

## Beatitudes 3: IT'S ALL ABOUT GENTLENESS

Matthew 5:1-6, Psalm 37:1-11 [MW17-23]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 06 August 2017

Cartoon [slide 1]

At first glance this week's beatitude is a bit of a relief!

- relief, refreshment, a change from the challenging, head-on confrontation the humbling, uncomfortable places of the past two weeks
- at first glance that is

Perhaps it is okay if you read a translation along the lines of the CEV: [slide 2]

*God blesses those people who are humble. The earth will belong to them!*

People who are “humble”?

- yup! nothing much to worry about there  
nothing to really have your conscience pricked by
- but then you read something like the NIV or NRSV [slide 3]  
translations which are closer to the original Greek:  
*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth*
- blessed are the *meek*? blessed are the **meek**?!  
what does that word mean exactly?  
turns out there are lots of words listed under meek in the dictionary  
here are just a few: [slide 4]  
compliant, acquiescent, humble, deferential, timid, unprotesting, unresisting,  
quiet, mild, gentle, docile, lamblike, shy, unassuming, self-effacing

Sound good? Something to strive after?

- so would you be okay with being described as “meek”?  
how would you respond if someone called you “meek”??? [slide 5]
- hands up all those who have no problem being thought of as meek  
put your hands half way if you are not so sure!

Do you remember that Sunday school song? Have you ever heard it?

- the one that contains the phrase: “gentle Jesus meek and mild”  
not an image of Jesus that seems wildly appealing
- not the kind of Jesus we are most happy with  
seems to conjure up the picture of a weak, effeminate Jesus
- compare that though with how good Kiwi blokes are described and thought of:  
tough, hard, big boys who don't cry, macho  
don't get pushed around, maybe push others around – just a bit

Yet listen to how Jesus describes himself in Matthew 11:29 [slide 6]

- this is when he is inviting burdened people to come to him and find help  
to take his yoke and learn from him  
“for I am *gentle* and *humble* in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”
- the Greek word for 'gentle and humble'  
is the exact same word Jesus uses in Matthew 5:5
- and anyway, when you take the whole picture  
how can you think of Jesus as a “wuss”, weak, pasty and lily-livered  
he endured a horrible painful death on the cross for goodness sake!

However the reality, the truth of the matter is that 'meek'

- is hardly one of the top ten words you would want on your character reference these days it carries with it the idea of spinelessness and subservience
- it paints a picture of a submissive, ineffective, snivelling creature

Yet it is also one of the great Greek ethical words

- carrying a sense of a person who is always angry at the right time or situation and never angry at the wrong time or situation
- it is also the word for an animal which has been trained to obey the word of command and learned to accept control
- in this case the blessing is in being a "God-controlled" person complete self-control is beyond our human capacity but in accepting the control of God there is perfect freedom and peace

The Greek word usually translated as 'meek' or 'humble' also encompasses another aspect

- which is linked with big-heartedness and true humility for without humility a person cannot learn or improve or grow the first step in this is the recognition of our own ignorance
- a great teacher once said of some of his pupils: they would no doubt be excellent students if they were not already convinced of their own knowledge
- this word includes the realisation that we are weak and have a need for God being conscious that we are the creature and God is the Creator
- it describes the acceptance of the necessity to learn and to be forgiven it describes our only proper attitude to God

It is precisely this "meekness" says Jesus, which will inherit the earth

- it is a fact of history that it has always been those with this gift of self-control people with their passions, instincts and impulses under discipline who have been great
- Moses was a great leader and law-giver; a man of character and passion certainly no spineless wimp [slide 7]  
Numbers 12:3 says this  
*Now the man Moses was very meek, more so than anyone on the face of the earth*
- and Proverbs 16:32 records:  
*one whose temper is controlled is better than one who captures a city*

It seems to me there is something in being meek, humble, under control, showing grace

- someone like this is more likely to command respect and be a person others flock to follow
- such a one will get the best out of people allow them to share their talents and work together
- it just makes such obvious sense that a person with this attitude will be so much more successful and is far more likely to be happy than someone who is loud, aggressive, pushy, showy, always up front

In this week's Bible Study John Stott writes: [slide 8]

The godless may boast and throw their weight about, yet real possession eludes their grasp. The meek, on the other hand, although they may be deprived and disenfranchised by the world, yet because they know what it is to live and reign with Christ, can enjoy and even "possess" the earth, which belongs to Christ. Then when Christ returns there will be a "new heaven and a new earth" for them to inherit.

