

MATTHEW 5:5
THE STRENGTH AND POWER OF BEING MEEK

I started this series two weeks ago, ready to look at values through Jesus' eyes. Right from the start it is clear that values as Jesus sees them are very different from the ways of the world. It seems to me significant, in the way that God works, that today we consider the third Beatitude on the Sunday after the Referendum, regardless of the result. There has been a lot of shouting done over the last few weeks; there have been many photos in the press and images on TV of aggression on the streets; even in George Square, in Glasgow, the aggression has boiled over; TV and radio debates have not always been measured, but people have talked over one another to make sure that the last word belongs with their point of view. In the drive to win hearts and minds for one view or the other, so that victory and domination would be ours or theirs, then "he who shouts loudest is bound to be right!" In the aftermath of all of that, we come to the Bible today to consider the words of Jesus which teach something very different to His disciples: "*Blessed are...*" (*Matthew 5:5*)

Some of us grew up with Charles Wesley's children's hymn *Gentle Jesus meek and mild* and the kind of image of Jesus on the screen. These paint a picture of Jesus in a particular way and suggest something about Him. To me, these suggest a kind of insipid picture of Jesus, gentle to the point of being inoffensive, soft and perhaps a bit weak! So we have learned to think that meekness equals weakness. In our minds, the meek are the doormats of our society, people that get down-trodden by the strong and powerful people, too quiet to speak up on their own behalf or in their own defence; these are people who the strong, tough people will simply trample all over. Meekness equals weakness. The Dictionary definition of meek is "mild and gentle of temper; submissive" – *Gentle Jesus, meek and mild*. I want to paint a different picture today; I want to suggest that there is a power and strength to meekness; I want to show you a different version of Jesus, of someone meek and strong, meek and full of power, meek and determined to do the will of God.

The Beatitudes is a set of eight sayings that describe the character of the disciple. These are not eight groups of people, but eight qualities of the one group – the disciples of Jesus. So these eight sayings describe qualities that we should be seeking after; this is the kind of people we should aspire to be. We began with the 'poor in Spirit', people who depend on Jesus totally because we have nothing in ourselves of which we could boast; this creates space for grace. Last week, we considered that as we look at ourselves, we see our faults, we see that we are less than perfect and we mourn the loss of our innocence, righteousness and self-respect; we are people with contrite, repentant hearts. The third of these sayings is: "*Blessed are...*" (*Matthew 5:5*) There is a formula: these are the people on whom the whole blessing of God rests; this is not about being happy, but about people whom God will bless and has blessed. Each saying has a quality to which we should aspire and a way in which God promises to bless those who so aspire.

"*Blessed are...*" (*Matthew 5:5*) This is all about the way in which we relate to God, that then has a spin-off effect on the way in which we relate to one another. There is a little progression here from numbers one and two: the poor in spirit know that we have nothing to bring to God; we come with empty hands and rely totally on the grace of Jesus; those who mourn recognise that we have fallen short of being the people we should be and that God wants us to be. So we come with humble hearts. We have a proper view of ourselves that leads us to be humble in the presence of God. That sense of humility leads to trust and prayer, knowing that God alone can help and save us. That sense of humility also creates in us the determination to be

better people and to be the kind of people that God wants us to be. Is this what it means to be meek?

What kind of people do we aspire to be? Lets look at Psalm 37: "*But the...*" (Psalm 37:11) Here is a psalm, in the verses we read at least, that is full of the "people we aspire to be". It is full of qualities which are good for us to aspire to. "*Trust...*" (v.3) "*Commit...*" (v5) "*Be still...*" (v.7) Here is a person who has learned to be humble before God, to trust God and to pray. Any debate about qualities and values really has to start here, with the kind of people that we are and that we aspire to be. Lots of people aspire in our world to have: people want to be rich, to have a nice house, to drive a big car, to have a growing bank balance and in themselves there is nothing wrong with any of these things. Any Bible view of aspirations and hopes, on the other hand, challenges us to begin in a different place, with the kind of people we are and the people we are in relationship with God. We are to be people who are humble, who trust God, who commit our ways and our days to the Lord, who wait quietly for the Lord to listen to our prayers. These are the meek!

