

Sermon on the Mount  
Allen Snapp  
Grace Community Church  
July 24, 2016

## Kingdom Character Part Two

### **Matt. 5:1-12**

For those who are bored with drinking a plain looking cup of coffee, there is now a coffee system called the Ripple Maker. With the Ripple Maker you can upload any photo and have it reproduced in the foam of your latte. If you want to look at yourself while drinking your morning Joe, you can immortalize yourself in the foam. Or, if you prefer, you can drink an image of your dog or cat. If it can be photographed, it can be rippled!

When I first saw this, I was amazed that an image of a person can be painted in coffee foam, but what's far more amazing (and far more lasting) is that Jesus etches the image of his character into his followers. Rom. 8:29 says that we are being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. That is God's great work in us - to make us look like Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount is all about the values and principles and ethics that rule the kingdom of God and the eight beatitudes that open the sermon paint a picture of what kingdom character looks like, and that picture looks like Jesus Christ. There are eight beatitudes - they are the verses that begin "blessed are the..." and we've already looked at the first two beatitudes so let's pick up at verse 5 where we see a third quality of kingdom character:

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (vs. 5)*

The English word meek may not be the best translation for the Greek word *praos*. When we think of meekness, most of us get an image of someone who is weak and timid. In our minds, a meek person is a fearful, people-pleasing, wall-flower kind of person. J. Upton Dickson founded a group called DOORMATS which stands for "Dependent Organization Of Really Meek And Timid Souls" Their motto is "the meek shall inherit the earth - if that's okay with everybody."

But the Greek word for meek doesn't mean weakness or timidity or people-pleasing at all. The Greek word *praos* was used to describe a war horse that had been trained to instantly obey the commands of its rider. Meekness is strength under control, power used with gentleness. Meekness doesn't turn us into wall-flowers, it turns us into war horses ready to obey God's direction at the slightest pull at the harness.

Moses was a meek man. In fact, Numbers 12:3 says he was the meekest man on earth. But Moses was no timid wall-flower! He came eyeball to eyeball with the Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth, and Pharaoh blinked first. Moses led millions of Israelites out of Egypt and performed miracle after miracle. He spoke face to face with God when everyone else was trembling and afraid of God even from a distance. Moses was meek, but he wasn't weak.

But meekness didn't come naturally to Moses, he had to learn to be meek. Early on in his life he felt a call to deliver Israel, and in his own strength he killed an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite. At that point he was operating in his own strength, a wild stallion who was unusable to God. So God sent him to the desert for 40 years where he was emptied of his own strength and pride, and when he was humbled and emptied of hope and plans built on his own ability and strength, then God said, "now I can use you." Pride is strength centered in our flesh. Meekness is strength centered in God.

Sermon on the Mount  
Allen Snapp  
Grace Community Church  
July 24, 2016

Have you ever had a situation, maybe you feel like you've been wronged or cheated, or you feel like someone has done an injustice, and something rises up within you? Maybe you're thinking of a situation going on right now - take a moment and analyze what's rising up within you, because that's the battlefield where pride and meekness fight for our hearts. Pride wants to lash out with no thought of God. It wants to take matters in our own hands and kill some Egyptians to get things done. I know that feeling well. Meekness isn't an absence of something rising up. It's not passivity and resignation to whatever happens. Moses didn't go from activist to inactivist. It's just that, once emptied of his pride and self-reliance, he was ready to do things God's way. We are restrained in our words by the Spirit of God. We are firm and strong and courageous, but not arrogant and angry and out of control. We don't think it's our actions and our anger that's going to get things done. We see ourselves as vessels that God is working through to get things done.

The more we grow in meekness, the more we look like Jesus. Did you know that meekness is the only personal quality of Jesus that he specifically drew attention to? Matt. 11: 29 - *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. (KJV)* Jesus wasn't weak, but he was self-controlled, humble, and lived completely under the authority of the Father. His strength was harnessed for God's use.

When we are attacked, we want to attack back. When spoken harshly against, we want to lob a verbal firebomb in retaliation. But God wants us to respond with meekness - strength under His control. What does He want to do in the situation? How does He want to use us to bring Him glory? To further the kingdom of God in the lives of others, including those who are attacking us? God can use us when we are meek.

But the question I wondered was, why is it the meek who will inherit the earth? Jesus is actually quoting Ps. 37 here where the wicked are contrasted with those who trust in the Lord. We are instructed to trust in the Lord, do good, commit our way to God, delight in God, be still before the Lord, and refrain from anger and wrath (unrestrained, uncontrolled anger). As we walk this way, we are promised that "those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land." In the snapshot of a moment, it can look like evil is winning, like the boastful, proud, arrogant, unethical people are the ones who win. But in the end, it's those who are humble and meek, who trust and depend on God, who take Jesus' yoke and pull with him, who inherit the earth forever, because Jesus came to reverse the curse of Adam and give us back the earth that God intended for us to have. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (vs. 6)*

Jesus describes an inner longing and yearning for righteousness, a yearning to be right with God, a desire for justice and for wrongs to be made right that is so strong and constant, it can only be called a hunger and thirst.

Righteousness is a prominent theme of this sermon. In verse 10 Jesus says that those who follow him can expect to be persecuted for righteousness' sake; he says in verse 20 that we need to have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes if we are enter the kingdom

Sermon on the Mount  
Allen Snapp  
Grace Community Church  
July 24, 2016

of heaven; in 6:1 Jesus says that we are to avoid practicing our righteousness just to be seen and noticed by men; and that we are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness in everything we do (6:33).

