**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MATTHEW-016. THE THIRD BEATITUDE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Blessed are the meek! for they shall inherit the earth."*

*Matthew 5:5*

The originality of Christ's moral teaching lies not so much in the novelty of His precepts as in the new relation in which He sets them, the deepening which He gives them, the motives on which He bases them, and the power which He communicates to keep them. Others before Him had pronounced a benediction on the meek, but our Lord means far more than they did, and, both in His description of the character and in the promise which He attaches to it, He vindicates the uniqueness of His notion of a perfect man.

The world's ideal is, on the whole, very different from His. It inclines to the more conspicuous and so-called heroic virtues; it prefers a great, flaring, yellow sunflower to the violet hiding among the grass, and making its presence known only by fragrance. Blessed are the strong, who can hold their own, says the world. Blessed are the meek, says Christ.

The Psalmist had said it before Him, and had attached verbally the same promise to the word. But our Lord means more than David did when he said, The meek shall inherit the earth. I ask you to think with me now, first, what this Christian meekness is; then, whence it issues; and then, whither it leads.

**I. What Christian meekness is.**

Now, the ordinary use of the word is to describe an attitude, or more properly a disposition, in regard to men, especially in regard to those who depreciate, or wrong, or harm us. But the Christian conception of meekness, whilst it includes that, goes far deeper; and, primarily, has reference to our attitude, or rather our disposition, towards God. And in that aspect, what is it? Meek endurance and meek obedience, the accepting of His dealings, of whatever complexion they are, and however they may tear or desolate our hearts, without murmuring, without sulking, without rebellion or resistance, is the deepest conception of the meekness which Christ pronounces blessed. When sorrow comes upon us, unless we have something more than natural strength bestowed upon us, we are all but certain, like fractious children when beaten, to kick and plunge and scream, or to take the infliction of the sorrow as being an affront and an injury. If we have any claim to this benediction, we must earn it by accepting our sorrows; then the accepted sorrow becomes a solemn joy, or almost akin thereto. The ox that kicks against the goads only does two things thereby; it does not get away from them, but it wounds its own hocks, and it drives the sharp points deeper into the ragged wounds. Let Him strike, dear friend, for when He strikes He cuts clean; and there is no poison on the edge of His knife. Meekness towards God is, first, patient endurance of His Will.

And, in reference to Him, it is, next, unquestioning docility and obedience. Its seat is in the will. When the will is bowed, a man is far on his road to perfection; and the meaning of all that God does with us--joys and sorrows, light and darkness, when His hand gives, and when His hand withdraws, as when His authoritative voice commands, and the sweet impulses of His love graciously constrain--is that our wills may be made plastic and flexible, like a piece of wrought leather, to every touch of His hand. True meekness goes far deeper down than any attitude towards men. It lays hold on the sovereign will of God as our supreme good, and delights in absolutely and perfectly conforming itself thereto.

And then there follows, as a matter of course, that which is usually the whole significance of the word, the meekness which is displayed in our attitude towards men. The truly meek heart remains unprovoked amidst all provocation. Most men are like dogs that answer bark for bark, and only make night hideous and themselves hoarse thereby. But it is our business to meet evil with good; and the more we are depreciated, the more we are harmed, the more we are circled about by malice and by scorn, the more patiently and persistently to love on.

Ah, brethren, it is easy to say and hard to do thus; but it is a plain Christian duty. Old-fashioned people believe that the sun puts out the fire. I know not how that may be, but sure I am that the one thing that puts out the fire of antagonism and wrath and malice in those who dislike or would harm us is that we should persistently shine upon, and perchance overcome, evil with good. Provoked, we remain, if we are truly meek, masters of ourselves and calm and equable, and so are blessed in ourselves. Meekness makes no claims upon others. Plenty of people are sore all over with the irritation caused by not getting what they consider due respect. They howl and whine because they are not appreciated. Do not expect much of men. Make no demands, if for no better reason than because the more you demand the less you will get; and the less you seem to think to be your due, the more likely you are to receive what you desire.

