

Changing the Price Tags of Life

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January 14-15, 2006
Life As It Was Meant To Be
Matthew 5:3-5

I read a story once about a break-in that occurred in an electronics store. It happened in the dead of night. The police responded to the alarm. The owner let them in. The police and the owner went through the store, but they didn't see anything missing. Nothing seemed to be stolen. So everyone assumed that the alarm went off accidentally. The owner locked up the store and went home.

But in the morning when shoppers came, they discovered something really interesting about the merchandise. High definition, flat screened TVs were selling for a \$1.50. Computer cables were selling for \$1500. Batteries cost \$600 and laptop computers were going for \$4.00.

What the thieves had done during the break-in was to simply switch the price tags on everything. They went around the store and took the price tag on the high definition TVs and put them on the batteries. They took the battery prices and put them on the TVs.

When you read the Sermon on the Mount, it would seem from even a casual reading that this is what Jesus is doing. He is changing the price tag on everything. Things that we consider to be really valuable, Jesus is saying are worthless. Things that we consider to be worthless, Jesus is saying that these things have God's approval and blessing on them. Some people have called the Sermon on the Mount the "great reversal." Jesus turns contemporary values on their head.

I want you to see this for a moment. Let's just read through the Beatitudes. Matthew 5:3-10:

Matthew 5:3-10

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

By the way, I take verses 11-12 to be a further extension or explanation of verse 10.

Jesus is giving us the value system of the kingdom of God. He is saying here that these are the qualities that ought to characterize those people who have been permeated by God's reign and rule. That is what we discovered last week. This is what people who

have become gospelized, impacted by the good news that the long-awaited intervention by God has now happened in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. These are the character qualities that ought to be embodied in those who claim to believe the gospel. That is what gospelized, kingdomized people should look like.

Now, compare the character qualities of the kingdom of God with the character qualities valued by the kingdom of this world. Years ago JB Phillips rendered the Beatitudes that apply in the kingdom of this world this way:

- Happy are the “pushers,” for they get on in the world.
- Happy are the hard-boiled, for they never let life hurt them.
- Happy are those who complain, for they get their own way in the end.
- Happy are the blasé, for they never worry over their sins.
- Happy are the slave-drivers, for they get results.
- Happy are the knowledgeable men of the world, for they know their way around.
- Happy are the trouble-makers, for they make people take notice of them.

Jesus turns all of these values on their heads. He does not believe in the survival of the fittest. Jesus does not believe that the person who dies with the most toys wins. And if you want to follow Jesus, you have to embrace this great reversal of values. If you wish to follow Jesus, you must choose Jesus’ re-valuation of things as your own way of approaching life.

As we begin our look at the Beatitudes (and by the way, the word “beatitude” is derived from the Latin “beatitud” which simply means “blessedness; the pronouncing of a blessing upon certain types of people), I’ve called today’s talk: “Changing the Price Tags of Life.” Matthew 5:3-5. Let’s pray.

Matthew 5:3-5

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Now, as we look at the character qualities of kingdom people, I’d like to begin with some general comments about the beatitudes.

These Qualities Are Not Natural Qualities

You will hear me say this over and over, but Jesus did not come into the world looking for people who already manifested these qualities so that he might give them the kingdom. He doesn’t say:

- “Ah, there is a person who is meek. They’re just the sort of person who I am going to invite into my kingdom.”
- “Oh, there is a peacemaker. You are just the kind of person that I will adopt as my son or daughter.”

What Jesus does not say is: “Since you are poor in spirit, I will give you the kingdom.” Rather, it is: You are poor in spirit because theirs is the kingdom. The proof that the kingdom has broken into your life is because you are poor in spirit. These are not natural qualities that we read in the beatitudes or in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus did not come looking for Sermon on the Mount people. Jesus came into the world to *produce* Sermon on the Mount people.

What Jesus is saying throughout this sermon is that when the gospel gets hold of you, this is what you are going to look like. These beatitudes describe the person who has become gospelized, the person who has been permeated and impacted by the Kingdom of God.

