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A Gentle Life

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Series: The Fruit of the Spirit



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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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A Gentle Life

A MOMENT TO REMEMBER

Try to picture the sheer excitement of the moment. It was Passover time, and Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside was teeming with people. This was no small celebration. Records indicate that nearly a quarter of a million lambs were slain for this festival alone. And since the law required at least ten people for each lamb, that meant that two and a half million people were either in the city or on their way. If you've been to little Jerusalem, you can imagine what it must have been like.

The city was a literal mass of pushing, shoving, humanity all with great religious expectations, for the most significant of all the Jewish celebrations was at hand. It was this backdrop, painted against the blue Israeli sky that made what was about to happen so incredible. The incident is recorded in Matthew 21:

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethpage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,

Saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me.

And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them."

All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying:

"Tell the daughter of Zion,
Behold your King is coming to you,
Lowly, and sitting on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey."

So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them.

They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them.

And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them

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on the road.

Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

‘Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!’

Hosanna in the highest.” (Matthew 21:1-9 NKJV)

Here was the Living God seated on a donkey, riding into the midst of over two million people, to stake His claim to their lives for all eternity. Now in that day when a king came to conquer, he came riding on a horse. When he came seeking peace, it was not unusual for him to come riding on a donkey, as a symbol of humility.

The King of Glory was not coming at this time as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He will soon return, on a white horse, to claim His Kingdom; but He was coming first, Beloved, in deep humility, as a slave, an ambassador of peace. The New King James Bible says, “He came lowly”. The NIV says, “He came gentle and riding on a donkey.” The original King James in quoting Zechariah 9:9 here, uses the word “meek”. But as we learned in our last lesson, the words “meek, humble or lowly, and gentle” may all be used interchangeably, because all are basically the same word in different applications.

It means He was meek before His Father, (totally dependent upon Him for His every breath). It means He was humble in His own eyes, for He came not to rule, but to be a slave and die for the sins of the people. It means He was gentle in His responses, for He was about to become the victim of the greatest act of injustice ever committed by mankind, and yet He would not so much as speak a word in His defense. The Prince of Peace was coming to proclaim a Kingdom that must first be established in the hearts of men.

It was an awesome occasion. The disciples, no doubt, saw it as the beginning of their royal rule; the world accepting at last the King for who He was. Jesus, seeing life through the eyes of His Father, saw it as the beginning of the end. But because the end would be the beginning, the pain that was to come would be worth it all. So the people gathered, waving palm branches, singing,

“Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ Hosanna in the highest!”

(Matthew 21:9b NKJV)

God coming meekly. What a moment in history. He could have come with an array of soldiers to take the city and set up His Kingdom. He could have come with legions of angels to set up His Church. He could have come surrounded by an entourage of political leaders, signifying a coalition of religious and civic authorities. He could have, but He didn't. He came on the colt of a donkey, signifying great humility, fulfilling Zechariah's great prophecy. The people missed its significance entirely. What appeared to be the greatest moment in history became only the prelude to the ultimate rejection of God by man.

That does not mean we must miss its significance...for it was this moment that Jesus must have had in mind when He said,

...as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

(John 20:21c)

It was this attitude of humility, no doubt, that prompted Jesus to wash the disciples' feet and then command us to have a like-minded spirit.

THE MISSING INGREDIENT

The Gospel took its 180-degree turn at this point, as far as the disciples were concerned. They were still waiting for Jesus to set up His Kingdom on earth, and give them their rightful roles as cabinet members in the new administration. But the Kingdom Jesus had in mind was a spiritual Kingdom; it had to be established, not in the courts of Jerusalem, but in the confines of the human heart...and it had to be administered, not by arrogant monarchs, but by humble slaves.

Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way.

The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.

(Psalms 25:8,9)

God had determined that the world would not be won by force, but by love. He could have done it either way. Make no mistake of that. But in order that man might come to understand who He is, God had to come to earth and be what man was intended to be: a servant of God, ready always to do His bidding, and a servant of man, ready to win the world by dying for it. This is why in a few short days, the disciples forsook Him and fled. This is not what they were looking for. And this is obviously not what most of us are looking for, either...for if it were, the world in which we

live would stand in utter awe as we became a band of servants walking this earth clothed in the spiritual garb of our Master, giving our lives away to an undeserving world.

You and I were designed by our God to walk this earth as He did, not clothed in the pious arrogance of the Pharisees, but wrapped in the cloak of servitude worn by God Himself. Is that how the world sees you? Are you recognized as being God's because of the meek and gentle spirit you portray? Or do you strut this earth waving flags and proclaiming your own greatness, as though this weary world would ever be impressed with the likes of you. The fact that you are a child of the King only makes grace more immeasurable; it does not make you more memorable.

The single most absent ingredient in the church today may well be a spirit of meekness, a gentle spirit toward man, reflecting a humble spirit toward self, because of a meek spirit toward God. We've simply taken our pompous self-confidence, in many cases, and carried it with us into the Kingdom and translated it into religious activities that are allowed by Satan with a minimum of warfare, because, while they may tell a bit about the plan of God, by their sheer arrogance, they tell nothing of the person of God.