But that is a poor, shallow ground. The true exhortation is, Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.

Ah, what a different world we should live in if the people that say, Oh, the Sermon on the Mount is my religion, really made it their religion! How much friction would be taken out of all our lives; how all society would be revolutionised, and earth would become a Paradise!

But there is another thing to be taken into account in the description of meekness. That grace, as the example of our Lord shows, harmonises with undaunted bravery and strenuous resistance to the evil in the world. On our own personal account, there are to be no bounds to our patient acceptance of personal wrong; on the world's account, there are to be no bounds to our militant attitude against public evils. Only let us remember that the wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God. If contending theologians, and angry philanthropists, and social reformers, that are ready to fly at each other's throats for the sacred cause of humanity, would only remember that there is no good to be done except in this spirit, there would be more likelihood of the errors and miseries of mankind being redressed than, alas! there is to-day. Gentleness is the strongest force in the world, and the soldiers of Christ are to be priests, and to fight the battles of the Kingdom, robed, not in jingling, shining armour or with sharp swords, nor with fierce and eager bitterness of controversy, but in the meekness which overcomes. You may take all the steam-hammers that ever were forged and batter at an iceberg, and, except for the comparatively little heat that is developed by the blows and melts some smell portion, it will be ice still, though pulverised instead of whole. But let it get into the silent drift of the Arctic current, and let it move quietly down to the southward, then the sunbeams smite its coldness to death, and it is dissipated in the warm ocean. Meekness is conqueror. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

**II. Notice whence this Christian meekness flows.**

You observe the place which this Beatitude holds in the linked series of these precious sayings. It follows upon poverty of spirit and mourning. And it follows, too, upon the comfort which the mourner is promised that he will receive. It is the conduct and disposition towards God and man which follows from the inward experience described in the two former Beatitudes, which had relation only to ourselves.

The only thing that can be relied upon as an adequate cold water douche to our sparks of anger, resentment, retaliation, and rebellion is that we shall have passed through the previous experiences, have learned a just and lowly estimate of ourselves, have learned to come to God with penitence in our hearts, and have been raised by His gracious hand from the dust where we lay at His feet, and been welcomed to His embrace. He who thus has learned himself, and has felt repentance, and has received the comfort of forgiveness and cleansing, he, and he only, is the man who, under all provocation and in any and every circumstance, can be absolutely trusted to live in the spirit of meekness.

If I have found out anything of my own sin, if my eyes have been filled with tears and my heart with conscious unworthiness before Him, oh, then, surely I shall not kick or murmur against discipline of which the main purpose is to rid me of the evil which is slaying me; but rather I shall recognise in the sorrows that do fall upon me, in the losses and disappointments and empty places in my life and heart, one way of God's fulfilling His great promise, From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, I will cleanse you. The man who has thus learned the purpose, the highest purpose, of sorrow, is not likely to remonstrate with God for giving him too much of the cleansing medium.

In like manner, if we have, in any real way, received for our own the comfort which God gives to the penitent heart, we shall be easily pleased with anything that He sends. And if we have measured ourselves, not against ourselves, but against His law, and have found out how much we owe unto our Lord, it is not likely that we shall take our brother by the throat and say, Pay me that thou owest. If any treat me badly, try to rob me, harm me, sneer at me, or turn the cold shoulder to me, who am I that I should resent that? Oh, brethren, we need, for our right relation to our fellows, a deeper conviction of our sinfulness before Him. Many of us are blessed with natural tendencies to meekness, but these are insufficient. Many of us seek to cultivate this grace from true and right, though not the deepest, motives. Let us reinforce them by that which comes from the consideration of the place which this Beatitude holds in the wreathed chain, and remember that poverty of spirit and mourning must precede it.

Now, there is a sharp test for us Christian people. If I have learned myself, and have penitently received God's pardon, I shall be meek with God and with man. If I am not meek with God and with man, have I received God's pardon? One great reason why so many of you Christian people have so little consciousness of God's forgiving mercy, as a constant joy in your lives, is because you have so little obeyed the commandment, Be ye imitators of God, and walk in love, as God hath forgiven and loved us.

