

BLESSED ARE THOSE THAT CONTROL THEIR REACTIONS

A truck driver was sitting in the corner of a roadside diner eating his dinner. A motorcycle gang walked in and started making trouble. One of the bikers walked over to him, picked up the plate and started eating his fries. Another biker took his coke and poured it in his lap. The truck driver didn't do anything. He just got up, paid his bill and walked out. The gang leader looked over to the waitress and said, "Not much of a man is he?" The bartender said, "Not much of a truck driver either. He just ran over twelve motorcycles going out of here!"

Today we are continuing our series called Blessed and we come to the third statement that Jesus makes;

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Meekness is a misunderstood word today. The word meek has lost its meaning. Today it is sometimes used as a slur. If you call a man meek, he'd be insulted. You don't put it on your resume. What do you think of when you think of meek? Meekness is not weakness. In this beatitude, Jesus is really just repeating Psalm 37:7-11 which says;

Psalms 37:7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. 8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret--it leads only to evil. 9 For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. 10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. 11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.

The Greek word for meek referred to a wild horse tamed or medicine that could tame a fever. Meekness means strength under control. It says in verse 8 to refrain from anger, turn from wrath and not to fret. Basically, what this verse says is, "Blessed are those who don't over react to people. Blessed are those that control their reactions."

Here are 3 ways to work on your reactions:

1. When people DISAGREE with you

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

This proverb talks about a gentle answer. In other words, it assumes that harsh words are spoken before this. When people speak against you it requires a choice. You choose how you will respond.

One of the things that I have learned as a pastor is that you cannot please all the people all the time. You can't please everyone. If you try, the minute you get crowd A satisfied then crowd B will be upset. As a leader you spend your time either in the penthouse or in the outhouse. One minute you're the hero, the next minute you're the zero.

The test of maturity is how do you handle disagreeable people, people who irritate you, people who like to contradict you, people who like to get in arguments, like to quarrel with you. You have three alternatives: You can retreat in fear, you can attack in anger, or you can respond in love.

Meekness is not compromising your convictions. It is not being passive, giving in, always letting the other person have their own way. That's not meekness, it's weakness.

It is also not reacting in anger, if someone disagrees with you. Some people are verbal assassins. They explode when provoked. Everything is a win/lose situation.

You never fight a battle where winning doesn't make any difference. Don't get into an argument over something that doesn't matter anyway -- Gen. George S. Patton

James 3:16-17 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

The way to handle words spoken against you is to be pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and sincere. This means strength under control. It is not compromising your convictions. It is simply showing love.

In the 1800s, Booker T Washington was a renowned educator, author and leader in the African American community. At one point he served as president of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. One day he was walking in an exclusive section of town when he was stopped by a wealthy white woman. Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. Because he had no pressing business at the moment, Professor Washington smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do the humble chore she had requested. When he was finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace and left. A little girl recognized him and later revealed his identity to the lady.

The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute and apologized profusely. "It's perfectly all right, Madam," he replied. "Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend." She shook his hand warmly and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart. Not long afterward she showed her admiration by persuading some wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute.

Booker T. Washington would later write "I will never allow another man to control or ruin my life by making me hate him."

The correct way to respond to criticism is to respond in love – with a gentle answer. We see in the bible that meekness is a qualification for spiritual leadership;

2 Timothy 2:24-25 And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,

A sign of spiritual maturity is that you do not argue with people. You gently instruct in love and hope that God will give a change of heart. In the essentials we have unity; in the nonessentials we have liberty; in all things we have charity. That means we are a community of grace. We allow for diversity in the body of Christ.

2. When people CORRECT you

Meekness is a teachable spirit. Meek people are eager to learn. Meek people don't pretend they know it all. They know they don't know it all and they don't try to pretend they know it all.

James 1:19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry

This tells us how to control our temper. If you do the first two, the third is automatic. If you're quick to listen, and slow to speak, then you will be slow to anger. But if you're slow to listen and quick to speak, you'll be quick to anger. This means you are teachable.

The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather, he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God has declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is, in the sight of God, more important than angels. ... He knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him and he has stopped caring about it. -- A. W. Tozer

Back in 2002 there was an armed robber arrested named Dennis Lee Curtis. In his wallet the police found a paper on which was written the following personal code: "I will not kill anyone, unless I have to. I will take only cash and food stamps - no checks. I will rob only at night and not wear a mask. I will not rob mini-marts. If I get chased on foot, I will get away. If I get chased by a vehicle, I will not put the lives of civilians on the line. I will rob only 7 months of the year." One author wrote about Dennis Lee Curtis that, "this thief had a sense of morality, but it was flawed. His focus was only on the ways that he was trying to act honorably, and that kept him from seeing the ways in which he could have acted even more honorably. Mr. Curtis did not understand that when he stood before the court, he would not be judged by the standards he had set for himself, but by the laws of the state.

