

SLIDE ONE: SERIES: THE BLESSED BATTLE

SLIDE TWO: THE BEATITUDES

SLIDE THREE: TITLE: "POWER UNDER CONTROL"

TEXT: Blessed are The Meek for they will Inherit the Earth" Matthew 5:5

Today discussing a misunderstood, under-valued but surprisingly powerful blessing of God desperately needed in our polarized, hostile culture

- Christian Counterculture: Christians are to bring new order, a new way of thinking and living.
 - Upside-Down Kingdom; a Holy Set-Apart People; Leviticus 18:1-4 (Do not do as they do: follow my laws and decrees);
 - A Chosen People, priesthood, nation . . . declaring the praises of the one who called us out of darkness into light.
 - Upside down Kingdom. Tim Mackie of The Bible Project compares it to being a tourist driving in the UK where you drive on the left side of the road. Its all backward and its just wrong! 😊 Jesus is asking us to drive on the opposite side of the road – figuratively speaking – by going the opposite direction the world is going. The way of generosity, kindness, gentleness, servanthood.
 - Power is to attack, attack, attack those who disagree with me
 - I'll get you before you get me;
 - Hatefulness and disrespect characterize our national dialogue
 - People freely express anger, hatred, ill will, violence, judgmentalism, and are unwilling to try and understand any perspective but their own.
 - Our current series from Matthew 5 studying the Beatitudes is part of this contrast that will be drawn from the whole of Matthew 5-7 that we call The Sermon on the Mount.

SLIDE 4: DEFINING MEEKNESS

- But meekness – really, you are going to tell me that we can live out God's will powerfully in our culture by being meek. Isn't meek being weak?
 - **Dictionary.com describes meekness** as docile, overly compliant, spiritless, yielding or tame.
 - **Merriam-Webster define** it as mild, deficient in courage, submissive and weak.
 - **And defines meek** as enduring injury with patience and without resentment, mild. 2 deficient in spirit and courage; and 3 not violent or strong.
 - However, it is important to note that these modern day definitions of meekness while close at some points hold an immensely different meaning from the spiritual connotation that is referenced in the Bible.

SLIDE 5: DEFINING MEEKNESS

- In the Old Testament, **the Hebrew word** for meek is *anaw*, which refers to someone who is afflicted or bearing a heavy burden.⁸ It is largely an explanation about the circumstance someone is willing to endure, rather than a state to succumb to.⁹ This certainly applied to those in the crowd hearing Jesus speak.

SLIDE 6: DEFINING MEEKNESS

- **The Greek word used is *prautes***, which connotes a total lack of self-pride, to the point of a lack of self-concern.⁵ The poor and oppressed are often labeled as such, but not because they are cowed, but as a result of their humility for their own position, and therefore place a greater emphasis on serving others.

- **Another analogous Greek word for meek is *praus***, which is expressed as a decided strength of disciplined calmness.⁶ In contrast to inherent anger, this leadership virtue towards followers demonstrates a benevolent compassion for those being led. . . .

ILLUSTRATION: MY FAILURE TO LIVE THIS OUT IN MICHIGAN ON ONE OCCASION.

SLIDE 7: DEFINING MEEKNESS

- **Simply put, the meaning here is “power under control.**
- It is a choice one makes as followers of Christ to be willing to serve and to submit to others in appropriate ways – to be a servant leader.
- Not powering over others, but humbly giving, serving, leading and influencing by the power of God’s Spirit.

ILLUSTRATION OF BREAKING A STALLION.

SLIDE 8: BLESSINGS

But before we go further in understanding this blessing on the Meek, lets back up a bit and let me review a little more the context in which the beatitudes or blessings are given to us in the bible or we will not truly understand the full meaning of this beatitude.

- Blessings were not new in Jewish history:
 - Psalm 1:1 – blessed is the one who seeks God;
 - Psalm 119: Blessed if you live in right relationship with God. Things go well. You are blessed. God is with you and for you.

