

The Fruit of the Spirit

Part 7 – Gentleness

My old pastor, who was in his 80s, used to say to me, “Tony, sometimes my mind makes contracts my body can’t fulfil.”

That’s understandable at that age.

But sometimes I feel the same way as a teacher of God’s Word.

I choose a passage of Scripture to teach a series on.

Then I discover that some of the topics are really hard to speak on.

So this was one of the most difficult messages to prepare, and all because of this word translated as either gentleness or meekness.

Ancient Greek expert William Barclay calls it “the most untranslatable of words.”

It is made even more difficult because, in English, some words have undertones.

The word “meek” also has connotations.

A meek man is scared of own shadow.

Meek = weak, spineless.

But it’s part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

So we’re going to try and unravel its meaning.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

1. Meekness is humble

Jesus described Himself as meek.

Matthew 11:29

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

How did that play out in His life?

At the beginning of Matthew 21, it describes what happened as Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem.

First, He gave some instructions to His disciples.

He said, “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.”

So, let’s read from verse 6: 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 on the road.

We call this “Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.”

This entry took place shortly before His crucifixion.

Around the same time, there was another entry into Jerusalem taking place.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, had his seat of government in the coastal city of Caesarea.

And it was the custom of the Roman governor to enter Jerusalem at important feasts - like the Passover - and keep the peace.

So imagine this: hundreds of soldiers, with their weapons and their shields.

The sound of drums and marching, the cavalry and their horses all entering from the west.

And right at the head of this impressive procession:

The governor, Pontius Pilate, on his horse.

Why on a horse?

Because that's what the mighty rode.

This show of force was to remind the people that Pilate was powerful, ruthless and to be feared.

But from east, Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the true Master of the Universe, enters Jerusalem.

What sort of ruler is He? He rides a donkey. Why?

The donkey is the kind of animal ridden by the insignificant.

It was also ridden by those on a mission of peace.

Meekness is humble; it doesn't need to blow its own trumpet.

2. Meekness is strength under control

The word translated "meekness" was the standard Greek word for an animal that was domesticated, trained to obey the word of command, responding to the reins, and accepting the control of the master.

Not self-controlled, but under the Master's control; this person doesn't do what they want, but what the Master wants.

Jesus is the perfect example of strength under control.

Because He was always yielded to His Father.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, a great multitude of people came to arrest Him, and carrying swords and clubs.

In Matthew 26:50-54, it says they "laid hands on Jesus and took Him.

And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear."

But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"

I wonder if we can put ourselves into that moment.

It's Jesus' last night before His crucifixion, and He knows He's going to be crucified.

His enemies come in force, fully armed, to arrest Him.

Judas is there too.

And Jesus has done nothing wrong.

In the heat of the moment, Peter cuts off someone's ear.

It's a natural reaction to want to meet force with force.

But I could also understand if Jesus had lashed out.

Jesus said He could call on more than twelve legions of angels.

A Roman legion contained 6,000 men.

So twelve legions is 72,000 angels.

It took only two angels to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

So what could 72,000 angels do?

But not only didn't Jesus call on the 72,000 angels, He healed the servant's ear.

Jesus had the power, but He controlled it.

The great ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, defined virtues as being half-way between two extremes:

For example, a generous man is half-way between a spendthrift and a miser.

He defined meekness as: "between excessive anger and excessive angerlessness, the quality of the man who is always angry at the right time and never at the wrong time."

Sounds like Jesus, doesn't it?

3. God will avenge the meek

Proverbs 22:22-23

Do not rob the poor because he is poor, nor oppress the afflicted (meek: Hebrew equivalent of Greek) at the gate; for the LORD will plead their cause, and plunder the soul of those who plunder them.

Think of David before he became king.

Saul made numerous attempts on his life.

David had two perfect opportunities to kill Saul.

He didn't. Why not? Because of meekness.

The meek person never needs to take their own revenge.

Leviticus 19:18

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

Yet, how much faith does that take?

The person who doesn't trust God will never be able to leave it to Him to sort things out.

Every day, a soldier made it his practice to end the day with Bible reading and prayer.

When everyone got ready for bed, he knelt by his bunk.

Some of them took the opportunity to make fun of him.

But one time the abuse went beyond ridicule.

As he bowed in prayer, a soldier threw his boots at him, hitting him in the face.

Everyone jeered, hoping there would be a fight, but he didn't retaliate.

The next morning, the soldier who threw his boots was amazed.

His boots had been polished and returned to the foot of his bed.

That's meekness.

Meekness is refusing to lash out when we can, refusing to take revenge, and controlling our natural impulses.

It's the complete absence of the spirit of retaliation.

4. Jesus is meek and approachable

Let's go back to:

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Notice what Jesus says here.

First of all, He invites all who are under a heavy load to come to Him.

He invites us to take His yoke upon ourselves.

The yoke was a wooden beam used to pair two oxen together.

Then Jesus gives the reason for His invitation.

He says, “For I am gentle (meek) and lowly in heart.”

In other words, He’s a gentle Master.

For lots of people, they are wearing Satan’s yoke.

He is a harsh master.

But Jesus is gentle, kind and gracious.

If you have not submitted your life to Jesus, you are under Satan’s yoke.

I want to invite you to come under Jesus’ yoke.

He says, “My yoke is easy (comfortable) and My burden is light.”

Tired of your old life?

Now is the time to change masters.