

The Beatitudes (3)

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.'

In my first talk in this series on the Beatitudes I spoke of the problems which are associated with them: problems which, in many cases, are due to an incomplete and even wrong understanding of what is being spoken of. In the Beatitudes the Lord is obviously speaking of desirable qualities within people; but to many people today those qualities seem visionary and not at all to be desired or sought after, because there is misunderstanding as to what is meant by them. Particularly with regard to the third Beatitude.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

And it is not difficult to see why. To modern ears the word meek describes 'a weak, flabby, milk and water, spineless creature, lacking in all virility, submissive and subservient to a fault, unable to stand up for themselves or for anyone else'. And we cannot understand what is desirable about that.

On top of this, these people are said to inherit the earth - a startling promise which, if literally true, just isn't borne out in practice. 'Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.'

However, the problems are not due to the Beatitude itself, but rather to an inadequate understanding of what is meant. We can be quite certain it is not the Beatitude which is at fault, rather it is the way we have come to think of it. And it is a revised and truer understanding which we are seeking after.

What of the word 'meek' first of all? Today we think of it in terms of qualities we come close to despising. But is this how it has always been used? Whilst it has undoubtedly come to mean certain things to people now, was this always so?

Now we read the man Moses 'was very meek, above all men which were upon the face of the earth.' (Numbers 12:3) And note the fact that this is said about Moses, about whom there can be no possible suggestion of him being a weak man. To the contrary, few men have been more forceful or more forthright, or have demonstrated such capacities for leadership as he did. If Moses was a meek man he wasn't a meek man in the way we have come to think of meekness today.

And then the Lord speaks of Himself as being 'meek and lowly in heart', Matthew 11:29. Again, it cannot possibly suggest a weak man for the Lord was demonstrably a man of immense courage who challenged the authority of the Scribes and Pharisees, denounced their practices and exposed their false doctrines. Think of meekness as having its source 'in weakness, or in indifference, or in fear, or in a slack and unprincipled tolerance', but this is not the way it has been used in the past, and it is clearly not the meaning it originally carried.

Our word 'meek' comes from a Hebrew word which means a person who is resolved to be led in all things by the Lord. It means a person 'who in loving and obedient humility accepts the guidance of the Lord and the providence of the Lord'. Weakness doesn't enter into it. Those being spoken of have overcome their inclinations to lead themselves; have successfully resisted their baser promptings; have determined not to live selfishly and according to their own standards, but according to the Lord's standards. These are the meek as the word was originally meant to be understood.

Again I stress the point that this has nothing to do with weakness. Indeed it is a courageous and strong minded person who resists his selfishness and places the leading of their life in the Lord's hands. It is unquestionably a courageous and strong minded person who resists the temptation to anger, irritability, hurtfulness and egotism, in favour of the Lord's way. It is a courageous and strong minded person who rests content under the dispensations of Divine Providence, rather than being resentful and bitter about what may come his way. Meekness, rightly understood, speaks of great strength of character. It speaks loyalty to the Lord's teaching and a deep seated resolve to be guided by it. 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.'

With regard to this third Beatitude, Swedenborg wrote that the meek 'are those in the good of charity'. (*Apocalypse Explained* 304). They are those who are making every effort to overcome their evils and to apply the truth they know to life. They have shaken off the bondage in which their evils once held them. They know what it is to be free of the old feelings, of the readiness which was once there to take offence or withhold forgiveness. They have come to see things in their proper perspective, the things of self and of the world being subordinate to the things of heaven and of the spirit.

In those instances in Scripture where the meek are mentioned, these are those who are meant. In Psalm 22:26, for example, we read, 'The meek shall eat and be satisfied.' Psalm 25:3,9 reads, 'Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will He teach sinners in the way. The meek will He guide in judgement and the meek will He teach His way.' And then in Psalm 37:10-11 'A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity'

What then of the promise that the meek will inherit the earth? Possibly those who were listening to the Lord as He spoke these words thought in terms of the world as we know it. Certainly others have done since. But we know now that this is not meant. It is in fact a spiritual inheritance which is meant. It is a possession, the mastery and control of which we gain, within ourselves, which the Lord promised. He spoke of the earthly or external, side of our natures which, in time, we can come to possess and rule. At the outset it invariably rules us, but the promise is that the position will be reversed. 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.'

It is with us, as it was with the people of Israel as they entered into possession of their inheritance, the Promised Land. They found that there were peoples and idolatrous practices to be eradicated beforehand. We also find that there are evils and falsities to be expelled; evils and falsities which have made their home in our thoughts and affections. These have to be expelled. As we said earlier, it is the meek who have expelled them, and they are able to enter into their promised inheritance; their every thought and action is ruled and governed from their inner trust in the Lord and obedience to His teachings. 'He that trusts in me' the Lord said 'will inherit the earth, and shall possess by inheritance the mountain of My holiness'. Isaiah 57:13. We have in the past tended to interpret such promises naturally. But the Lord in fact spoke of spiritual things and of an inheritance far more important to us than any external possession into which one might come.

It has been said 'It does not matter much who owns the earth, but it matters greatly that people should not be possessed by the earth, should not be dominated by earthly desires and passions. We are masters of the earth when we are freed from the illusions of the earth born. We are the free people of God when we are reborn of His Spirit, and the cares of the world fall from us when we conquer worldliness. Every person is a heaven and a world in miniature, and they enter into his inheritance when his heaven controls his world.' Hall, '*The Blessed Way*' page 50.

The Swedenborg Programme – Number 135. <http://www.swedenborg.com.au>