History is full of leaders who have been undone

- because they have been the exact opposite of Matthew 5:5  
leaders who have not listened to others, were convinced they alone knew best, were arrogant, stubborn, their tempers and appetites far from under control
- leaders like Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Hitler (maybe even Donald Trump?)  
there are unfortunately so many contemporary leaders who have suffered the same fate

It is clear that this one Greek word means far, far more than the English word “meek”

- Bible scholar William Barclay says:  
it is, in fact, clear that there is no one English word which will translate it although perhaps the word “gentle” comes nearest to it

Our theme this week is: “It's all about gentleness”

- in his translation of the New Testament Barclay has this for Matthew 5:5 [slide 9]  
*O the bliss of those whose strength is in their gentleness,  
for they shall enter into possession of the earth*

So let me share with you something about gentleness from a Pastor from small-town USA, Philip Gulley in his book *Hometown Tales*. He reflects on 'gentleness' from his own life experience ... [slide 10]

When I was nine, my parents bought a house on the south edge of town on the road to the landfill. A family's station in life could be measured by its proximity to the dump. We were solid middle class and therefore lived beyond most of the dump's stench. Two or three days a month we could smell it, just enough to remind us that we were rich enough to avoid the smell most of the time but not wealthy enough to escape it altogether.

Down the road from us, dumpward, lived an old woman and two children. No man. Just that woman and those two kids in a dirty white house down a long, gravel thread of a lane. Where house ended and dump began was barely discernible.

The boy would walk up the road to play with us. When children play, a natural pecking order evolves—an overdog and an underdog. He was the underdog, and we overdogs pointed our barbed arrows of meanness his way. He responded as a cornered dog would, with snarls and bites and lunges, which served to confirm our judgment of him — wild kid, out of control, dump boy.

When things heated up, powerful and potent weapons were unsheathed: “You better leave me alone, or my dad will get you!” This was a weapon he seemed unable to counter. No elevated retort, no “Oh, yeah? Well I'll get my dad, and he'll beat up your dad!” Just silence, a turning away, and a walking dumpward.

I don't remember now how the knowledge came to us, but come to us it did — that his father and mother had been killed and the old woman in the dirty white house was his grandma. I do remember that it had no effect on us; the meanness continued. Despite popular thinking, gentleness is not something we are born with; it is something we are taught, and we had not yet learned it.

The lesson came during a basketball game when an elbow was thrown and dump boy charged my brother . . . fists flying, rage brimming, right at my brother, who lifted not a hand to defend himself. My brother, who just the week before had chased dump boy back home and hurled rocks, now stood stone-still while dump boy battered him. It was an unleashing of fury such as I had never seen, dump boy lashing out at every pain that had ever come his way: the midnight visit of a sheriff's chaplain who explained that Mommy and Daddy wouldn't be coming home, the taunts of children who punished him for his grandma's house, the arrows of meanness which pierce the air and then the soul. Fury raining down.

“Hit him, hit him!” we yelled at my brother. But he raised not a hand, and after a time dump boy tired of the easy kill and went home. We assailed my brother with questions, demanding an explanation for his timidity in battle. He mumbled something about not being able to hit a boy who had lost his parents, that he’d been hit enough as it was.

I did not understand then. And still I struggle with its meaning — how gentleness is never real until fury is aimed our way, how I can be gentle with my infant son but think ill of the eight-item man in the seven-item line at the grocery store. Such little acts turn our hearts from gentleness.

Jesus knew this, knew it not only in his head, but in his heart — that gentleness, of all the fruits, is the hardest to cultivate. How strong our tendency to return the blow, to hurl the rock, to call the name. Until our hearts are likewise broken. Why is it that gentleness must necessarily spring from rocky soil, from hardship, from ground sowed with tears?

One day, I prayed to the Lord to teach me gentleness and sat about, waiting for good to happen. Instead, God showed me sorrow, and thus began my education.

Dump boy moved away the next year. I haven’t seen him since. Don’t even know if he’s alive. I hope his life is sweet, that he married well, that tiny children crowd his lap and call him sweeter names than we did. [*Hometown Tales* by Philip Gulley p.182-185]

Another way of highlighting what Jesus said so very simply

- *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth*  
very simple words which encompass so much
- our usual English translations cannot do Jesus' words justice  
so William Barclay in his commentary  
concludes with this version of Matthew 5:5 [slide 11]

O the bliss of the man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time; who has every instinct, impulse, and passion under control because he himself is God-controlled, who has the humility to realise his own ignorance and his own weakness, for such a man is king among men!

No one can lead others until they have mastered themselves

- and no one can serve others until they have subjected themselves  
the person who gives themselves into the complete control of God  
will gain this “meekness”, this “gentleness”
- and it is this quality which will enable them to inherit the earth  
to enjoy and share the fullest blessings which life can bring

My “take home thought” this week

- my suggestion for our “homework”  
is to work on being filled with this quality of “gentleness” [slide 12]
- easy to say I know, and much, much harder to do  
however I encourage you to be filled with this special quality of gentleness  
that it might just 'pour out' in your life
- work on how you react to situations that poke you, disturb you, shake you up  
on how you react when people are mean, nasty, confronting
- so that what instantly spills out is grace and compassion  
mercy, acceptance, kindness ...

Let us pray ...