These Qualities Require Our Active Participation With the Grace Of God

Last week I said that the qualities described in the Sermon on the Mount, and in particular the Beatitudes, are not something we signed up for, something that we decided to do. There are some superficial folks in mainline churches who say: “We just need to do the Sermon on the Mount.” These superficial folks say: “The Sermon on the Mount is really the essence of Christianity. Forget all this supernatural stuff. Forget the stuff about the Virgin Birth and the substitutionary atonement of Christ at the cross and his bodily resurrection and ascension, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Let’s just all go out and do the Sermon on the Mount.”

As we saw, we cannot just go out and do the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is for converted people. It is for people who have been impacted and permeated by the kingdom of God. It describes people who have drunk deeply from the well of God’s Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is the agent of the kingdom, the one who brings to us the reign of God.

So, does this simply mean that we just have to surrender to God’s rule? We just turn to Christ for salvation and God will automatically produce these qualities in our life?

These qualifiers are not automatic. The gospel of the kingdom is something that God invites us to actively participate in. It is not an automatic that just because a person turns to Christ they will manifest all of the qualities of the Sermon on the Mount. This is one of many passages in the Bible, in which God’s work in us and God’s work for us becomes an incentive for us to make every effort to put his will into practice.

There is a wonderful example of this kind of text in 2 Peter 1:3-5:

2 Peter 1:3-5

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the

world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge

Because God has given us everything we need for godly life, Peter says make every effort to grow in obedience to God and in godliness.

Or to cite the apostle Paul in Philippians 2:12-13:

Philippians 2:12-13

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

In other words, the biblical message is not: Let go and let God; just be passive. Nor is the biblical message: God has done his bit by sending his Son to die on a cross; now it is all up to you. The biblical message is - because God is powerfully at work in you, because the Kingdom of God has invaded your life and is powerfully impacting you, because the Spirit of God lives in you, because you have been grabbed hold of by the gospel, because God is at work in you, you must make every effort to live this message out.

The life that you were meant to live is one in which you are an active participant and partner with the grace of God. In other words, just because the Sermon on the Mount is for folks who have been grabbed hold of by the kingdom, doesn't mean that we do absolutely nothing.

I so often run into Christians who claim to have made a discovery about the key to spiritual growth, or the key to revival in our city, or the key to some other great thing. They say: "Ah, you know, how unfortunate are the sad struggling Christians who are living such low level lives – crying, sweating, going through this hard process of dying to sin, and going to recovery groups, getting accountability in their lives, and going to counseling week by week and making little steps of progress. Why, you can be instantly transported to a whole new higher level, a victorious level, of Christian living. It is so easy to have the Fruit of the Holy Spirit. Just get filled with the Holy Spirit. Just have this particular experience. Just trust God and you will have all the life change you will ever want and need. This particular experience is the key to everything else in the Christian life. This particular technique is the key to revival in our city. If the churches in our city just united in prayer, we would have all the revival we desire. If you just did this one easy thing, you would see more miracles and more converts than you could handle."

The fact is, friend that God has inspired these 1094 double column pages in this book. The length of the Bible should be a stunning rebuke to anyone who comes up to you and tries to reduce the Christian life, or Christian revival, or Christian growth to one key or three easy steps. The Sermon on the Mount is for active participants in God's grace.

What Jesus is saying is: God's kingdom has broken in upon you. God's kingdom, his reign, has permeated your life. The gospel has gotten a hold of you. Now, work it out. Go for it, relying on God every step of the way.

You see, friends, God's grace and our discipleship are not in opposition to one another. Grace and merit are opposed to each other. Grace and deserving are opposed to one another, but not grace and human activity. You can be super active, pressing in, going after it, and running hard after the qualities you see on the Sermon on the Mount, all the time understanding that the only way these things are ever going to be worked in your life is by the grace of God.

Let me make this really simple. You have a lust problem? That lust problem is not just going to go away because you have accepted Christ into your life. The lust problem is not going to go away simply because you've had an experience or you travel here, there or anywhere. The lust problem is not going to go away with one easy key to defeating lust. It is a step by step progressive putting your flesh to death. It requires accountability, much prayer, being passionate about having purity of heart in your life, and going after it. All the time knowing and relying on the grace of God to internally convert you.

