

THE MIGHTY MEEK

MATTHEW 5:5

What does it mean to be great? How does a person display that greatness?

In Kenya, as in most African countries, the president does many things to establish and demonstrate his power and greatness. When he comes into office he changes the name of the main avenue or boulevard in nearly every city. They now bear his name. The main national holiday bears his name as well—it's his birthday. All of the currency—every note and every coin—has his image on it.

Furthermore, every business and institution is required to hang his picture in a prominent place on the wall, so that when you enter any public building in the country, from the biggest to the smallest, his picture is the first thing you see. That picture and its proper placement is mandatory. If you do not have a picture of him hanging in the entrance of your building you can be arrested.

The reason he does all these things is because he wants every person to realize that, ultimately, he is the Bwana Mkubwa—the Big Man. He is the most important person in the country, and he is in charge...of everything.

Earlier we read a passage in John 13 about Jesus washing His disciples' feet. That story, however, is not *primarily* about foot washing, it's primarily about the display of *true* greatness. It follows a very intentional statement. Verse 3 says, "Jesus knew that the Father had put *all* things under his power." Jesus was not merely the leader of a movement or even a religion. The text is very clear. He is in charge of *everything*. He has been given *all* power—*all* authority. And to demonstrate that power and authority what does He do?

I love how one paraphrase puts it: "*Jesus knew that the Father had put him in complete charge of everything; that he came from God and was on his way back to God. So he got up from the supper table, took off his robe, and put on an apron*" (*The Message*).

Did you notice the irony? Jesus, knowing He was in charge of everything, put on an apron, and began to do one of the most demeaning tasks in that day and age.

He didn't try to prove to everyone how great He was; He didn't demand that everyone serve Him; He didn't try to make sure that He got the recognition that was due Him. *He* knew that He was in charge of everything, that He was the greatest, most powerful Person in the universe. And He displayed His power and greatness by taking on the role of a slave. The most important person in the universe put Himself in the position of a "nobody".

Why? For one thing, He was reconstructing our concept of true greatness, showing us that greatness in the kingdom of God is displayed in an altogether different manner than how the world displays it. But He was also *modeling* how that greatness is demonstrated.

Later in the passage He said, *¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you*" (13:14-15).

He also talked about it in the Sermon on the Mount, where He describes a quality possessed by those who are great in the eyes of God. **Matthew 5:1-4.** *Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."*

Just before Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount we are told that Jesus went

throughout Galilee proclaiming “the gospel of the kingdom” (4:23). This sermon is an example of that “gospel”. And in this, His introduction, Jesus describes the attitudes of people who have encountered the kingdom and have become kingdom people. Meekness is the third of eight attitudes. And, as with the first two, it goes against who and what we are in our natural state.

The word “meek” is kind of a derogatory term in our culture. Meek rhymes with weak, and most people think the words are synonyms. We equate meekness with passivity or indecision; a lack of confidence or assertiveness. A meek person is a pushover, a doormat, a “yes” man, so we think.

Meekness didn’t have quite the pejorative connotations in the first century, but it was certainly not a quality that people aspired to have. The Jews associated meekness with subservience. It was what the Roman Empire insisted they be, not what they wanted to be, and so most Jews were repulsed by the concept of meekness.

Likewise, Greeks disdained meekness because they could not disassociate it with servanthood—which, for them, was a curse. A servant was something you tried very hard *not* to be. A servant was a “nobody”. A servant had no rights, no power, and no freedom.

So why would Jesus say that the meek are blessed, and that they will inherit the earth?

Don’t forget that the beatitudes are the qualities of individuals whose eyes have been opened to see the truth—the truth about themselves, the truth about the world, the truth about who they are in relation to God and ultimate reality. We discovered that *poor in spirit* is the attitude of someone who is confronted with the truth that he is spiritually bankrupt, and that she is in a precarious predicament before a holy God in her natural state. That she falls way short of His glory, that he hasn’t any moral or spiritual virtue in herself that would commend him to God and win His favor, and that there is nothing he or she can do that would make them worthy of His approval.

But the reason they are blessed is because it’s only when they come to that truthful understanding—the realization that their need is not partial but total, that they can enter the kingdom of heaven.

Those who *mourn* not only see themselves for who and what they are, they see the *world* as God sees it, and it breaks their heart. Not that there are not good or beautiful things in the world. But they realize that below the surface, when you peel back the veneer, you see a world that is suffering from sin’s devastating effects, a world full of people who are by nature victims of sin’s curse and Satan’s dominion.

Kingdom people look at this, not with self-righteous disgust or indignation, but with genuine sorrow. Not just because people’s lives are so messed up and there’s so much pain and suffering in the world as the result of sin, but because they know the destiny of those who reject God and His provision, and are stricken with grief by what they know.

That brings us to **verse 5**. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*”

Whereas the poor in spirit see themselves as God sees them, and those who mourn see the world as God sees it, the meek see *people* as God sees them. They see people as persons made in the image of God and precious to Him—so precious that He would send His Son into this world to rescue them from their precarious predicament so that they could become His very own children.

