

Text: Genesis 50:15-26

Title: Joseph's example of Christ-like meekness

Time: December 6, 2009 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Some of us are planning on Friday to travel to Danbury CT to see The Baptist Church of Danbury's Christmas play there. I hope you can join us. I was an assistant pastor at that church for about 11 years, and Christmas programs were always a big "to do" when we were there, primarily because of the extreme talents of the pastor's wife in this area, Janet Reinhardt. Now her daughters are grown, and I believe that some of them are equally talented forces in what they do there around Christmas.

I can remember one song Janet had a young girl sing for one of these programs, which I had never heard before, but after hearing would never forget. It was written by a couple that is today closely associated with Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, so I do not mean to communicate an unqualified endorsement of its authors, but this particular song was written in a very conservative style, and it captures an important theme of the true meaning of Christmas - the meekness of Christ - in a way that few songs have. It is called "How should a King come?":

"How should a King come?

Even a child know the answer of course,

In a coach of gold and a pure white horse,

In the beautiful city in the prime of the day,

And the trumpets should cry as the crowds make way.

And the flags fly high in the morning sun,

As the people all cheer for the sovereign one.

And everyone knows that's the way it is done.

That's the way a king should come.

"How should a King come?

Even a commoner understands
He should come for his treasures and his houses and lands.
He should dine with silver upon berries and milk
And sleep upon a bed made of satin and silk.
And high on a hill his castle should show
All its light to the people in the village below.
And everyone knows that's the way it is done.
That's the way a King should come.

"How did the King come?
On a star-filled night into Bethlehem
Rode a weary woman and a worried man.
And the only sound on the cobblestone street
Was the shuffle and the ring of their donkey's feet.
And they came to the inn and finding no room
They settled for the barn, not a moment too soon.
Everyone should know that's the way it was done.
That's the way the king has come."

One of the wonders of Christmas time is the humble circumstances of the birth of our Savior who was the King of the Jews. King Jesus was meek. Matt. 21:5 claims that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise of Isa. 62:11, which said: "Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass."

In these last verses of Genesis, we read of the final days of Joseph, one of the rulers of Egypt. And in this description of the final days of his life, Joseph does what he had done throughout his life. He projects a character that reminds us of Christ.

What is different in this passage in terms of Joseph's dealings with his brothers is the fact that his father Jacob is now dead. The only force restraining Joseph from pursuing some form of retribution against his brothers is the meekness of Joseph's character. I want us to focus our study of the passage together on Joseph's example of Christ-like meekness.

I. Some human-like roadblocks to living with Christ-like meekness (vv. 15-18).

Illustration: The weather we have been enjoying so far this season makes the ice storm of last year seem like a distant memory. When that hit, we all learned what roadblocks really look like. I do not think that I will ever forget the one on Cera and George's road, where two trees made an X. Roadblocks make further progress impossible.

Application: Spiritual growth or the sanctification of the believer is often described in Scripture as a path or road that we need to travel. 1 Thess. 4:1, "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more."

At the end of this path that we all must walk and make ever increasing progress on is Christ-likeness. There are many components to Christ-likeness, for our Lord is a truly glorious being, but when the Lord Himself summed up what it meant to learn of Him and be like Him, he mentioned meekness. In Matt. 11:29 he challenges the weary and heavy laden to "take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls." So what are some of the roadblocks that make further progress toward Christ-like meekness impossible. The brothers give us these.

A. Self-preservation is a roadblock to living with Christ-like meekness (v. 15).

Application: Sigmund Freud described self-preservation as one of the two basic instincts of human nature. Today's authorities in the field of psychoanalysis have modified their view of this, but the Bible's teach on the topic has never changed. The Bible teaches that the instinct for self-preservation is natural to man because human nature is

fallen. For we fallen sinners, the sons and daughters of Adam, it is very difficult to separate selfishness from self-preservation.

This cause is certainly not a part of Christ-like meekness. The ministry of Christ had nothing to do with self-preservation. He came not to do His own will, but the will of the One who had sent Him (John 6:38). He did not come to save His life for Himself, but to give it for others. To be like Him is to be willing to do the same, exchanging our own self-interest for the interests of the will of God for our lives: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8:45).

B. Self-deception is a roadblock to living with Christ-like meekness (vv. 16-18).

Application: Some believe that the brothers were telling the truth in these verses, but I think that it is more likely, given the timing of the story and the motivation behind it, that the brothers made it entirely up. When selfishness is the guiding principle of the life, dishonesty is often not far behind in the cause of self-preservation.

The brothers were not being honest with Joseph, but neither were they being honest with themselves at first. There is a contrast in their attitude from vv. 16-17 to v. 18. Between these two, Joseph weeps, and that weeping causes the brothers to get real about the situation they found themselves in. In vv. 16-17, they are a bit sure of themselves (v. 16, they "command" Joseph; v. 17, "the servants of the God of your fathers"). In verse 18 they fall before Joseph as his slaves.