God will not zap you into life change. You may have experiences that provide you with a significant degree of freedom. I absolutely believe in deliverance. I absolutely see in the scripture and have experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit. But God requires all of us to walk out and work out what he has worked into our lives in the context of committed accountable relationships in the church. These character qualities require our active participation with the grace of God.

These Qualities Are All To Be Found In All Christians

All eight of the Beatitudes describe every Christian. They all describe the same person. In other words, all of these character qualities that we read in the Beatitudes are supposed to describe all of Jesus' followers. It is not as if Jesus is saying: "Well, some of my followers are called to be meek. Others are called to be peacemakers, others are called to be merciful and others will be persecuted." If you are a follower of Jesus, you are called to pursue and eagerly desire to manifest each of these qualities.

You may not, therefore, say, if you consider yourself a follower of Christ:

- Peacemaking is just not my thing. You know, I am a fighter.
- You know, I am really strong in mercy, but I am not that into righteousness.

The Beatitudes are like the fruit of the Holy Spirit that is mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23:

Galatians 5:22-23

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

The Christian is not a person who says:

- “You know, I am really joyful, so I don’t have to exercise any self control.”
- “I have lots of peace in my life, so I don’t need to be faithful.”

Every Christian is to pursue all of the fruit of the Spirit. Every Christian is to pursue all of the character qualities.

The fourth general observation that I want to make of the Beatitudes, before we look at the particular verses is this:

These Qualities Result In Blessednesss Not Necessarily Happiness

The eight Beatitudes begin with the word “blessed.” The Greek word for the word “blessed” is “makarios.” Some translators render this word “makarios” as “happy.”

- “Happy are the poor in spirit.”
- “Happy are they that mourn.”
- “Happy are the meek.”

John Stott in his wonderful commentary on the Sermon on the Mount quotes a Union College Professor of Psychology named Ernest Ligon, who wrote a book years ago titled *The Psychology of Christian Personality*. Ligon says that:

The Beatitudes constitute Jesus’ theory of happiness.

They are not so much ethical duties as a series of eight fundamental emotional attitudes. If a man reacts to his environment with them, his life will be a happy one, for he will have discovered the basic formula for mental health.

It certainly is the case that there is some truth in Professor Ligon’s view. God knows the way we are made. So much of our unhappiness comes from living counter to our Creator’s plans for our lives. We’ve all seen that. We live life across the grain of God’s will. And when we rub our lives across the grain of God’s will, we pick up splinters along the way.

God tells us to not have sex outside of marriage, not because he hates us, or because he is a heavenly prude and disapproves of sex. God tells us not to have sex outside of marriage because he loves us. He wants us to live happy, healthy lives. So many of us live counter to God’s plans in the area of our sexuality and you know the result. You have experienced this in your life. You’ve had broken hearts. You’ve gotten really insecure. You’ve had mistrustful relationships. Some of you have wrecked your marriage. You’ve been manipulated and you’ve been a manipulator. To say nothing of the epidemic rates that we have in America of sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, and out of wedlock pregnancies.

There is a close connection between obedience to God and personal happiness. Those of you who have been following Christ for a while, you've seen this connection. Disobedient, willful rebellious people are generally unhappy. Disobedience and out of control addicted lives often go hand in hand. There is a price for not doing our Creator's will. That is just the way we are designed.

But it is misleading to render *makarios* as happy because "happy" describes how we feel. "Blessed" describes how God feels about us and how God feels about our circumstances.

Let me just take, for example, the last Beatitude. I want you to understand this. Matthew 5:10:

Matthew 5:10

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

You may not be happy being persecuted. You may be bruised and hurt by what people say about you. You may feel rejected. You may feel confused or overwhelmed by the level of opposition you are facing at home or at your job, or from your family. But if you are being persecuted because of your association with Christ, if it is because you follow Jesus that you are getting criticized and made fun of, the Lord says "you are blessed." In other words, God is saying: "You may be hurt; you may be upset; you may feel horrible at times, you may be tossing and turning in your bed not knowing why things are happening to you, why you are facing so much opposition. But dear child, you are blessed. Dear child, I delight in you. You have my 'well done thou good and faithful servant.'"