Meekness, then, is the attitude of one who looks beyond the sinfulness and selfishness inherent in a person, to what that person could become if Christ were to get ahold of him/her. It means coming alongside and helping him/her become everything God intended for them

to be.

Did you know that the word “friend” can be traced back to the word “meek?” And the idea, in particular, is that this friend is one who comes alongside a person who needs support or assistance.

Goats were considered *meek* in Jesus’ day because the Greeks and Romans used them to calm their thoroughbred horses. Before a race those horses tended to get skittish, and in order to counteract that tendency each horse came into the stadium accompanied by its own personal goat—a goat that would have a calming influence on the horse. That’s where the phrase, “you got my goat” comes from.

“Meekness” is coming alongside persons, putting their needs and interests first, and helping them become what God intended them to be. That’s what Jesus did when He washed the disciples’ feet. That’s what Jesus did when He went to the cross and died for our sins in our place. That’s what Paul was talking about when he said to the Philippians, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.”*⁴ *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*⁵ *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...* (2:3-5).

That’s meekness! It is the quality of putting others first, because you see them as God sees them, and want what God wants for them. Jesus was meek, and those who belong to Him are also meek. And their meekness makes them VIP’s in God’s kingdom. Jesus Himself said as much.

On one occasion Jesus and His disciples were walking along the road and some of the disciples were quarreling with each other, but apparently thought Jesus didn’t notice or couldn’t hear them. Later, *[Jesus] asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?”*³⁴ *But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.*³⁵ *Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:33-35).*

That’s the ethic of the kingdom, and it’s called meekness. Those who have become kingdom people are meek, just like their King.

But how does one become meek? Does it happen by trying real hard to be meek? Does it happen by taking every opportunity to wash people’s feet, or by doing other tasks that servants do?

You’ve probably noticed by now that the beatitudes are declarations. Jesus declared, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”* He has merely told us that people with these attitudes are blessed, and what their ultimate reward is for having these attitudes. He has *not* told us *how* we get these attitudes. And if you look for something later in the sermon about how you get these attitudes you won’t find it.

I believe Jesus does this (or doesn’t do this) on purpose. In this sermon Jesus does not tell His audience how they can obtain these attitudes or apply the ethics of the kingdom because He is intentionally creating a crisis in their hearts and minds. By describing kingdom attitudes and kingdom ethics He is raising the bar to a level that is humanly impossible to attain. All of the things He describes go against our nature. We are *not* what He describes, nor can we obtain what He describes except by divine enablement. There needs to be a radical change in our nature. We actually need a *new* nature.

Which is exactly what Jesus told Nicodemus. We read in John 3, *Now there was a*

man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

³ In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

⁴ “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”

⁵ Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (3:1-6).

Jesus makes it clear: You enter the kingdom of God and become a kingdom person by being born again, which is an activity the Holy Spirit does in a person. He makes us new and different people, with a new nature and new capabilities. And because that new nature is His nature, we are capable of viewing other people and treating other people like Jesus did. With love and compassion and humility. We are able to be meek.

You will hear me say all throughout our study of the Sermon on the Mount that if you want to be the kind of person that Jesus describes you need to be born again. If you try to be meek without being born again you will fail, because it is not a human characteristic. It is a fruit of the Spirit, who lives inside someone who has been born again.

I want to talk for a few minutes about what this meekness looks like for those who have been born again. I want to mention two things.

1. Since “the meek” are citizens of Christ’s kingdom, they are not concerned with their position or esteem in this world. This world is not our home. We’re aliens here. We have given up our earthly rights, our selfish ambitions, and our fleshly desires. Our identity, our role, our priorities, our ambitions come from King Jesus. Therefore, our position, reputation, and status in this world mean very little.

So meek people have no interest in promoting themselves or proving themselves or getting the upper hand. Likewise, popularity is of no concern. Because the opinions of the world are of no consequence to the kingdom person. What matters is what the King thinks. And since this world is passing away, and since this world has precious little to offer in light of the kingdom, they live accordingly.

Consequently, the meek may or may not be well thought of by others, but either way they are content. If people do think highly of them, they don’t get overly excited. In fact, they view the esteem of the world somewhat suspiciously. Because if the world hated their King, Jesus, then why should the world love them?

On the other hand, if they are maligned or criticized or slandered they don’t get overly excited by that either. They certainly don’t waste their time and energy trying to get vindication. They don’t strike back with cutting remarks of their own. They don’t go on the defensive. Because it doesn’t matter how they are regarded by the world. It only matters what Jesus thinks.

I’d like you to think of your situation at work, school, or home, wherever it is that you rub shoulders with people. Are you concerned about what they think of you? Please understand that if you are a child of the kingdom you don’t have to try to prove yourself. You are already great in the eyes of the only One whose opinion really matters. You are esteemed by the King of kings.

2. That brings me to the second characteristic of a meek person. Since “the meek”

are citizens of Christ's kingdom, they want to devote their lives to serving others. Meekness is the desire to elevate others without any conditions and without any expectation of recognition or reward in this life.