Like that robber, all of us are often blind when it comes to certain areas of our lives. We have strengths, but we also have weaknesses that we often fail to see. That means we need to be teachable.

As a pastor, I try to be teachable. Over the last several years our pastoral staff has visited a number of other churches. The reason we do this is to learn. To allow iron to sharpen iron. We all need to always have the attitude that we have not yet arrived, that there is more to learn. This helps us to be open to correction.

Proverbs 13:18 He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored.

I once saw a sign that said "I'd rather change my mind and succeed than have my own way and fail."

Control your reactions when people disagree with you and when they correct you. But lastly;

3. When people HURT you

Romans 12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

In this life you will be hurt by other people. The question is, how will you respond to it? What is your normal reaction when people hurt you intentionally?

Victor Frankl, the famous psychiatrist, went through Auchwitz. He said, "They took my clothes, my wife, my kids, my wedding ring. I stood naked before the SS and I realized they can take everything in my life but they cannot take my freedom to choose how I will respond to them." That is a freedom you will always have. How do I react? How do I choose to react to those people who hurt me?

I know for most people, the first instinct is to retaliate. If someone takes a swing at you, then you take a swing at them. That is normal. Whenever I teach premarital counselling I teach couples how to have a fair fight. That means that you do not accuse. You do not lay blame. You avoid saying that you "always" do this or you "never" listen. Instead, you talk about yourself and your own feelings "when this happened, this is how I felt..." Instead of attacking your spouse you take the focus off the other person and onto yourself. It is choosing not to strike back.

Numbers 12:1-4 Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. 2 Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this. 3 (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) 4 At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them came out.

In this story, Moses is attacked. He is criticized for his choice of a wife. When he was criticized and insulted he did not defend himself. He let God take care of it. It was God that rose to his defence.

Meekness is the ability to handle a hurt without retaliating. It is acting without reacting.

Proverbs 16:32 Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.

What determines your emotions? Can you control your own emotions or does somebody else? Your emotions are either controlled by circumstances or by character. It's your choice.

Blessed are the people who can control their reactions.

In Kuwait we had friends called the Brookleys who had a large golden retriever named Misty. One of my daughters loved playing with their dog. She would chase it around the house. Poor Misty just sat there and took it. She could have knocked her over or eaten her in one bite, but she was patient and showed great restraint. That dog showed more meekness than I do sometimes.

This is a hard message for me to preach today because, quite honestly, I struggle in this area. Just ask my wife and kids. There will be times we are driving and someone will cut me off and I will yell at the driver. This is an area that I need to grow in.

As you study the character traits described in the Beatitudes, you can't help but realize one thing; these qualities are by no means natural to the human spirit. They are very foreign. Poverty of spirit, handling a broken heart, and meekness does not come to us naturally. These are things that must be learned. They are also all things that require us to trust in God.

The secret of controlling your reaction is letting God's Spirit fill your life moment by moment. I do not have all the answers, but I know from my own life that the times I am closest to God are also the times I am most patient and teachable. God is able to transform our lives. To replace bad habits with healthy ones.

Blessed are those that control their reactions. Meekness is power controlled by love. When Jesus was on the cross all the power of heaven was at His disposal. He could have called ten thousand angels. He could have blown up the world. He didn't. It was power controlled by love.

The meek is like the mango tree. All its branches hang with fruit. Passer-by come and assails it with stones and sticks. It responds by dropping the fruit at every blow, at the feet of those who assail it. At the close of the season, it stands scarred and battered, its leaves torn off, its branches broken. Come the next year, it continues to bear fruit - more fruits than the previous year. That is meekness. It does not try to conserve its self-esteem. It bears fruit, and blesses even those who are not deserving of it.

There is no greater opportunity to influence our fellowman for Christ than to respond with love when we have been unmistakably wronged. Then the difference between Christian love and the values of the world are most brilliantly evident. -- James C. Dobson

Robert Moffatt, missionary to savage tribes of South Africa, translated the Bible into the native language of the people and taught the people to read. He watched the remarkable changes which the gospel brought in the lives of these formerly fierce warriors. He saw them show mercy and compassion to enemies and to the weak and helpless. One day a native with a dog on a leash came running up, "My best hunting dog is ruined, and it's your fault," the native said. Moffatt examined him, "I see nothing wrong." "But I know he is ruined. He ate some pages from the Bible you gave me." Moffatt laughed, "That won't hurt." "But it will," argued the native. "I have seen the Bible in the heart of man change him from a fierce warrior to a meek, peaceful neighbor. If it will do that to a man, I know that my dog will never again be fierce enough to be a good hunting dog."