SLIDE 9: BLESSINGS

- **Wisdom of Jesus Ben-Sirah, a Jewish Scholar writing in 150BC**
 - There are nine I would call blessed, and a tenth my tongue proclaims:
 - Blessed is the man who can rejoice in his children
 - Blessed is the man who lives to see the downfall of his foes
 - Blessed is the man who does not sin with the tongue
 - Blessed is the man who doesn’t serve an inferior
 - Blessed is the one who finds a friend
 - Blessed is the one who speaks to attentive listeners
 - Greatest is the one who finds wisdom
 - And none is superior to the one who fears the Lord
 - At first glance these from the Jesus before our Jesus sound like good Bible teaching, until you look a little closer. Sure, it is good to control your tongue and to fear the Lord. . . . But the rest imply that the one who God favors is the one who has a position of prestige – who has the honor of others sitting and listening to him, who has a great family, and doesn’t have anyone over him who is actually an inferior and thus doesn’t have to serve someone of lower status than himself . . .and who is successful and mighty and gets to see that those who oppose him are truly inferior and lives to see their downfall.

These beatitudes or blessings seem very simple at first sight – such nice sounding words and who doesn’t want blessings.

But when you look closer – what does it mean to be poor in spirit . . . and who wants to be happy because you are poor or mourning or of low stature or persecuted for doing the right things. And who wants to be persecuted for righteousness sake or for any reason whatsoever.

How is this a blessed state of life? This just sounds wrong, like driving on the wrong side of the road.

Also many in church history have struggled with whether the beatitudes are akin to work salvation, where these are the things you do to earn favor with God. And this list of 8 blessings is turned into a list of virtues that we must seek to attain in order for God to approve of us.

But this is the opposite of what is really happening here.

SLIDE 10: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

TWO IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:

- Who Was in the Crowd?
 - What was the Occasion?
- To understand these beatitudes, we need to ask a couple questions: Who is Jesus talking to and on what occasion. These questions will unlock the meaning of not only the beatitudes but all of the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7.
 - To not ask these questions is to lift these 3 chapters out of their context and treat them like a separate teaching we might call the ethics of Jesus. There is ethical content here but to understand the full meaning, we have to know the context and who he is teaching and why?

SLIDE 11: THE CONTEXT – (3 main groups of listeners)

1. There are 3 main groups to consider: 1. His first chosen disciples that he is beginning to train. The fishermen and tax collector that he has called, but not yet appointed apostles.
2. The huge crowds that are following him
3. Who is not here? The Pharisees? But most likely they are hanging around the outside to observe and make clear they are not following this man named Jesus – the Pharisees, who are the teachers of Judaism that love their high places they have achieved.

Two weeks ago in his intro to this series, **Josh referred to Matthew 4:17** where Jesus called the crowds to repent- for the kingdom of God is at hand. Jesus says, listen up – turn away from how you have been living (repent) for the Kingdom of God is near – it is close by.

After this announcement, he begins **to call fishermen** – ordinary working men to follow him. **And Luke adds the calling of a tax collector.**

(Mt. 4:24,25) Great crowds of people begin to flock to follow him – sick people, paralyzed people, demon-possessed, poor people from the slums just barely surviving day to day, day laborers – in their broken society, they are the losers, the down and out, the unworthy, even worthless people of society . . . even the despised tax collectors seen as traitors are in the crowd.

WERE the Pharisees there too? We also know from the parallel account of this event in Luke's gospel, that he orders his telling in chapter 6 following several incidents where the Pharisees come into conflict with Jesus. There are 4 incidents in Luke chapter 5,6.

- The healing of the **paralytic lowered** down thru the roof

- Jesus calling **a tax collector to follow him** and then going to his house to eat with other tax collectors and fellow sinners – where Jesus says it is the sick who need a physician and not the healthy – that he has come to save the sinners not the righteous.
- **Jesus disciples not fasting** as much as those of John the Baptist, but they go on eating and drinking.
- And then in the first part of chapter 6, Luke tells of Jesus allowing his disciples to **eat grain from the fields on the Sabbath** –

SLIDE 12: THE CONTEXT – THE RADICAL TEACHING.