We need to stop kidding ourselves about our own lack of Christ-likeness. We become very accustomed to telling ourselves that our disobedience really does not matter all that much. "So we have not followed through on a commitment or

two, big deal. So I have put something else ahead of my God, doesn't everyone?" We deceive ourselves with these excuses, and we inhibit our progress to Christ-likeness.

Remember what James says about doing, not just hearing, the word of God: "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does." Are we blessed by the Lord because we have put away self-deception, admitting our pathetic apathy, and committing ourselves to a faithful obedience to the Word of God?

II. Some Joseph-like characteristics of living with Christ-like meekness (vv. 17b, 19-21).

Application: Love born of forgiveness is a characteristic of Christ-like meekness (v. 17b, "Joseph wept"). The text only tells us that Joseph wept; it does not tell us why. But we can guess why he weeps before his brothers here, because he has wept this way before (Gen. 45:1-15).

Illustration: I will always remember the wonderful prayer time we had at the IBFNA conference in Pittsburg this past summer. Dr. Clay Nuttel led the session with a devotional in which he described how God moved the congregation he pastored at one point, so much so, that people were getting up in the service, weeping, falling on the necks of one another, and getting made right through love born out of forgiveness.

We need those revival winds here as well. We need the sincere unity that comes from love born of forgiveness, and it comes when Christ-like meekness is a part of our character the way it was for Joseph.

In addition, humility born of faith is a characteristic of Christ-like meekness (vv. 19-20). Joseph asks a wonderful question in verse 19, which we all need to take the time to answer ourselves: "Am I in God's place?"

Illustration: In 1973 the American Humanist Association published what they called "Humanist Manifesto II." The need for a version 2 was related, in part, to the catastrophic events human nature had produced with WWII shortly after the publication of the optimistic first manifesto in 1933. The first section in the second version is entitled "Religion," and there the humanists describe their starting point: "As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity. Nature may indeed be broader and deeper than we now know; any new discoveries, however, will but enlarge our knowledge of the natural."

The first thing the Bible teaches us is "In the beginning God." He is where everything begins. To begin with humans rather than God is to put humans in God's place. To begin your day, your priorities, your plans, and your purposes with yourself rather than with God is to put yourself in God's place. This is not "nontheism." Everyone has something in God's place. Having man there is humanism. Joseph exhibits Christ-like meekness because he has the correct Person in God's place. For Joseph, God was in God's place, and Joseph had put Him there by faith. He expresses this faith in two ways:

1. Joseph had faith in the power of God's plan as he reflects on the past (v. 20). If there is someone who has a right to doubt the power of God's plan as he looks on the past events of his life, Joseph may be a candidate. But Joseph's experiences had taught him the amazing truth that what others intend for evil, God plans for the purposes of good. That understanding takes faith, for evil is very real and damaging. But the day is coming when we shall be able to look back and understand perfectly well that this truth was true in our lives as well: though others meant it for evil, God meant it for good. This is why Joseph

never had any trouble getting over what his brothers had done to him. He affirmed that his past was in God's hands.

2. Joseph had faith in the power of God's plan as he contemplated the future (vv. 21, 24-25). He would do what he could to affect this future (v. 21), but ultimately God would do more (v. 24-25). Here again, evil and suffering would be a part of God's plan (Exod. 1:8-11), but faith still sees that God's care for His people and God's promises to His people always stand firm in the end (Heb. 11:22, "By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones").

III. Some rewards for those in possession of Christ-like meekness (vv. 22-26).

Illustration: Jesus promised in His Sermon on the Mount that the meek would inherit the earth. Christ-like meekness yielded a wonderful inheritance in the life of Joseph.

Application: Joseph inherited the blessings God intends for the family (vv. 22-23; unity, grandchildren). There was unity in this family because of Joseph's Christ-like meekness (v. 22). That meekness was something that influenced many generations beyond Joseph (vv. 23-24). Joseph had a special relationship with his grandson Machir ("one sold"), who was undoubtedly named in honor of his grandfather's faithfulness in the face of great difficulty. The phrase "born on Joseph's knees" indicates that Joseph adopted Machir's sons as his own. It is Christ-like meekness that will influence the next generation to follow the faith of their fathers.

Conclusion: Finally, the meek inherit the fulfillment of God's promise to the patriarchs (vv. 24-26). Here Joseph sounds a lot like Jacob, and we saw that Jacob's concern for the burial of his corpse in Canaan was an expression in his faith that God

would resurrect him from the dead and give him the land that was promised to him some day.

The descendants of Joseph's brothers keep the charge of their forefather (Exod. 13:19). The coffin of Joseph accompanied that generation of Israelites through their wilderness wanderings as an ongoing testimony to the faith that this patriarch had that he would one day have an inheritance in the land of the promise of God.

I hope you understand this morning that those who are meek like Christ shall inherit the earth. We become meek in this way by following the Lord's instruction: "Come unto Me all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching