

Barratt Ministries Challenge

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BLESSED ARE THE MEEK - The Beatitudes Part 3

by Maurice Barratt

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me: because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God” (Isaiah 61:1-2).

What is meekness? Who are the meek, who are given such a wonderful promise: “They shall inherit the earth”? We can gain some insight by firstly reminding ourselves that the beatitudes are progressive. That means you can’t be meek if you have no experience of poverty of spirit or mourning (the first two beatitudes). A proud, egotistical man can never be meek. He needs to see himself as he is. That humbling experience is an essential prerequisite for meekness. To be meek means to be submissive, teachable, “easily intreated” (James 3:17). It is often said that meekness is not weakness. It is less often explained why meekness is not weakness. Meekness is a strong quality, owned by men and women of character, for this reason: meekness is a choice. It is a decision. Allow me to illustrate from my own experience.

A Test Of Attitude

Many years ago I was driving back from a Bible study when a police car came up behind me and signalled me to pull in. To my amazement, the policeman got out shouting abusively and swearing. As he came near me I could smell alcohol on his breath. He was accusing me of having a bald tyre, although I could see nothing wrong with it. So I had to hand over my licence. I was absolutely furious! I stormed round to the police station and said I wanted to make a complaint. The officer to whom I told the story had only one reply for me: “My officers do not drink on duty”. He could not be persuaded otherwise; but I could not be dissuaded, and so he went off to get the complaint forms, taking an unreasonably long time about it, presumably in order to let me roast for a while and hopefully calm down. As I was waiting, my conscience started to bother me. I thought, “Why am I so keen to defend myself? If the tyre is bald, then the policeman was right to stop me, and if it wasn’t bald, why should I worry? In any case, as a Christian I am supposed to support the police and obey those in authority”.

So I made a decision, and when the officer returned (20 minutes later!) I told him I was dropping my complaint. A smug smile spread across his face. I knew exactly what he was thinking - that his tactics had got the better of me, that I was just another hot-head who needed to simmer down, and that I was bowing out in weakness under pressure. But it wasn’t weakness. I didn’t give in to pressure. I made a decision to be submissive, knowing that it would look like weakness and humiliating defeat.

And I had to let the officer believe that it was weakness. Meekness means that you don't defend yourself or try to justify yourself.

But now I was left with a problem - I had to go to court and deal with the charge of with a bald tyre, and it seemed impossible for me to prove my case. Even if I was to take the tyre off the car and present it to the court as evidence, how could I prove that it was the same tyre as was on my car when I was pulled up? I could see no possible answer, so I sent off my licence with a "guilty" plea, and waited for the court summons. And a miracle happened - no court summons ever came! I've never heard anything of it since. Two years later, I wrote off to DVLC for a duplicate licence, and they sent me one - with no record of any conviction! If you are familiar with the legal situation, you will know that this is impossible! Court cases must be dealt with, and resolved one way or another. But God did the impossible for me. Why? I am in no doubt. It was because I made the decision to be meek. I made a choice that pleased God, and because I didn't try to justify myself or vindicate myself, God vindicated me Himself.

Facing The Choice

There are countless times when we face similar choices. It may be over the smallest, trifling issues. The desire to vindicate our own reputation, to justify and avenge ourselves, is a very strong element of our old nature. But in an age when the world is making us very conscious of our rights, telling us to be assertive and "look after Number One", as Christians we should take a completely different view - for Christians have no such "rights". We have responsibilities and privileges, we have grace and gifts from God, but what rights do we have as Christians? On the contrary, we are called to give up our rights. That's the law of the kingdom, and the way to blessing.

The beatitudes all promise blessing. In some translations, the word "blessed" is translated as "happy". But "blessed" does not really mean happy - how can you be happy, for instance, when you are mourning? It is much nearer to the truth to say that blessed means "God-favoured". As far as we are concerned, we will probably not feel blessed at all when we experience poverty of spirit, mourning, etc. But "blessed" is God's opinion of us, not our feelings about ourselves. Why then are we blessed, or favoured by God, when we are meek? Here are some good scriptural reasons why it's blessed to be meek.