You may not be happy, but if you are manifesting any of these qualities comfort your soul with this thought: God your father is pleased with you. God your father is honored. God your father says, "I bless you."

Let me put it this way: Friend, what would you prefer? Happiness in life, or blessedness in life? What do you want? Happiness or blessedness?

If you always insist on being happy, if you insist on always feeling okay, if you insist on not experiencing any pain or suffering, you may miss God's approval and God's favor on your life. If you say that you are going to live life in the most pain avoidant way, in the end you are going to miss happiness altogether. See, one day when we see God, we are either going to experience his smile, or his frown.

On the other hand, if you adopt the attitude which says:

- I may not for a season be happy. I am not happy trying to make peace with this aggressive, angry person in my office.

- I am not happy breaking off this dating relationship because I realize that me dating this person is not God's will.
- I am not happy staying in this difficult marriage, this marriage that causes me grief and pain, but I know that even though I am not happy for a season, I am making God my Father happy by keeping my vows.
- I know that by breaking off this relationship with this person who is outside of God's will, I am making God my Father happy. I've got God's approval on my life. God my Father is pleased with the choices I'm making. And if God my Father is pleased, then one day I am going to encounter his smile and experience his pleasure. And I am going to be eternally happy.

So, friend, what are you aiming at – happiness or blessedness? Temporarily making yourself happy, even at the price of disobedience to God your father, or being willing to live with temporary unhappiness so long as you live a life that pleases God?

Now, with all of that as the backdrop, let's look at Matthew 5:3:

Matthew 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We see this change of price tags – this change in what is of ultimate value in this first Beatitude. The world says: Blessed are those who are full of themselves. Jesus says: Blessed are those who have emptied themselves. The world says: Blessed are those who find answers within themselves. And Jesus says: Blessed are those who have come to the end of themselves and are looking to God.

Now, we need to look at what Jesus is saying very closely. Luke phrases this Beatitude differently in Luke 6:20:

Luke 6:20

Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

Luke speaks about the poor. Matthew speaks about the poor in spirit. Is Matthew simply spiritualizing Jesus' statement by adding poor "in spirit?" Is Luke making an economic point out of something spiritual?

You know, the Bible never romanticizes material poverty the way some wealthy university-educated suburbanites do today. The poor are not generally happy with poverty and neither is God. God does not set his blessing on destitution and say: This is great! There is no salvation in the Bible based on social class. God is not a Marxist.

We read this passage in Matthew and in Luke against an Old Testament background. We understand that the poor, in Judaism, are those who are in desperate need and who acknowledge their dependence upon God. The poor in Judaism are the humble of the land, the lowly, and the powerless. In the Old Testament the wealthy are often

portrayed as the proud rich, the violent and self-centered wealthy. The wealthy are cursed in Luke not because they have money, but because they live proud lives independent of God.

So Matthew catches the sense of Jesus' words exactly when he adds "poor in spirit." That is what Jesus is getting at. He is getting at humility – coming to the end of one's self, the emptying of one's self.

Now, there are two words in Greek that are used for poverty. There is the Greek word:

"Penes" = The Working Poor

People who work, but can only afford the barest essentials in life. They have no extra money for luxuries or anything beyond the barest necessities.

There is another Greek word for the poor:

"Ptocoi" = People Who Are Forced To Beg

"Ptocoi" refers to the absolutely destitute. Now, Matthew chooses this second word, "ptocoi," not "penes." What Jesus is saying is blessed are the utterly destitute in spirit. Blessed are those who come to God with absolutely nothing. Blessed are the spiritual beggars, those who come to God with empty hands and empty pockets. Blessed are those who acknowledge their complete spiritual bankruptcy, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

What a change in price tags. The world values self-sufficiency. The world says: Blessed are those who can get it together by themselves without any outside help. Blessed are those who always have a strategy to figure out the next step no matter what life throws at them. Again, spiritual poverty, like all the other character qualities, is not natural. Spiritual poverty is produced in a person's life as they are permeated by the kingdom of God. We are naturally full of ourselves. We are naturally full of our own opinions. We are full of our own sense of rightness. It is only when we encounter Christ, only when the kingdom breaks into our lives that we become spiritually bankrupt.