In our last study, we looked at the three-fold expression of meekness that unfolds in the New Testament, and we began a look at some key questions concerning humility. The first was, What does it mean "the meek shall inherit the earth"? The second was, Why was Moses considered the meekest man in the world? Today we further explore that somewhat uncharted desert on the roadmap of life known as meekness, as we continue our look at this eighth manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. In our opening portion of this study, we looked at still a third question: Why did Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a colt? Our concluding look at this somewhat touchy subject will include a look at "gentle wives", "gentle witnesses", and "gentle reproof", as well as a closing look at how God views a "gentle Christian", one who possesses a meek spirit toward Him, a humble spirit toward himself, and a gentle spirit toward others.

GENTLE WIVES

A spirit of gentleness or humility is required by God for the believer to manifest His nature in a world where pride and selfishness are the norm. It seems only natural, then, that He would begin in the home. In I Peter, chapter three, a passage that

is more than familiar to most Christian women, our key word is found in a most prominent place.

To understand its usage, however, we must see the verses in context; otherwise, we men will use it as club to beat our wives into submission and overlook the deeper implications that affect all of us.

Jesus has literally defined gentleness in chapter two. He describes us as a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood,” called on planet earth “to proclaim the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness, into His marvelous light”. Then He decides that we probably don’t understand what He means by that. How will we demonstrate light in a world of darkness? We are to “have our conduct honorable among the unbelievers, that when they speak against us as evildoers, they may, by our good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

Do you remember what “good works” are? They are God working through us doing what only He can do. It is supernatural behavior in a natural world. It will make such an impact on the lives of others, that they will “glorify God” (not us) on the day when the Holy Spirit visits them to convict them of sin. The verse goes on: “Therefore...” (and the therefore, remember, always ties what is to follow with what has gone before). In this case, Peter goes on to explain how we demonstrate Christ to an unbelieving world. Step one. We submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake. That’s humility, remember? We lay aside our self-righteousness and become servants, even in a crooked and perverse world. We obey the government, even if the government is corrupt. “This is the will of God, that by so doing, you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” So this is how you silence the unbelieving world. You submit to authority. First to the government. You pay your taxes, obey the laws, honor the president, respect the offices of those who govern, not because they deserve it, but because God said to. Why would God say that? “To put to silence the ignorance of foolish men,” that’s why.

Then God goes on to the employer-employee relationship, and He further punctuates the truth. A gentle response (one which humbly takes unjust abuse as deserved) will be God’s way of “putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men”. He asks a simple question “What credit is it, if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But, when you do good, and suffer for it, if

you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.”

He then gives us Christ Himself as an example. “When He suffered, (unjustly) He did not threaten to retaliate, but committed Himself to the Father, and rested. He humbled Himself and became obedient even unto death. He was meek before the Father, not demanding His way; He was humble in His own sight, taking on the role of a servant; and thus He was gentle in the face of injustice, leaving the results in the Father’s hands.

Now it reads, “likewise, you wives...”. Now, men, don’t start on that “likewise, you wives” without realizing that “likewise” literally means “just as you husbands are commanded to live humble, gentle lives in the face of adversity, while under authority, you wives should follow that example.” In fact, even if your husband isn’t gentle, that’s no excuse. Your gentle behavior alone may well win his heart. That’s what the verse means. It reads:

Do not let your adornment [beauty] be merely outward—
arranging the hair, wearing gold, or of putting on fine
apparel—

rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the
incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is
very precious in the sight of God. (I Peter 3:3,4 NKJV)

In other words, it will not be your outward adornment that will affect your husband eternally. It will be your quiet, gentle spirit. It will be the way you quietly respond to life’s injustices that will bear testimony that a supernatural God has transformed your natural responses. They will want what you have. That is why gentleness is so “precious in the sight of God” according to the passage.

But this is not a “women’s” verse. It is a “likewise, you wives verse”...which means that the believing husband is setting the example for the wives to follow—in the marketplace, in the workplace, and in the home. Should you happen to have an unbelieving husband, or a disobedient one, ladies, you are to be gentle in the face of adversity anyway. But the men are to set the example. “Even hereunto were we called...” says verse 21 of chapter two. The home was meant to be the showcase of gentleness and humility: two people so bowing to one another’s needs, that never would there be conflict over who gets their way, because each is too busy trying to give themselves away to the other one, and each is too humble to even consider that they

deserve something better.