1. Because God defends the meek

In Numbers chapter 12 we read that Moses had married an Ethiopian woman, and Aaron and Miriam (his elder brother and sister) spoke against him because of it, and tried to usurp his authority. "And they said, 'Hath the Lord indeed only spoken to Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us?' And the Lord heard it" (Numbers 12:2). Aaron and Miriam had a seemingly valid point - according to God's law, Moses should not have married a foreign wife. But we never read of God reprimanding Moses for this. On the other hand, God did take offence when Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses, even though they were older than him, and even though they seemed to be right. God came to Moses' defence very suddenly, calling the 3 of them to the tabernacle, and telling

them plainly that Moses was His choice, His friend, and that they should not have dared to speak to him like that. God's anger rose up against them, and Miriam was left with leprosy.

Why did God defend Moses, even though he had violated a commandment? The answer is in verse 3: "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." It seems from the scripture that Moses hardly had time to defend himself, even if he'd wanted to. God intervened and spoke up for him immediately. That's what God does for the meek. Look at Moses' attitude. Not only did he refuse to defend himself, he also refused to bear a grudge. Instead of adopting a "serves you right" attitude towards Miriam, Moses "cried unto the Lord, saying, 'Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee!'" (Numbers 12:13).

Wouldn't it be wonderful to rise to Moses' standard and become "the meekest man on earth"? I wonder who is the meekest man or woman on earth at the moment? The key is in whether we defend ourselves or not. In the family, in the church, at work, if we defend ourselves in great or small matters, we make God redundant - we stop Him from defending us. But if we refuse to defend, justify or vindicate ourselves, if we make the choice to back down and be silent, then God will be our defender and vindicator.

2. Because we are imitating Jesus

We have noted the similarity between the beatitudes and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and seen that both of these describe the character of Christ, the new nature. Meekness is in the fruit of the Spirit as well as the beatitudes. If we are to follow our Master, we have to make the decision to be meek, because He did. Isaiah prophesied it: "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus fulfilled it at his trial: "And the high priest arose, and said unto Him, 'Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against Thee?' But Jesus held His peace" (Matthew 26:62-63). "And when He was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto Him, 'Hearest thou not how many things they witness against Thee?' And He answered him to never a word: insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly" (Matthew 27:12-14).

Pilate was amazed, because for Jesus to refuse to reply or defend Himself was tantamount to accepting guilt. How much Jesus could have said, and done! Yet he made a choice to be meek. So God vindicated Him afterwards: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth" (Philippians 2:9-10). What a reward! And what a reward for all the meek who follow in His footsteps: "They shall inherit the earth"! This is a real, practical promise. It will happen!

3. Because we shall find rest for our souls.

"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" (Matthew 11:28). If you wonder why you don't have peace in your soul, why you

are stressed, why you seem to be surrounded by so many problems, could it be that you have never really obeyed this verse and taken Jesus' yoke upon you? It seems paradoxical that a yoke could be easy and light. But it's true.

Why is Jesus' burden light? Simply because there is no resistance. When we take upon ourselves Jesus' attitude of heart, the attitude of meekness, it changes the way we look at everything. We stop fighting and resisting and trying to defend ourselves and justify ourselves. It doesn't matter any more, because God will be our vindicator, either in this life or in the future. What does it matter if we become of no reputation like Jesus, or of a bad reputation - "the offscouring of the earth" - like Paul? Those accusations weren't a burden to Jesus or Paul, because they happily accepted it, knowing they had reward of their father in heaven. Their minds and hearts were at rest, because they offered no resistance. They put up no fight for themselves. They made the decision of meekness. You can, too, and you will find rest for your soul.

4. Because we are the bride

Peter admonishes wives to be subject to their husbands. He says they should not adorn themselves outwardly with beautiful hairstyles, jewellery or fine clothes, "but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3:4). I want to apply this scripture not to the relationship between husband and wife, but to the relationship of Christ to His Church. Men should never say that they don't understand women. Why? A very good reason - all Christians, men and women, are a part of the bride of Christ. We are all feminine in our relationship to Christ. We all have to be submissive and obedient. There is nothing chauvinistic about Peter's words. It merely reflects the relationship that we all have to our husband, Christ. An uncooperative, arrogant, self-opinionated, argumentative wife will not make a good marriage! We need to be meek to be the bride of Christ.