You know, spiritual bankruptcy, a sense of utter spiritual destitution before God is essential to begin of the Christian life. No one can be saved who does not first come to the end of themselves and their own self-reliance. Every Christian understands that salvation is a gift from God. It is entirely by grace through faith, not by works so that no one can boast. We renounce confidence in any righteousness of our own. We turn in faith to Christ to receive salvation. Salvation is a gift, and in our turning to Christ we declare complete spiritual bankruptcy.

It is like the old hymn, "Rock of Ages," which contains the verse:

Nothing in my hand I bring

Simply to thy cross I cling
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace
Foul I to the fountain fly
Wash me Savior, lest I die.

You know, almost every 12-step program begins at this point. We start a 12-step program saying: I acknowledge my powerlessness over – and then you fill in the blank:

- I acknowledge my powerlessness over alcohol.
- I acknowledge my powerlessness over cocaine.
- I acknowledge my powerlessness over gambling.
- I acknowledge my powerlessness over pornography.
- I acknowledge my powerlessness over food.

Everyone who has been through a 12-step group says: I only began to live when I acknowledged my powerlessness, my spiritual poverty.

But you know, the declaration of spiritual bankruptcy is not only necessary for beginning the Christian life. The declaration and acknowledgement of spiritual bankruptcy is necessary for growing as a Christian. See, we don't understand what kind of bankruptcy we declare at the beginning of the Christian life.

Jerry Bridges in his wonderful book titled *Transforming Grace* says this: “In the business world, financially troubled companies forced into bankruptcy have two options popularly known as Chapter 7 and Chapter 11. Chapter 11 deals with what we could call temporary bankruptcy. This action is chosen by a basically healthy company that if given time can work through its financial problems. Chapter 7 is for a company that has reached the end of its financial rope. It is not only deeply in debt, but it has no future as a viable business. It is forced to liquidate its assets and pay off its creditors. It is all over once you go into Chapter 7.” Bridges asks this question: “What kind of bankruptcy did we declare at the beginning of the Christian life? Did we file under chapter 7, permanent bankruptcy, or Chapter 11, temporary bankruptcy?” He answers: “Most Christians file under Chapter 11, temporary bankruptcy.”

Having trusted in Christ for our salvation, we very quickly revert to our works as the basis for sustaining our relationship with God. Whenever we fall on our faces, when we fail to do what we should do, or we do what we shouldn't do, we assume that we have forfeited God's grace on our lives and God's blessing for some unspecified period of time. We get on a performance treadmill. We start off saying: It is not my performance but we think we continue the Christian life through our performance.

Friends, this declaration of spiritual bankruptcy is the permanent condition of the Christian before God. In order to relate to God, I must always be relying utterly on him and not on myself. You do not rely on any psychological game you play with yourself. You do not rely on your feelings of faith. You do not come to God relying on the

devotions you had this morning, your Bible reading, or your prayer. You do not come to God relying on what you've given at church, or your church attendance, or your obedience in a certain area.

You know the blessing of crises is that they push us off the performance treadmill. When you get bad news from the doctor, when your finances are under attack, when you have a family crisis, when your child is ill or addicted or rebellious, when your resources are overwhelmed and the little boat you are sitting in is sinking, we recognize again our utter dependence on God for all of life. These blessed times of crises; I call them spiritual melt-down moments. When you are overwhelmed and you say to God, "God, I can't handle this. This problem is too big for my resources – financially, emotionally, psychologically, intellectually – this is too much for me. I am powerless. I need you. I cry out to you for help. Then, the Lord says: "Blessed are you. You are in the position of receiving the kingdom. Indeed, you show yourself to already be a kingdom person because you are spiritually poor."

