kind of settings that I talked about, in a hotel lobby, in our families, in our workplaces, and in other public places like restaurant, theaters, and airports. So for us, (click) it is ***Looking for the kernel of truth in every criticism.***

For unlike Jesus, we do have faults. Criticisms can be valid. So not only do we say nothing in response, we always look for the kernel of truth in every criticism. James picks this up in another use of the word meekness in James 1:19–21: (Click)

“Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with **meekness** the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”(ESV)

In verse 21 “receive with **meekness** the implanted word “, the application here is specific to the Word of God. But by extension, maybe we can apply it to the attitude when we hear the word of criticism towards us. To receive the word with meekness means that we don't have a resistant, hostile spirit when we hear things we don’t like to hear. It means that we are slow to write a person off, slow to condemn, especially slow to be angry, because it may not be the right person for the right reason. “Meekly received the word “– look for the kernel of truth in every criticism. The land you inherit in this is righteousness, because James says that “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God”. If you get criticism and you just lash out in response, you may be depriving yourself of that harvest of righteousness, which is why God brought that criticism to you in the first place. In fact, quite often, (Click)***Gentleness disarms critics.***

(Click)2 Tim 2:25 “And the Lord’s servant must never quarrel; instead, he must be kind and **gentle** with everyone. They must be able to teach effectively and be patient with difficult people….Those who oppose him, he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to know the truth.”

One of the most challenging times in my professional life was that when the vice president whom I have terminated for cause lashed out at me in the local newspaper, attacking my character. After consulting with my vice president communications, I issued a very short news release without direct rebuttal or defending myself in the public. A lot of people in my church were surprised of my “mild” response.

(Slide 6) ***Gentleness diffuses conflicts*** because it says in Prov 15:1 “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Also Eccles 10:4 (NLT) -“If your boss is angry with you, don’t quit! A quiet, gentle spirit can overcome even great mistakes”

1. **Meekness Is a Controlled Expression of Anger** ( Slide 7)

Meekness (Gk Praotes ) is also an important Greek ethical word. Aristotle describes virtue as a balance between two extremes. For example, courage is a balance between cowardice and recklessness. To Aristotle, meekness has to do with the virtue of anger, and he saw it as the happy medium between too much anger and too little anger. And so the second possible translation of this Beatitude is:

(Click) ***“Blessed is the man who is always able to be angry at the right person for the right reason for the right amount of time.”***

In other word, **meekness** is a controlled expression of anger.

An Old Testament example is Moses: when he was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, the Israelites sinned and built the golden cow (Exodus 32). When he returned he was angry with the right people (the Israelites) for the right reason (for they turned their back on God). It was also for the right amount of time because the next day after punishing his people, he went back up to the mountain to plead with God to forgive what the people had done. Moses expressed his anger but he also attended to their needs.

Another example is Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus was angry and grieved at the hardheartedness of the Pharisees ([Mark 3:5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%203.5)) and he drove the merchants out of the temple and turned over their tables ([Matthew 21:12](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matthew%2021.12ff),13).

Therefore meekness is not the absence of passion and conviction and even indignation for the glory of God. But it does not mean we have hair-trigger anger. James 1:19 says that we should be "SLOW to anger,"

Righteous anger is a crucially important emotion because it is righteous anger that motivates us to fight for injustice. But the problem with us, including me, is our anger often very quickly moves from the zeal for God’s glory to ***our*** own glory and the protection of ***our*** rights. We don’t move from the anger to the needs of people, instead we nurse our anger and replay that irritation over and over again.

At work, that’s why I see so many discussions in meetings that started off as a legitimate difference of opinions, very quickly they escalated into argumentativeness, aggression and increase in volume in our words, and we become feisty, we become demanding in our interactions with people. This is exactly the opposite of meekness.

(Click)Let’s look at another feature in the portrait of meekness. Let’s look at Galatians 6:1-2. “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in the spirit of **meekness**. Look to yourself, lest you be tempted.”

Not only is meekness slow to speak and slow to anger, but when I decided that I must speak words of correction, as we have here in Galatians 6:1-2, I should speak with the deep awareness I am also fallible. More specifically when meekness reaches out to bring back a person overtaken in sin, I admit that apart from grace – free and undeserved – I would fall to the very sin that I am now trying to correct.

If we ask what’s the right time and the wrong time are, we may say as a general rule for life that it is never right to be angry for any insult or injury done to ourselves; but that it is often right to be angry at injuries done to other people. Selfish anger is a sin; selfless anger can bring big impact to this fallen world.

1. **Meekness is Humility** (Slide 8 )

Many of the English translations of the Bible translates meek into “Humble” (e.g. NIV)

***“Blessed is the man who has the humility to know his own ignorance, his own weakness, and his own need.”***

Without humility a man cannot learn, for the first step to learning is the realization of our own ignorance. No one can teach the man who knows it all already. As we come to know God we come to the realization of our own weakness and of our need for God. Without God, I can do nothing.