- **So here is the radical context of these blessings.** I would like all of you to imagine you are in first century Galilee; you have heard about this itinerate preacher named Jesus, who also heals the sick and casts out demons and speaks of a new Kingdom that he will be bringing to the world.
 - I would like you to imagine that you are living in extreme poverty. You sell a few food and craft items down at the local market each day just to try and have enough food for the family to be able to eat and sometimes you just have a little bread for dinner because you had no money to purchase anything else. You don't see any way out of your predicament – there aren't good paying jobs around and most everyone around you is also poor. Those who are better off live across town and they want nothing to do with you except for those they hire to do a little work for them from time to time.
 - Those of you in the back half of this side, I want you to imagine that you are fighting serious illness. Some of you are crippled and need help to be able to go anywhere; others of you have diseases for which there is no known treatment or cure – and if there was, you don't have money to be able to see a physician who could help you.

He is saying to you - this amassed crowd of everyday working men who have no hope of more than subsistence survival from day to day – this crowd of broken, sad, devalued, sick, lost sinners – that he has truly good news for you. The Kingdom of God is near – that in the Kingdom he is bringing – you are the ones who have first access to it! This Kingdom is for you - the poor, the lowly, the mournful – the sad and broken mass of humanity are welcome and have the chief seats in the Kingdom of God. You are the ones who know you desperately need God and his love – you know you need his mercy and grace – you know you need strength with which to live the difficult life you have. You are open to the Kingdom of God and what he has for you.

The Pharisees of course are livid. They feel they have earned and deserved God's blessings by their meticulous keeping of the laws of Moses and they are the righteous and are to have nothing to do - to not even be in the presence of such despicable humanity as is gathered here following Jesus.

If you read on past the Blessings in this Sermon on the Mount, you will hear more about this confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees where he confronts their views on how to treat enemies, on how they respond to divorce and adultery and so on.

So when we interpret the individual blessings and try to apply them to our own context, we need to keep in mind this radical setting where Jesus has come to bring healing, hope, and light to those living in darkness – where he has come not for the righteous, but the sick – and not turn the blessings into a how to succeed course for ourselves or a booklet on the ethical teachings of Jesus taken out of context.

These are not steps we have to take to earn God's blessing – he is offering his blessing freely to all who will receive, regardless of who you are and what you have done. The Kingdom of God is for you!!!

SLIDE 13: FAITH

In reviewing several commentaries on these verses, I came across this idea in an older commentary, written in 1958 by Leslie Thomas. He describes an order of arrangement that has meaning. We can't say for sure Jesus had this progression in mind, but it seems to make good sense to me:

1. **The beginning of faith. The first 3 Blessings:**
 - a. The first experience of one who turns from darkness to light is knowledge of misery, or a consciousness of spiritual poverty – what Josh taught two weeks ago on “Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”
 - b. Next we learn of the cause of this spiritual poverty, namely, sin, both his own and that of others, and we mourn over our sin – as Ben effectively challenged us last week to sit in our sadness, the ways we mourn including our sin nature which calls us to repentance and the comfort of forgiveness God offers.
 - c. And third, in the beginning of faith, this consciousness of our need and our sin and sorrow brings us to humility, seeking strength beyond ourselves that God offers us to be able to live with strength, inheriting the earth.

SLIDE 14: FAITH

2. **The progress of faith: The 4th Beatitude.** Conscious of our own spiritual condition, we begin to hunger and thirst for the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven.
3. **The perfection of faith: 5th-8th Beatitudes.** As we seek and grown in Christ, we will be empowered to serve others – being blessed to be merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers.

SLIDE 15: FAITH

4. **The trial of faith: 8th Beatitude:** Even when we live a faithful life following Christ effectively, we will have detractors – for the darkness hates the light. Jesus said not only will we have troubles in this life, but we will be hated for His sake.

Today, Christians are being persecuted in many countries of the world and are often looked down upon in free societies by people with very different values and desires for human power. We don't go looking for persecution or to be despised by others, but it happens.