The Beatitudes go on and we read this in Matthew 5:4:

Matthew 5:4

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Barclay in his commentary says that of all the paradoxes in the Sermon on the Mount, this is the most radical. Blessed are the unhappy? Blessed are those who grieve? Talk about changing the price tags. Again, this is not a natural quality. Jesus is not looking around for grieving people to bless them. He does have pity on those who grieve. Jesus does see people who are mourning the loss of loved ones and he draws near to him, but this is not primarily what is going on in this Beatitude. He is not talking about those who naturally mourn because of the loss of a loved one, or the loss of a romantic relationship. Jesus is talking about, first of all, blessed are those who see themselves and their sins in the light of God's holiness and they mourn over themselves and their sins. It is natural for us to minimize our sins. It is natural for us to rationalize them away. It is natural for us to compare our sins with the sins of our mate, or the sins of others around us. It is natural for us to excuse our sins.

What is not natural, what indicates that the kingdom of God has broken in upon you is for you to pause and feel the grief that is in the heart of God because of your sins – the grief regarding the pain that you cause to your father in heaven and the grief and pain that you cause to others. It is a sign of the Kingdom of God upon you when you allow yourself to feel the pain you have caused to another person. That is not natural. That is an indication of the kingdom.

In counseling, I always know that God is at work in this person's life when they get in touch with the pain that they have caused another person in their family, or the pain they caused someone they are dating, or someone in the past. When a person gets in touch with the pain they've caused and they truly grieve over that, I say there is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn. The mourning that Jesus is talking about is not only mourning over our own sins. The mourning that Jesus is talking about is gaining the heart of God for this world, and grieving with God as you say: "This is not the way it has to be."

Blessed are they who mourn. We grieve as friends marriages break down. We say: "It doesn't have to be this way. Christians don't have to head for divorce court." We grieve as we see children walk in rebellion. You don't have to live such a hard life. We grieve as we turn on the TV and we see the insanity and the garbage that is being poured into our community's water supply.

Nicholas Wolterstorff wrote a powerful book some years ago called *Lament for a Son*. His beautiful son in his early 20's suddenly died in an unbelievably tragic climbing accident. Wolterstorff, who is a philosophy professor, pours out his heart in this little book called *Lament For A Son*. One thing that he says in there is this: "Mourners are those who have caught a glimpse of God's new day, who ache with all their being for that day's coming, and who break out into tears when confronted with its absence."

Mourners, in other words, are aching visionaries. They see what could be and isn't yet here. Not every inner-city child has to have a one-way ticket for jail. Not every fatherless child has to grow up and father a lot of other children out of wedlock. It does not have to be that our country spends a million and a half dollars a minute on weapons to fight wars.

Our hearts ache because we see the new day dawning, the day of Christ's coming and we long for that day.

Finally, Jesus says in Matthew 5:5:

Matthew 5:5

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

We need to immediately say what meekness is not. In contemporary use, meekness is a very negative thing. Meekness usually implies spinelessness, weakness, a person without convictions. Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is not being willing to be a doormat that someone else can wipe their feet on. Jesus does not call someone blessed because you have no standards, because you have no convictions, because you have no boundaries. Meekness does not mean that you are wishy-washy or flabby. Meekness is not passivity.

Again, like being poor in spirit and mourning, meekness is not a natural quality. It is not being Harvey Milquetoast, being quiet, unassuming, and retiring. You can have any personality, you can be naturally aggressive, super type A, naturally opinionated. You can be someone like me and learn this quality of meekness. Meekness is a quality

produced by the gospel. It is what happens to a person when the Kingdom of God permeates their lives.

What is meekness? In classical Greek this term was used of a domesticated animal. It was used of a horse or an ox, who was incredibly strong, but had been broken, mastered. The two people in the Bible who are described as meek are Moses in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament. Both are incredibly strong. Both are men of great conviction. Both are men who have clear boundaries. Neither Moses nor Jesus was a doormat for anyone. They weren't weak. They weren't wishy-washy. They weren't spineless or retiring, or unassuming. Both were the opposite of passive. They had a huge capacity to draw lines and to be tough and to be confrontational, but they were entirely mastered by God.