Meekness is an inward condition. It is a condition of the "hidden man of the heart". The outward appearance doesn't mean a thing. An outwardly beautiful person arrayed in fine clothes and jewels could be very virtuous, or very wicked. Likewise the outward trappings of Christianity - going to church, reading the Bible, saying all the right prayers, being fluent in Christian jargon - mean nothing in themselves; it is the inner attitude of the heart that decides whether a person is a real Christian or not. Do you have a "meek and quiet spirit" - whether you're a man or a woman? Are you submissive, teachable, easily intreated? Those are the qualities of the heart that Jesus looks for, and then He says, "You shall inherit the earth".

Meekness is an ongoing process

I have stressed that meekness is a choice, an active decision. But it would be a mistake to think that we can become meek in an instant just by making one decision. We can certainly make an instant decision, but we cannot instantly change our hearts. That takes time - usually a long time.

Moses was the meekest man on earth - but it was not always so. In Egypt, he had been brought up in Pharaoh's household. Pharaoh was proud, arrogant and implacable. Moses had been brought up in

that environment. He was probably just the same! He had to learn meekness, slowly, over 40 years in the desert, before God could use Him. In fact, Moses proved his arrogance, by trying to deliver Israel in the strength of his own flesh. (Read Exodus 2:11-15). Moses succeeded in delivering one Israelite and killing one Egyptian. But after he had learned meekness in the backside of the desert for 40 years, God used him to deliver a whole nation and wipe out the entire Egyptian army. When he killed the one Egyptian, he proved that he was actually weak, because he became afraid, and fled from Pharaoh. But when he became meek, he was able to boldly stand before Pharaoh and faithfully declare God's word: "Let My people go!" Weakness had turned into meekness, fear into boldness, because Moses was now trusting the living God, who says "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay".

It takes time to become meek. It takes the wilderness to knock the arrogance and pride out of us. Let us put ourselves into the hands of the living God and, decision by decision, choice by choice, learn to be meek, take Jesus' yoke upon us, learn to stop resisting and struggling and fighting to justify ourselves. If we can do that, God will justify us in the future, and say to us "Come, inherit the earth!"

Experiences from Life

by Joanna Barratt

Putting Down The Boxing Gloves

"We thank you for replying to our advertisement, but the response was so great that we are unable, at this time, to offer you an interview..." Although I was getting used to receiving these letters through the post the sick feeling in the pit of my stomach was still there. I needed a permanent job. After seven years of working for the church on a voluntary basis, and being housed for that period by a couple of the members, I now found myself in a flat on my own again. The fact that I had not worked in offices for the past seven years was not helping the situation, as technology had improved and advanced at a tremendous rate. In my last employment an electric typewriter proved that you were a worthy secretary, but now people were using electronic typewriters and word-processors. I knew that these inventions had been brought out to make the secretary's life easier, but my potential bosses were always reluctant to take on "inexperienced" employees.

For a while I found work through a temporary services bureau, but was always on the look out for a permanent position, as I needed the security of a regular income to enable me to pay the rent and bills etc. I found it quite amusing therefore to be assigned temporary work in a company where I had been refused even an interview, especially as the job I had applied for had not yet been filled, and that was the job I was assigned to do!

Progress At Last!

William Press and Leonard Fairclough, two big property development companies, had amalgamated to become AMEC Properties, and they were setting up a branch office in the middle of Manchester. Because the company was brand new, and there were only a few employees, my role was that of 'Girl Friday', which meant doing anything for everybody, and I loved every minute of it, from washing pots and brewing up to taking shorthand notes at board meetings. I found it challenging and exciting and had an overview of the whole of the company's dealings. I did my job well and it wasn't long before I was asked to stay as a permanent member of staff. By now a lot of other people had also been employed for specific jobs and we were all told there were prospects for promotion in the future as the company developed.