Righteousness is vital to the Christian life and essential if we're ever to see the kingdom of God. But what kind of righteousness is Jesus talking about? How can our righteousness exceed the Pharisees? That would have been a shocking statement to the disciples because the Pharisees were considered to be the most righteous people living - no one knew the scriptures better than they did, no one kept the religious rules better than they did, no one sought to live blameless lives more vigorously than they did. To say we need to be more righteous than they were seems hopeless. It would be like pointing out all the champion golfers over the years: Danny Willett, Bubba Watson, Rory McIlroy, Phil Mickelson, Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, and then say, "unless your golf game exceeds their golf game, you will never set one foot in the kingdom of heaven." The disciples must have been thinking "we're doomed. What chance do we have if that's the standard?" What kind of righteousness is Jesus talking about and how do we get there?

Righteousness is being in right relation with God and living right. And that has three dimensions to it. The first dimension is a righteousness that is given to us by God when we believe in Christ. What theologians call "imputed righteousness". On the cross Jesus took our sin upon himself as if it was his own, and he gives us his righteousness as if it were our own. This righteousness has nothing to do with anything we do, it is totally based on what Christ has done. We could never be good enough (righteous enough) to earn this righteousness. It is the gift of God for all who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. And because it is the righteousness of God's own Son, it is perfect righteousness. It far exceeds the Pharisee's hypocritical righteousness. This imputed righteousness is the first dimension of righteousness that Jesus works in our lives.

The second dimension is what we call sanctification - our growing in experiential righteousness. When we first get saved, there's a lot in our lives that doesn't look like Jesus! I was saved as a teenager, and at that point I was full of disrespect and rebellion against my dad and stepmother. But when I gave my heart to Christ and decided I wanted to be his disciple I soon realized that God was calling me to honor and obey my parents. This wasn't about rules and regulations, this was about an inner change that was going on in my heart: I *wanted* to obey and respect them. I didn't always do that perfectly, and I needed to ask God's forgiveness and theirs on more than one occasion, but my heart was different. My hunger and thirst was different.

Jesus does more than just save us *in* our sin. He saves us *from* our sin. Christian's aren't perfect, but we're also more than *just* forgiven. Being a disciple has to be more than just believing right - we need to live right too! Following Jesus means there's a growing hunger and thirst to live differently - to look more like Jesus in our thoughts, words, and actions. We don't ever reach perfection in this life, but if we're healthy and Spirit-filled, then we're growing and becoming more like Jesus in our character and actions.

But there's yet a third dimension to the righteousness that we are to hunger and thirst for: we want to see the righteousness of God established in the world around us. We want to see wrongs righted, justice where there's been injustice, mercy where there's been cruelty, deliverance where there's been

Sermon on the Mount  
Allen Snapp  
Grace Community Church  
July 24, 2016

oppression. It's a hunger and a thirst that is meant to drive us to action. Holy Spirit guided action. Jesus is asking, how much do you want to see my kingdom agenda lived out here on earth?

This hunger and thirst motivates us to be change-agents in the world. Fil Anderson tells about an encounter he had with a man named Sukhen. Sukhen and his wife were from Bangladesh, and unlike most young people in his city, Sukhen was well educated, had a good job, and he and his wife were volunteer leaders of the children's ministry in their church. They really had it made and were well on their way to a comfortable life.

But it wasn't enough...there was a hunger and a thirst to see wrong made right. For them, living comfortably in a country where millions of children live in abject poverty became unbearable. He and his wife began to dream about raising up thousands of Christ-followers among Bangladesh's children. In 1997 Sukhen and his wife quit their jobs, sold everything they owned, and lived for two years underneath a stairwell, devoting all their resources to fulfilling their God-given dream. Over time their ministry to children would grow so large they needed to hire 60 full time employees to care for the needs of orphan children. Today they partner with Tiny Hands International helping thousands of orphans in Bangladesh as well as intercepting young girls being trafficked across the Nepal/India border in order to save them from a life of sexual bondage and devastation.

All this because of two people's insatiable hunger for God's agenda to be fulfilled. And they are filled, satisfied, as they see lives changed by God's love and mercy in action.

I believe the Lord wants to stir up a hunger and thirst in everyone of us - a hunger and thirst that can't be filled by money, or material things, or fame, or politics, or success, or any other substitute Satan can try to pawn off on us as real life. A hunger and thirst to make a kingdom difference in the lives of people. To see wrongs righted, to see oppressed set free, to see the suffering and hurting comforted.

There is no template for this. It's not a one-size-fits-all thing. God has shaped each of us to reach out with righteousness and justice in a dark world in different ways. It may not be in big ways, it will often be in small, unnoticed ways, but as we follow the Spirit's leading, there will be wrongs that we can do something about. There will be injustices we can speak out against. There will be oppressed and hurting people that the Lord gives us opportunity and ability to help.

To refer back to Bill's message last week - the Lord will bring broken and beaten people into our path and the question is, will we be too busy, too active in our own agendas, too absorbed in what we're about, to bring God's agenda to the situation? Let's pray that we're not. Let's pray that God opens our eyes to see the needs and our hearts to want to make a difference. Let's pray that God stirs our hearts with a deeper compassion and hunger to see God's agenda be brought to the lives of those around us.

God has prepared ways and circumstances for you to be His change-agent in the world. He has given you His Spirit, and He has cleansed you of your sin by Jesus' blood. He promises to be with you and never leave you or forsake you. He has given you everything you need to bring God's agenda into the lives of those around you. As we step out in obedience, He will use us. Let's pray...and then let's act.