

DID JESUS REALLY SAY THAT?

Power Comes From Yielding

Matthew 5:5-12

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We begin this morning with a pop quiz. What do these two men have in common? William Gladstone, Prime Minister of Great Britain in the 1800's....and Jimi Hendrix, famous rock star who died in 1970. The answer? They both are known for a similar quote that goes like this: "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace." Now ponder that statement in conjunction with our text this morning. Do you see the connection between yielding power and peace in all relationships?

Now that is a counter-cultural word today and it was even more so in Jesus' day. In that day, the Jews of Palestine were living under *Pax Romana* (Roman peace). Before Pax Romana, small nations and city-states had been warring, pirates had been raiding sea vessels and life was chaotic. The Roman power brought order. But it was superficial. It was peace through force and brutality. Not the deep biblical *shalom*--wholeness, justice and wellbeing.

Power, when left unchecked and unchallenged, is very intoxicating. Listen to these words by the philosopher Toynbee: "Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make drunk with power" [*Red Letter Christians*, Tony Campolo, p. 37]. In other words, there is a destructive power inherent in power. Jesus knew that when power gets married to pride, the ego is always grasping for more, especially when it is challenged [I am indebted to Reinhold Niebuhr for this thought, cited in *King Came Preaching*, by Mervyn Warren, p. 119].

So in light of all the abuses of power, what did Jesus say? What is the Jesus way? "Blessed are the meek." Did Jesus really say that? Really? Meek? Doesn't that rhyme with weak? The Greek word means gentle, considerate, humble, unassuming, courteous, but NOT weak. Moses is described in Numbers 12:3 as meek. Was he weak? He took on Pharaoh and an evil Egyptian empire. Jesus is described in Matthew 11:29 as meek. Was he weak? He took on the Roman powers, the corrupted church powers of his day and sin, hell, death and the grave. I don't think so! In fact, the word "meek" was a word used for taming wild animals. A horse that is broken is not weak. She is as strong as ever, but her energies are channeled effectively, able to become all she was created to be.

H.H. Farmer once said that "Power is the ability to achieve purpose...even if it requires self-imposed limitations at the present time" [from *Things Not Seen*]. Did you hear that? Isn't that a perfect description of Jesus' incarnation and the Cross? Here it is in a nutshell: Jesus won by losing. That is counter-cultural.

Let's bring this down to the street level, to daily living in the rough and tumble of relationships. Have you ever been controlled by another person? Are you a controller? Do you always have to win the argument? Always have to have the last word? "Blessed are the meek...Blessed are the merciful...blessed are the peacemakers..." Did Jesus really say that?

Take the area of marriage as an example. I note with some amusement that some men love to begin quoting the Apostle Paul in Eph. 5:22 regarding wives being subject to their husbands. Instead, they should begin one verse earlier, in v. 21, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." My seminary professor, Dr. John Howell points out that the word for mutual submission is the opposite of self-assertiveness, independent self-seeking. It is "voluntary yieldedness in love" [*Equality and Submission in Marriage*, p. 67].

I love these words from poet Joyce Kilmer: "Next time I won't waste my heart/on anger; I won't care about/being right. I'll be willing to be/wrong about everything and to/concentrate on giving myself away." In other words, we can lose power and actually gain authority and respect. By giving himself away, Jesus lost power but gained all authority of heaven and earth (Matthew 28:16-20; Phil. 2:5-11).

Someone has described the meek inv. 5 as "those surrendered to God" [*Living The Sermon on the Mount*, by Glen Stassen, p. 48]. Surrendering egos, the need to be right, the need to get our way, the need to get even. Surrendering our will, our way, for God's. And when we surrender, we win. When we surrender, God's unusual power flows into our lives. Jesus begins to transform us.