

Beatitudes for the Workplace #3

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth

The Beatitudes is Jesus' nine-part message (Mt. 5: 3-11) of how God is present in our lives and the workplace. What Jesus said long ago remains relevant, today. Following are thoughts on Jesus' Beatitude about *meekness* and how it applies to us.

What does *meek* mean?

Two dictionary definitions prevail: *humble, gentle* and *cowed submissiveness*. Both help us understand what Jesus said to his first audience and, now, to us.

Background:

Jesus' first audience was peasant, rural, and lived in small villages. Both definitions of *meek* applied to them, but it was *cowed submissive* that they would have felt most immediately. Their world was stacked against them! Their social, religious and economic status was minimal. Caesar and the Sanhedrin kept them that way. The people were told, in effect: *be quiet, do as you are told, pay your taxes*.

Jesus two-fold message:

1) *Blessed are the meek* is God's commitment to help people who are *cowed submissive*. God gives hope and caring, backed and delivered in God's sovereignty. *Blessed* encouraged people to look beyond their immediate experiences and feelings. As they do, they will discover God's passion and commitment to their wellbeing. God wants relationship with God's people, and stands with them. God is not rules, ritual or an institution. God never sides with oppressors of people.

2) *...for they will inherit the earth* reflects whose world this is! Psalm 24:1 explains: *The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it*. The word, *Lord*, declares God's sovereignty over everyone...including Caesar and all oppressors. God is passionate about exercising sovereignty to bless people.

God exercises sovereignty in *gentleness* and *humility*. Oppressed people would prefer God to go, *zap*, and make everything better, now. God reminds us, however: *my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord* (Isaiah 55:8). God's ways succeed where violence (*zap*) does not.

Jesus explains (Matthew 11:29), *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart*. He invites and includes people in transforming the world by changing its values. This can take time, which can be frustrating when we want a quick fix. But, God's values succeed because they change people from the inside, out.

God transformed the world by coming to us *gently* and *humbly* in Jesus. Jesus invited a few disciples, and taught them his values. Then, as they practiced them, the number of disciples grew. The world began changing. The oppressive Roman Empire fell. The Sanhedrin's grip slipped, as people chose to follow Jesus. God's values succeed in giving people the earth.

So what?

Today, *cowed submissiveness* is still among us. People are losing their jobs, homes, savings, freedom, ability to make choices, and hope. We hear a familiar message: *be quiet, do as you're told, pay your taxes*. We also hear a new and outrageous phrase: *too big to fail* - the modern excuse for oppressing the majority.

It's tempting to react to today's oppression with civil disobedience and violence. The gap between haves and have nots is widening. Jesus' original audience experienced a 90-10 society; 90% of the wealth was in the hands of 10% of the population. In some instances, today, that number has shifted to 99-1. Injustice, then as now, appears in businesses, economies and governments.

Jesus' Beatitude about *meekness* is our helpful reality check.

Jesus' opening word, *blessed*, is God's promise of love, hope and sovereignty. Taking the next step, Jesus' values of *humility* and *gentleness* are still history's most effective change agents. We have records of results in Scripture and history.

Yes, evil still runs amok, but it will not prevail. It never has the final say or activity. This is God's world, and God is passionate about blessing us. God is committed to stamping out evil in all its forms, God's way. Feelings of *cowed submissive* are real, and they hurt! *Humble* and *gentle* seem odd ways of responding to evil. But, the bottom line for us is that meek do inherit the earth. Jesus gives us his values, compassion and commitment to make it happen. Along the way, he gives us hope, encouragement, and reminders of who is sovereign.

Thanks be to God!

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