

“Distracted, Discouraged and Despairing”

Sermon for 1 March, 2015

Texts: Matthew 5:5; Psalm 22:19-31; and selections from Exodus

35 Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. **36** Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. **37** Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. **38** “Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” (Matthew 9, NASB)

He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus has compassion on the crowds, their apparent clueless-ness rouses His pity. He sees their frenzy, bordering on panic and their milling about. So He teaches them Christianity 101. We have taken two steps (humility and mourning for our soul’s true state) and both these steps relate primarily to ourselves, our interactions one to another. With the third step we ponder the disposition of our souls toward God and, secondarily, to each other: **Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth.**

Are we meek? Do we even understand what authentic meekness is? We will get to those questions eventually, but first an illustration. Let’s take a look at Moses’ meekness, in the early portions of Exodus. Chapter 2 Moses is on the lamb. Despite the best of education, training in oration and governmental skills—a veritable prince in Egypt—Moses, running ahead of the Lord mistook his role as the deliverer of Israel as license to murder. He slew an Egyptian slave driver out of compassion for a fellow Hebrew and fled into the wilderness for his life. There he tended sheep in obscurity among the Midianites. He married Ziporrah, the daughter of Reuel, and bore Moses a son, Gershom (whose name could be interpreted as “a foreigner here”). Then, in chapter 3, God appears to Moses, a forty years refugee, in a burning bush. **Moses! Moses! Moses replied. “Here I am.” Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. (v.5) At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.**

A good move, for God is holy. Moses had a sober assessment of himself: he knew he was unworthy to stand before God! Guilt, remorse and sorrow for his sinning had annihilated the proud, self-sufficient self-directing man he used to be. He was thoroughly chastened, having fallen so desperately short of the great expectations of his first forty years of life. God relates to Moses that He has seen the misery (their **dispirited and distracted** state). **So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians** (who, typologically, represent the world for the crowd Jesus felt compassion for *as well as for us at our time and place*) **and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing**

with milk and honey—the home of many pagan Canaanite peoples. Those people engaged in the worship of demons, gross immorality and darkness and they had nearly filled up the cup of wickedness, rendering their annihilation and removal just. They chose rebellion and deviance above God and thereby chose death as their judgment. Moses, feeling forgotten in a foreign land, must have rejoiced to hear that God had not forgotten His people, and that He had a plan to give them a place to be: the Promised Land! Away from Egyptian tyranny, the Israelites, God’s own people had a place in the plan of God.

But what came next was a shocker! **I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.** (v.10) Feeling unworthy and unequipped, Moses cries out, **Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the people out of Egypt?! And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be a sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you bring the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.** (vv. 11-12) It was Moses’ meek availability, not his merit, skills or ability that qualified him for service to God. The same is true for every believer seated here today! There follow a series of objections. Moses says, I don’t even know your name. Your are to summon the elders of Israel (**they will listen to you!** (v.18)). Filled with self-doubt, hardly robust confidence, Moses hears from God. **Then go to the king and say, Let us go a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God. But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a might hand compels him.** (vv. 18-19) Then I will perform wonders, I will make the people favorably disposed to you, you will leave with much plunder. The purpose of God is not to vindicate Himself, nor does He want to establish His people as the primary thing. Rather it is all about His people being able to fearless and freely worship Him! ***Worship, not political freedom is the main point.***

In Chapter 4, the objections become more personal: **What if they won’t believe or listen to me?** God performs the sign of the staff and serpent. He follows up with the sign of the leprous hand. God then promises the sign of water turning into blood. Armed with this, surely Moses would be empowered? Right? Wrong. **Pardon, your servant, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.** Egyptians, like the Greeks and cultured Romans, valued eloquence of speech highly. But there is something like a rebuke in the Lord’s retort: **Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and I will teach you what to say.”** (vv. 11-12) **Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else. Then the Lord’s anger kindled against Moses, What about your brother, Aaron, the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the**

signs with it. (vv. 13-17) Why would God get perturbed? Because if He has called you to a job—you are obviously the one to get it done. Moses' meekness almost crossed the line into unbelief, and the questioning of divine wisdom. *There are limits to appropriate meekness—let's learn what they are.*

So, how do we know if we are meek? Let's assume you wish to be meek, see it as a Christian grace that you wish to appropriate to yourself. First, do you practice self-control? Are you proactive rather than reactive? Does your anger rise when God is dishonored . . . and not yourself. Second, do you respond humbly and obediently to the word? Third, am I a peacemaker, or a pot stirrer? Meekness forgives, restores and makes peace as in Ephesians 4: endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Fourth, do I take criticism well and do I love the critic in the process? Is something other than winning, or being right all the time, my motivation? 2 Tim. 2:25: **In meekness instructing those who oppose.** Finally, are others aware in your life, from your speech and reactions, that you are done with yourself for good?

If we take this inventory and do not pass the tests, it is possible that we are not a Christian . . . despite our current circumstances, or regardless of whatever happened the past. Of course, we might be in rebellion. Perhaps we are acting in disobedience. In this case, we may either be a soul on its way to hell, or a believer on his way to chastisement, spiritual discipline.

If we are in this unhappy position and we sincerely want to be meek, for reasons yet to be exposed or uncovered, we can study up on Jesus who is **meek and lowly of heart**. Study Jesus' life closely . . . pay attention to the beauty of His character and request earnestly that we be made more like Him. After all the reward of the meek is extravagant. Learn Jesus and yield yourself to the Holy Spirit. Invite conviction, welcome correction and be entirely converted. If you do, you will no longer be distracted, discouraged and despairing and you will be more like Him.

Amen.