SLIDE 16: FAITH

A. KNOWING OUR IDENTITY AS CHRIST FOLLOWERS

- a. We have a saying in Central America where the mission I work for works with incarcerated youth who almost all come from extreme poverty and broken homes and a culture of violence – that you don't know Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.
- b. Its hard for us when we are living in comparative abundance, and a free and mostly law-abiding society to realize Jesus is all we need – in order to live abundantly in all circumstances.
- c. That is the key to understanding how the meek inherit the earth. So we have had dozens of youth testify that being in prison was the best thing that ever happened to them – because in that time of desperation they opened their hearts to the living God. When they are ultimately released, they don't go home to a beautiful home and where they are esteemed and valued – rather they have to find a safe place or if they can go back to their old neighborhood where they previously extorted and murdered, they have are not trusted and accepted but feared. Still they go with the riches of Christ to live with strength, courage, determination and power in difficult life circumstances.
- d. So I don't think that Jesus is glorifying poverty and sadness and lowliness in these verses but rather glorifying the attitude of finding our true worth and power in God's Kingdom – a kingdom

of service and loving others. He is offering to those who have been poor and despised a new way of thinking and a new hope and power regardless of their life circumstances.

- e. And that same offer is for us, to live meekly – that is humbly, courageously, gratefully when things are going great for us - and even when we encounter criticism, hard financial times, sickness and all kinds of trials.
- f. Our inheritance is that our true meaning is being a child of the living God who can find hope, strength and joy in the midst of whatever life may bring.
- g. It is the difference between the prodigal son and the older brother in the parable of Jesus – the younger brother has squandered his inheritance and comes back home begging for his father just to let him be a worker on the farm – broken, humble, knowing his weakness and need / vs. the older brother who refuses to rejoice in his brother’s repentance, but feeling like he is not getting enough credit for how good he is.
- h. Likewise, Jesus is condemning and deconstructing Pharisaical attitudes of self-righteousness and self-praise and looking down on others as inferior, expecting to be praised and served rather than being the servant of others. . . . A reminder to all of us to not lord it over others, but to be those who are willing to serve all, even those we see as inferior.

STILL ON SLIDE 16: Power Under Control

B. UNDERSTANDING OUR POWER AS SERVANTS OF CHRIST

- a. When we know who and whose we are, as God’s chosen people by His grace, we know we are called to be servant leaders. We are called to love our neighbor just like we love ourselves. As such, we are glad to serve and to assist others and we don’t consider ourselves too good to serve anyone, regardless of their status, personality, or behaviors. Not saying this is easy – it is hard. In fact it is sometimes impossible for us in our human condition, unless we are seeking to live by the power of God’s Spirit. And Meekness, gently controlling our power is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit listed in Gal. 5:22
- b. I saw this Thursday at the infusion center in Kansas City where Barb goes once a month for an infusion to keep her body from rejecting her transplanted lung that gives her life – a patient came who looked like he could be a street person – clearly poor and unkempt and unattractive – but the processing nurse greeted him with great warmth and caring. I checked my own spirit as I realized I was feeling some contempt for the man, and was inwardly repentant for how much more positive and loving the nurse was than I was feeling. She was demonstrating the power of meekness.

IF TIME, ILLUSTRATION OF GARY TOEBBEN

SLIDE 17: APPLICATION: SERVANT LEADERS

Mt. 20:25-28: “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’”

I Peter 5:3, “not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

SLIDE 18: APPLICATION: Calm Influencers

James 1:19,20 My dear brothers, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

SLIDE 19: APPLICATION: Gentle Guides

Galatians 6:1-5 says: “Brothers, if anyone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual, should restore him gently. But watch yourselves or you may also be tempted. Carry each others burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each should carry his own load.

Ephesians 4:2,3 “As a prisoner of the Lord, then I urge you to lived a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make very effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

This is meekness – power under control to love and come alongside others with gentleness, aware of our own weakness and need to work on our own behaviors while seeking to encourage others to live as Christ calls us.

SLIDE 20: APPLICATION: Overcoming Evil

Romans 12:17-21: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord. On the contrary, If you enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. **DO NOT BE OVERCOME BY EVIL BUT OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD.**