There are a lot of people who serve—who do a lot of good things—but who do it for some personal gain or glory. Either to be told how wonderful they are, or to be liked or applauded or patted on the back. Some people do good things for others because it makes *them* feel good.

That's not meekness. Meekness is coming alongside persons, putting their needs and interests first, and helping them become what God intended them to be. A meek person doesn't care if he/she is noticed, or what he/she can get out of it.

When I was a small child I was fascinated by escalators. Occasionally we would get to go to one of the department stores in Sacramento and go to the little boys' section on the second floor. And we got to ride on those mysterious, moving stairs. I never could figure them out. They seemingly came out of the floor from nowhere, carried a person to a higher level, and then quietly disappeared.

That's a description of meekness. Meek people are holy escalators. They elevate other people to positions of honor and esteem. They carry them to new heights in their potential, make sure they are on solid ground, and then quietly disappear.

Now, how do you stand in relation to this text? It's one thing to define meekness and describe what meek people do. It's quite another to actually be a meek person. So I'd like you to think about your relationships—especially those relationships with people you know the best. Spouses, siblings, family members, fellow workers, friends at school, friends at church. I'd like you to think about the people you interact with on a regular basis. How do you treat them? How would they describe you?

I'm not asking if you're nice or you're easy to get along with or if people like being around you. I'm asking if you are making a positive contribution to their lives that helps them become better persons.

Am I putting my wife's interests ahead of mine, not just when things are going well but when we're having a difference of opinion? Am I compassionate and considerate of that person driving in front of me who's going 30 in a 45 MPH zone? Am I teachable when someone gets me aside and says, "I've got a bone to pick with you?"

It's in those kinds of situations that my true character is revealed.

That's why we must remember that true meekness is not something we can develop or contrive through our own efforts. It is an unnatural quality. It requires divine enablement. It is a fruit of the Spirit.

If we want it, we must be born again. And even after we are born again we must let the Spirit of God develop it in our lives and display it through us. We must continually depend on Him to make us meek. We must yield to His control and pay attention to His promptings.

When we lived in Nairobi I had a friend named Sukraj who was a converted Sikh. He embraced the Lord Jesus when he was in High School while living in Nairobi but was forced to practice his faith quietly because of fear of persecution by his family. After graduation he went on to a University in the UK where he grew tremendously in his faith. While there, he became engaged to the daughter of the pastor of his church.

Shortly after his graduation his mother visited him in England and discovered, to her horror, that Sukraj had cut his hair and was no longer wearing the turban that was so essential to the Sikh religion.

In three days she and her family had cleared out his apartment, moved him back to Nairobi whereupon they said, “This is your new life. England is dead; your Christian Faith is dead; your fiancée is dead. Your life is beginning here again. We will get you a job, buy you a car, and find a girl for you to marry.”

Sukraj came to our house after his family had done this. You would think he would have been angry, resentful, and feeling sorry for himself. You might assume that he was coming to ask me to help him plot a way to get back to England and the life and girl he loved.

Instead, he sat in our chair and wept, and with tears streaming down his face he said to me, “I’ve come to ask if you would pray with me for my parents and my family. I don’t want to hurt them, but they’re blind. They’re victims of Satan’s lies. Would you pray with me and ask God to help them see the light?”

I said, “Sure. But what are you going to do?”

He said, “I’m going stay and live with my parents and serve them so that perhaps they will see Jesus in me and come to know him.”

I said, “Yeah, but what about *your* life. What about your fiancée? What about your future?”

He looked at me a little puzzled as if I was a bit daft. Then he said, “Oh, I’ve been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I now live I live by faith in the One who loves me and gave Himself for me. My life is in His hands. My fiancée, my future, is in His hands.”

Right then and there I had a glimpse of true greatness. Maybe not greatness in the world’s eyes. But greatness, for sure, in the eyes of God. Those who put others first are the VIP’s of the kingdom, and they will inherit the earth.

“The Mighty Meek” **Matthew 5:5**

Main Idea: Those who put others first are the VIP’s of the kingdom.

Introduction: What does it mean to be “great”?

“Blessed are the meek”

The Jewish concept of meekness

The Greek concept of meekness

Why meekness is the kingdom ethic
Seeing people as God sees them

Treating people accordingly

What is meekness?

Meekness is _____ others _____, even before _____

What does meekness look like?

Since “the meek” are citizens of Christ’s kingdom:

- They are not concerned with their _____ or _____ in this world
- They want to _____ their lives to _____ others

They shall inherit the earth

The kingdom on earth when Jesus rules and reigns

Ruling and reigning with Jesus

Family Life Groups

Matthew 5:5

Main Idea: Those who put others first are the VIP's of the kingdom.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

1) Meekness is not a natural quality. It is a “kingdom” attitude (called a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:25), possessed by those who have become kingdom people. How do you become a kingdom person? (How do you have access to the Spirit's fruit?) Look at John 3:1-8.

2) How do you become *meek*? Is meekness something you “determine” and “try” to become, or is there some other way?

3) How do you know if you are meek? What are some evidences of true meekness?