**III. And now, lastly, note whither this meekness leads.**

They shall inherit the earth. The words are quoted, as I have already said, from one of the psalms, and in the Psalmist's mouth they had, I suppose, especial reference to Israel's peaceful possession of the promised land, which in that Old Dispensation was made contingent on the people's faithfulness. In that aspect, and looking at this Sermon on the Mount as the programme of the King Himself, what a bucket of cold water such words as these must have poured on the hot Messianic expectations of the carnal Jew! Here was a King that did not expect to win back the land by armed rebellion against the Roman legions, but said, Be meek, and you will truly possess it, whether there is a Pilate in the procurator's house at Cæ³¡rea or not.

But for us the words have a double reference, as all the promises annexed to these Beatitudes have. They apply to the present; they apply to the future. And that is no mere looseness of interpretation, eking out an insufficient verification of them here upon earth by some dim hopes of a future fulfilment, but it flows from the plain fact that the gifts which a man receives on condition of his being a true disciple are one and the same in essence, and only differ in degree, here and hereafter. Circumstances alter, no doubt, and there will be much in that heavenly state unlike that which we experience here. But the essence of Christian blessedness is the same in this world and in the furthest reach of the shining but dim eternity beyond. And so we take the double reference of these words to be inherent in the facts of the case, and not to be a makeshift of interpretation.

There is a present inheritance of the earth which goes, as certainly as the shadow with the sunshine, with the meekness spoken of in our text. Not literal, of course, for it is not true that this Christian grace has in it any tendency whatever to draw to itself material good of any sort. The world in outward possession belongs to the strong men, to the men of faculty, of force and push and ambition. If you want to get through a crowd, make your elbows as sharp, and your feet upon the toes of your neighbours as heavy as you can, and a road will be made for you; but, in the majority of cases, the meek man on the edge of the crowd will stop there.

Nor is it true that there would be any real blessedness, though the earth were ours in that outward sense. For you cannot measure happiness by the acre, nor does an outward condition of the most full-fed abundance, and of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, and above the gnawings of care, ensure to any man even the shabby blessedness that the world knows, to say nothing of the solid beatitude that Christ proclaims.

So we must go deeper than that for the meaning of inherit. Whatever are our circumstances, it is true that this calm, equable, submissive acceptance of the divine will and obedience to it, and this loving and unresentful attitude towards men, bring with them necessarily a peacefulness of heart which gets the highest good out of the modicum of material supplies which God's providence may send us. It used to be the idea that gods and beatified spirits were nourished, not by the gross, material flesh of the sacrifices, but by a certain subtle aroma and essence that went up in the incense smoke. So Christ's meek men do live and thrive, and are blessed in a true possession of earthly good, even though their outward portion of it may be very small. Better is a little that a righteous man hath than the riches of many wicked.

And, beyond that, there is a further fulfilment of this promise, upon which I venture to say but very little. It seems to me very probable that our Lord's words here fall in with what appears to be a general stream of representation throughout Scripture, to the effect that the perfected form of the Kingdom of God is to be realised in this renovated earth, when it becomes the new earth in which dwelleth righteousness. Whether that be so or no, at all events we may fairly gather from the words the thought that in the ultimate state of assimilation and fellowship with God and Christ to which Christian people have a right to look forward, there will be an external universe on which they will exercise their activities, and from which they will draw as yet unimagined delights.

But, at all events, dear brethren, we may be sure of this blessed thought, that they who meekly live, knowing and mourning their sin, and who meekly take to their hearts as their only hope the comfort of Christ's pardon and cleansing, who are meekly recipient, meekly enduring, meekly obedient, shall have in their hearts, even here, a quiet fountain of peace which shall make the wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose, and hereafter shall be crowned with the lordship of all. Meekness overcomes, and he that overcometh shall inherit all things.