GENTLE WITNESSES

So the home is to be the showcase of humility: two people trying to “out-gentle” one another by serving one another. There is a second place, however, where God makes specific use of this word. It is in how we witness. Christians have, for the most part, confused being bold with being obnoxious. The “in” thing among many is to buttonhole unsuspecting “prospects” and blast them with their need of a Savior, without being sensitive to whether or not their spirits are open to the Gospel, and without being mindful that often they must earn the right to share their supernatural God by demonstrating His supernatural life. Granted, many witnessing opportunities are with those who do not even know you, but those who do, deserve to see what they are hearing about. That’s what Peter means when he writes,

But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

(I Peter 3:14,15 NKJV)

Once again, the backdrop is unjust suffering. You have done nothing worthy of rebuke, but you are being called upon to bear the brunt of persecution anyway. The way you respond will demonstrate who lives inside of you. You are to set God apart in your heart as all that matters (that’s meekness), and be always ready to answer anyone who wants to know why you are so different. But you are to do it with meekness, or gentleness, and fear.

In other words, the reason God often allows you into tough situations is so that others who may be watching can see a different kind of response...a gentle response. So different, in fact, that they will be drawn to ask you why you are so different. When they do, be ready...have a clear explanation of who Jesus is, and what Jesus does, so you can share the reason for the hope that is in you. But you simply must do it in meekness. You must appear to be their servant, ready to help them; not their judge, ready to convict them. God is their judge; you are their servant. How you answer those who are seeking an answer is as

important as what you say. It must be done with a gentle heart; it must demonstrate a life that would be willing to die, if need be, that they might be saved. That is the life Jesus lived for you. That is the death Jesus died for you. He is the One who lives in you. The One who is meek, and lowly in heart.

GENTLE REPROOF

There is at least one more situation in Scripture where a gentle spirit is a requirement, not an option. That is the case of rebuke or correction. Never is rebuke to be done condescendingly or self-righteously. Never. Always it is to be done in such a spirit of meekness, that the very humility with which you correct is in itself the greatest rebuke of all. Galatians gives this clear guideline:

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Galatians 6:1-3 NKJV)

Here we have a clear case of justified rebuke. A brother has been overtaken in a fault. He is guilty, and has been found out. Your job is to go to that brother, with two distinct priorities and one distinct warning..

Priority 1- You go for the purpose of restoration. You are not there to judge him, but to restore him. You are not there to say, "I told you so". You are not there to see how hard you can make it for him. You go to that one for the sake of restoration.

Priority 2- You go meekly. You are his servant, there to help him up, in a state of real humility, and to assist him in finding freedom again.

The warning is obvious. "Consider yourself; lest you be tempted." You could be next. Whatever his sin is; you're not immune. If you go condescendingly, you set yourself up for the same fall.

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall. (I Corinthians 10:12)

Believers who are in the correction business had better be careful how they assume that awesome role. Paul adds this:

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But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,

in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,
(II Timothy 2:23-25 NKJV)

In other words, humility and gentleness must also be the law of the opposition party. When you are engaged in a conflict, or in a campaign, even for righteousness sake, be it in the marketplace, in the community, or in the church (especially in the church); state your case gently, humbly, meekly...without anger, without vindictiveness, without judgment. The outcome is God's responsibility. Making your position known in utter humility is yours. And I believe 99% of all the problems that exist within the Body of Christ, and within the local churches, in particular, would be solved before they get to the crisis stage, if everyone simply obeyed Paul's instruction... "humbly correcting those who are in opposition." When you do it any other way, you are in conflict with Biblical absolutes, and even though your position may be dead right, if your attitude is dead wrong, you may win the battle and lose the war.

GENTLE LIVES

What God is after is men and women of humility. He delights when His children walk this earth clothed in the garments of a meek and gentle spirit. He delights when His children live in the home with such gentleness, that the word of the day is "how can I serve you", rather than "you violated my rights". He delights when we witness with such gracious gentleness that "when they ask us a reason for the hope that is in us", we respond with meekness and fear. He delights when we correct those who are captured in sin with such a gentle heart that they are drawn irresistibly to resist that sin and repent. He delights when we learn, in the midst of a conflict, to address our opposition with deep humility and a heart filled with meekness. He delights... because when we do, we are letting the world about us see the amazing difference that only Jesus Christ can make in a life.

If you are struggling with the concept of meekness, spend some time just listening to how God feels about those who are meek. Listen to the heartbeat of God where the meek are

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concerned:

Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way.

The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way. (Psalms 25:8,9)

Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite;

The LORD lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground. (Psalms 147:5,6)

For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation. (Psalms 149:4)

The Lord our God has a beautiful room in the midst of His precious heart reserved for those who are of a meek and lowly spirit. He will guide them, He will teach them, He will lift them up when they fall, He will beautify them by clothing them with the garments of salvation. Yea, they will inherit the earth. They will possess the inheritance that is rightfully theirs, because the Lord delights, He takes pleasure in those who are meek toward Him, humble toward themselves, and gentle toward others.

Oh, Beloved, let us lay aside even this moment, that prideful, arrogant, self-sufficient spirit that so antagonizes the world and that is so uncharacteristic of the God we serve; and let us in gentleness demonstrate a life so supernatural that even as they see our lives, they will hear a voice whispering:

Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

...for I Am gentle and humble in heart [meek and lowly in heart]; and you shall find rest for your souls.

(Matthew 11:28,29b NAS)

He is and they will...

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