To be honest it wouldn't have mattered to me what post I held, because my priority was to bring in a regular wage to give me security, but as more staff came in on the ground level, I found that my own position was being promoted extremely rapidly until I became personal assistant to the Senior Surveyor. As the manager and his secretary, together with a few surveyors, had already been transferred from another branch of William Fairclough to set up this particular company of AMEC, it came as quite a surprise to me to realise that I had landed the highest job available to staff being recruited. My new job entitled me to a superb salary, plus a clothing allowance, as I would be in regular contact with clients and would be expected to dress with class so as to represent my company, which had world- wide repute.

The Trials Begin

Whilst setting up this company we had to work around builders' rubble as the premises had not yet been fully refurbished, and that meant that the secretaries and clerical staff all had to share a general office. I loved my job but found it very difficult to cope with the jealousies stirred up in the hearts of the people I was working with, and the girls in my office were particularly hurtful with the bitchy remarks that they made. My years of voluntary work for the church had a profound effect upon me and I no longer wanted to argue or retaliate to their provocation. Instead I tried to make peace, hoping that my kind words would turn away their wrath, which the bible instructed that I should do. But instead of appeasing them it seemed that my behaviour incensed them, and they saw the kindnesses that I tried to do for them as "creeping", and that I acted with "such innocence" when all the time I was covering up my "deceitful condescension!"

I was bemused by their accusations, but no matter what I did I couldn't convince them. Things went from bad to worse and I went through a particularly harrowing time when all the girls "sent me to Coventry" .I would have never believed that such a schoolgirl prank could hurt a grown woman so effectively. For days on end I was totally ignored; they would neither look at nor speak to me, and when it was absolutely essential that they communicated they would leave curt notes on my desk. I

felt totally alone and unwanted as they laughed, joked and ridiculed over my head. Although I loved the job I hated the working environment. I desperately wanted to leave, but I had already experienced how hard it would be to find a permanent position with a stable income. I knew God had allowed this trial for some reason, and although I tried hard to put on a brave face my heart was crying out in tears to God as I asked Him for help.

God's Answer

Although my boss asked me what the problem was, I hadn't known him for very long and so didn't feel confident enough to share my feelings. Fortunately, he took the situation into his own hands, and within a matter of days my desk and typewriter had been removed from the general office and put into his own. I was then told that from now on I would be working in his office - something which was totally unheard of! The girls in the general office were infuriated by this action, but it was a tremendous blessing for me to be away from their cynical attitudes. I felt like a maiden being rescued by the knight in shining armour, and, under his protection, I became more and more involved in my job and my potential seemed boundless. Our working relationship could not have been better, and I often felt as though I knew the job so well that I was literally an extension of my boss.

Patience Rewarded

As the months passed, God began to work, and I could see my patience paying off as one by one, my enemies began to leave, and replacements were found to fill their positions. By this time all the refurbishments to our offices were completed and we were rehoused. I was placed in an office next to my boss which was quite apart from everyone else. Sometime later the existing manager left and a new one came in and, after a week of working in the department, made a request to our head office in London that I be moved from my present position to work as his personal assistant on the grounds that I knew the job so well. My boss later jubilantly informed me that this request had been overruled by the Managing Director, who regularly made visits to our Manchester branch, because he had recognised our excellent team work and was very reluctant to break it up. This type of loyalty from bosses was totally alien to me, and as I viewed my situation I was constantly amazed to see how God had removed all my enemies and placed allies alongside me who respected me rather than resented me for the position I was in, and the clients wined and dined me so regularly that I sometimes wondered who was more important - the boss or the assistant!

In Demand

As time went by, my touring engagements for the ministry became more regular, and although I was allotted quite a number of weeks holiday each year, these still weren't enough and I had to ask for further time off. Though I requested leave without pay, I found that the company were still paying my salary, and it became increasingly difficult for me to ask for time off. Consequently I handed in my notice as I could see that the ministry was taking over, but even then my bosses tried to work out

a situation where they could still employ me when I wasn't out on ministry. It was very novel for me to feel in such demand!! Obviously, the end of the story is that I finally left my employment; but what a testimony to the way God can turn events if we don't retaliate and allow Him to deal in all our circumstances as He sees fit! The bible says, "The meek shall inherit the earth", referring to the future kingdom, but just imagine what we could enjoy now if only we'd "put down the boxing gloves" and allow God to fight for us.