A meek person is a person who exhibits great strength that has been wholly mastered by God. Meekness is Jesus refusing to retaliate, even to speak when he is falsely accused at his trial. He is a totally mastered person not by self-mastery, not by will power, but by the Spirit of God. A meek person is able to be mastered by God's Spirit because they have such a deep trust in God's control that they don't have to push or prod their way into the front.

You talk about a change in the price tags? A meek person is simply a person who doesn't have to look out for their own interests because they deeply believe they have a Father in heaven who will look out for them. A meek person is a person who can truly promote the interests of others.

Let me close with an illustration of meekness from the Bible. In Genesis 13 we read about a dispute between men who work for Abram, the older leader of his family, and men who work for Lot, Abram's younger nephew. Apparently, both Abram and Lot were wealthy and had huge herds and lots of property and there were conflicts among the employees who worked for Abram and the employees that worked for Lot.

Abram is a model of meekness. He doesn't have to push, prod and shove his way to the front. He doesn't have to dominate and control and make sure that his end is always protected. He trusts in God. Listen to Abram's words in Genesis 13:8-9:

Genesis 13:8-9

So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

Imagine if all the families who had disputes about an estate, or all the families who were arguing about a family business, or all the marriages where people are disputing with one another – imagine if all of these folks took Abram's attitude, Probate Courts, Divorce Courts and lawyers would have a lot more time on their hands.

Lot, this younger man, is the opposite of meekness. Read with me in verses 10-11:

Genesis 13:10-11

Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company

Like so many folks, Lot sees what he wants and he goes after that aggressively. I demand the biggest share. I demand the best. I deserve the promotion. I am going to grab for the spotlight. I will choose the best for myself.

Notice Abram's attitude. Meekness is not weakness. He is a strong man, but he has an even stronger trust in his Father in heaven. The meek person says: "I am willing to wait on God to give me mine. I don't have to grab, grasp, or dominate, or control or manipulate. I don't have to lie in bed at night and toss and turn trying to figure out how I am going to be protected."

I can roll my fears of the future onto the Lord. I can roll my career, I can roll my finances, I can roll my future, and I can roll my worries onto the Lord. Let the Lord worry; I don't have to. I can go to sleep. I can give the Lord my wounded ego and my need to be recognized and my need to be appreciated by people at my job or in my home or my church. I can give the Lord all of that and get the Lord's "atta-boy." I don't have to get the "atta-boy" or "atta-girl" from other people.

So instead of Abram lifting up his own eyes and choosing for himself, we read of this strong man who has been mastered by God and who trusts in God's control. We read of Abram these words in Genesis 13:14-17:

Genesis 13:14-17

The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

Abram, the meek man, becomes an inheritor of the earth. People who have come under God's reign sees the way that Jesus has changed the price tag on what is valuable and what is worthless, and it makes sense to them. People who have come under God's reign understand themselves to be bankrupt before God. They mourn over their own sins and the sins of the world and they trust in God's control and goodness to hold up their end of the bargain. Kingdom people value what God values and they count as worthless what God considers worthless. Let's pray.

Changing the Price Tags of Life

Rich Nathan
January 14-15, 2006
Life As It Was Meant To Be
Matthew 5:3-5

I. Basic Premises

- A. These Qualities Are Not Natural Qualities.
- B. These Qualities Require Our Active Participation With God's Grace.
- C. These Qualities Are All To Be Found In All Christians.
- D. These Qualities Result In Blessedness Not Necessarily Happiness.

II. Blessed Are the Poor In Spirit (Matthew 5:3)

- A. Economic or Spiritual Poverty? (Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20)
- B. Working Poor or Utter Destitution?
- C. Self-Sufficiency or Spiritual Bankruptcy?
- D. Temporary Permanent Bankruptcy?

III. Blessed Are They That Mourn (Matthew 5:4)

- A. Mourning Over Our Sin.
- B. Mourning Over What Could Be and Isn't.

IV. Blessed Are The Meek (Matthew 5:5)

- A. What Meekness Is Not
- B. What Meekness Is