To expound further this dimension of meekness let's look at James 1:19–21 again. (Click)

The opposite of what James described here is a person who does not like to listen to what other people have to say, and is quick to speak and quickly becomes angry if the words of others cross his opinion or call his behavior into question.

Do we know such person at work? Do we behave like that at meetings? This person is the same as the one who is not receptive to the Word of God and filters it through his own desires and receives it selectively, if at all.

The picture James painted for us here is another kind of person who is slow to speak, and quick to listen (v. 19). This person recognizes the limitations of his knowledge and the fallibility of his thinking. If he hears something new or contrary to his own view, his first reaction is not fretful anger. He listens and considers. (Click)He is ***teachable.***

In [James 3:13](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%203.13) and [17](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%203.17). Verse 13 says, "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the **meekness** of wisdom (NET)”. There is not enough time to develop this passage this morning, but you can see how these verses tie back into [James 1:19–21](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%201.19%E2%80%9321) to show that there is a correlation between **meekness** and **reasonableness.** (Click)And is not reasonableness basically the willingness to listen to another person's reasons for his opinion and the willingness to give reasons for yours?

What a beautiful thing it is to sit on whether a committee meeting at work or a board of deacons at church where, when a man speaks, the others listen and then deal reasonably with what was said instead of just blurting out something irrelevant or making a quick judgment without thinking through the reasons for it.

In the world we live in, it is very natural for us to exert our position, to exert our opinions or ideas over our subordinates. We have a misconception that a meek boss is a weak leader.

When the meekness of wisdom is open to reason—it is quick to listen to the reasons given by others for their opinions, and it is willing to give reasons for its own opinions. It cares about truth. It is always willing to change to bring its opinions into line with truth. Meekness knows its own fallibility.

**For They will Inherit the Earth** (Slide 9)

It is this meekness, Jesus says, which will inherit the earth. In history the truly great people have always been those who have their passions, their instincts, and their impulses under control.

(Click)The writer of Proverbs has it: "He that rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city" ([Proverbs 16:32](http://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=Proverbs+16:32&t1=en_nas))

“For they shall inherit the earth”. It is difficult to interpret. I have not found a satisfactory explanation. This is my own attempt. Inheritance is something I receive not because I earn it. It is something given to me through a benefactor because of my relationship with the benefactor.

(Click) Col 1:12 says, “And giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the **inheritance** of his holy people in the kingdom of light”

Because of our relationship to God as His children we are to inherit the earth which is the new Heaven and Earth. However, today we are sharing the inheritance of His holy people in the kingdom of light. God is the benefactor and it is up to him to give me what He wills. It is not up to me what I inherit. Therefore I need to receive my inheritance with gratefulness and with thanksgiving. I should not fight for what I think should be mine.

The man who gives himself into the complete control of God will gain this meekness which will indeed enable him to inherit the earth.

 Meek people actually are the strongest people in the world.

**How to be meek?** (Slide 10)

We are not born to be meek. It is particularly difficult when we live in an upside down world where the philosophy of survival for the fittest has gone deep into us.

We can learn from Moses. What did he do? Face down before God. Moses learned meekness when he was 40 days in the presence of the holy God on Mount Sinai. He knew who to be angry with and was angry for the right amount of time, and then prayed for their forgiveness. Each time when he was challenged, he was face down before God. He learned what appropriate anger is and learned to be quiet when anger was inappropriate. He had the Spirit of Jesus in him. Jesus is the meekest person ever lived and (Click) ***Meekness makes us like Jesus*.** Jesus drank the cup of the wrath of God on all human sin at the cross, and he was led to the cross as a meek person.

We are not by nature a meek person, we need God’s help. When we are challenged, instead of expressing anger and irritation, do we remember to face down before Jesus, pleading with Him to help us embrace the way of the cross?

If our whole focus is on protecting our rights, getting feisty with people who infringe those rights, burning with irritation and anger every time when criticized, we would live a heavy burden life. Because there will be no shortage of those kind of people doing those things to you. There will be many more situations like that in our work life and in our family encounters, in our spousal relationships.

If our constant orientation is to protect our rights, it is going to be a very heavy burden life. That’s why Jesus is saying to you and me today, (Click) “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matt 11:28-29)

Jesus is asking you: “Do you want to live a life like that?” Or you “Learn to be meek and find rest!” (Click) The choice is yours.

***DISCUSSION QUESTIONS***

1. **Meekness is: Controlled expression of anger**
2. Is your anger with the right people, flowing out of a zeal for God’s honor, and is it for the right amount of time?
3. In what situations and with whom, do you need to move beyond righteous anger to plead God’s grace for them?
4. **Meekness is: Power under control:**
5. With whom and in what situations do you need to be less assertive, aggressive and demanding, and instead hold your rights loosely, trusting in God to protect your rights as he sees fit?
6. **Meekness is: Self-control when criticized**
7. What is your most common response to criticism? How might that change if you really believed that God would defend you?
8. What is the kernel of truth in any recent criticism that you may have received?
9. Are you able to be free from the desire for defense and retaliation?