For me, one of the defining moments of Jesus' life takes place in Gethsemane, on the night before He died. The cross is central to the gospel and all of that takes place the next day, but for Jesus the issue is settled in Gethsemane and it is there that we see what kind of spirit was in Him. After the Last Supper, He goes out with His disciples to pray. Here is Jesus' prayer: "*Father, if...*" (Luke 22:42) The 'cup' is all about the suffering that will take place on the following day; the prayer says "take it away!" Jesus knows what will happen and knows how hard it will be to do it. But, and here's the force of this prayer and here is Jesus, humble before God - "*not my...*" (Luke 22:42) Here is Jesus ready to do what God wants, ready to be the person God wants Him to be. For Him that means the cross, suffering, death, and resurrection. He is ready to do what God wants, rather than assert Himself and run away. It is this humble spirit that leads Him to take on His enemies and succeed; it is this humble spirit that leads Him to obey God and achieve salvation for the world for ever. *Gentle Jesus, meek and mild* - not here; meek yes; humble yes; strong, powerful, determined, yes!

Being humble with God completely infected the way in which Jesus dealt with other people. How was Jesus with little children? How was Jesus with those who were sick, weak, blind, and lame? How was Jesus with those who had made a mess of life? How was Jesus with those that other people looked down on? How was Jesus with outsiders? How was Jesus with people in need? He was full of grace and compassion! He saw people in need and treated them gently, carefully, compassionately, graciously; He even talked about Himself as a servant! There were times when He had strong, harsh words, words that caused offence, words that penetrated to the very heart and soul of those who heard them and people complained at His strong words. So the meek, humble Jesus is not weak, soft, or inoffensive; He is strong, powerful and gracious, all at the same time.

Let's imagine that you are so taken with the notion of being meek that you've decided that this is a quality to which you want to aspire. What does that mean? It means two things: first of all, it means being humble with God, in a relationship that is marked by a growing sense of trust in Jesus, learning that we are not masters of our own affairs, nor masters of our own destiny, but our times, our lives are in the hands of God; we learn to trust God, we learn to pray, we learn to depend on God to provide for us all that we need. Secondly, this affects our relationships with other people, leading us to treat one another with care, compassion, and grace; helping us to recognise the needs of people and to care for them, even to serve them.

It takes power and strength to be people like that. The world says that the race belongs to the strong and powerful people. Successful people are usually rich and influential; the world listens to those who are strident in way they speak. Pride leads to arrogance and the desire to win, to be top of the heap and I suppose we've seen some of that in the last few weeks. The challenge for people across Scotland in the next few days is to treat one another well: for those who supported the "no" campaign to be gracious in winning the referendum, that there be no gloating, no overwhelming desire to rub other people's noses in it; and for those who supported "Yes" to be gracious in defeat, not going off in the huff, with no recriminations. Part of our human instinct is to be proud, to want to be better than everyone else, to demand my rights no matter the cost; part of that instinct simply centres on myself and what I want; no-one teaches children to say "I want...", it comes naturally. It takes a great effort of will-power and self-control for the Christian, supported by the Spirit, to be meek, to be humble, to be caring. Meekness does not equal weakness; this is not about making ourselves the doormats of society, to be trampled all over, but is all about being humble and gracious with one another and with other people. To be meek requires strength, power and self-control, equipped by the Spirit.

World domination – that lies behind every James Bond movie; it lies behind the stories of Superman, or Star Wars; they all have someone who wants to rule the world, usually for their own evil purposes. More seriously, there have been all kinds of movements across history and across the world that have tried same: Genghis Khan came rolling across the plains of Asia to dominate the world; the Roman Empire ruled from Spain to the Caspian Sea; even the Christian Crusades were an attempt to dominate the world by force of arms. Here's Jesus' view: *"Blessed..." (Matthew 5:5)* In the end, the world will belong to the humble, to people who trust Jesus. We expect the meek to be ignored, trampled over, and that the tough and overbearing will win the day; weaklings will get nowhere. *"Having nothing, yet possessing everything" (2 Corinthians 6:9)* A time will come when Jesus will bring a new heaven and a new earth and these will belong to the meek, to humble people, to those who trust Jesus and wait quietly, patiently, determinedly for Him. On such people, the whole blessing of God will rest.

When we pray, if we pray, do we demand things from God. "This is what I want and if you don't do this..." Is there a sense of pride and arrogance in that relationship? When we pray, do we ask God for help and trust Him to answer? These are two different kinds of attitude! The second is better. Are we humble in this God-relationship, and humble then in the way we treat other people? It is so easy to be proud and arrogant in all we say to others, to hurt others, to dismiss others, to ride roughshod over others; when there are times we've been like that, we need to repent and be sorry. It takes power and strength and self-control to be meek: to be different from the world, to be different from our instincts, no longer with self at the centre, no longer selfish and wanting our own way. It takes power and strength and self-control to be meek, to be humble before God, to be ready to do what God wants; it takes power and strength and self-control to be meek in our dealings with other people, to care about other people, to put their need first, to listen to them, to be gracious. *"Blessed are..." (Matthew 5:5)*