

Lutheran Vespers, Sometime during 1947-1948
Recording #7
KVNU, 610, Logan, Utah
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Gracious Father in heaven, we pray Thee to guide us by Thy Spirit in this brief devotional period and bless Thy word to our souls. Increase our love for Thee and our trust in the grace of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Dear friends of Lutheran Vespers. What a promise is held out to us by this Word of Jesus: "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth," upon which we wish to meditate today.

We are all ambitious. We all want our lives to count for something. We want to accomplish things and no man ever did unless he was ambitious. But our trouble is that we become ambitious about the wrong things. When we become ambitious for money or popularity or pleasure, when our ambition means self-seeking, it always deteriorates us. God would never have said: "Thou shalt not covet," if we were not always tempted to become ambitious for the wrong things.

But here we have the promise of Jesus that we shall inherit the earth, all things shall be ours if we will be meek. And from the life and teaching of Jesus and His influence down through the ages, we can learn something about the power of meekness.

This beatitude from our Lord's Sermon on the Mount is probably the most unpopular of all of them. It has the least appeal to the men of the world. How are you ever going to get along in a world like this if you are meek? Things happen to the man who is aggressive, who goes after what he wants and takes what he can get. The meek may inherit something in heaven, but certainly not on earth. In the ancient world meekness was always despised and regarded as a vice. If you are insulted and did not avenge yourself, you were a coward. Even in our modern world, if anyone offended you, the honorable thing was to challenge him to a duel. That has now gone out of style, at least in our country, but the spirit still exists. If a friend of yours is insulted, you are apt to say to him, "You don't have to stand for this. If anyone did that to me I would show him. Don't let people take unfair advantage of you." But there is nothing very strong and heroic about that.

And you do not gain very much by revenge, except perhaps in exchange of bitterness or of violence. The really strong man is the one who can control his temper, who can refrain from anger. It was the wise Solomon, who said: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." Any man, any weak man, can strike back when he is struck. The strong are the meek.

We are living in a world that is ruled largely by the demon of greed. We are meant to inherit the earth, all things are made for us. But when people begin grasping, taking away from others, then everyone is on the defensive and all lose. You do not go forward when

on the defensive. Someone will soon figure out that for the time and the money spent in the past war, we might all have a lovely home and a new car, and a host of other conveniences. We should all inherit this, the whole earth, Jesus said. But we cannot get it by force and violence. The strong man who inherits the earth is the man with patience and understanding for his fellow men.

Now what really is meekness. It is an attitude toward God, first of all. It is not humility exactly, but the attitude a disciple takes toward his teacher when he is being taught, or the son toward his father when the father is exercising his parental authority, or the servant toward his master when receiving orders. Meekness is an attitude of dependence on another, on God, first of all.

Many people know nothing about meekness, because they have a wrong attitude toward God. They have no love for him. No one really loves God until he knows him as the Christian does and has seen him in Christ in his great love on the cross. Man is always in rebellion against God. You see it every time he boasts about the accomplishments of his power and might, every time he lifts himself above his creator. But when a man is converted, he is turned from self to God and then he assumes the attitude of the student toward his teacher. He becomes willing to learn and that is meekness. When a person becomes big enough to be little enough to learn, when he will admit his weakness and seek the Lord's strength, then he becomes meek and strong.

Most of us would probably be surprised if we made a note of every word of anger and ill will we express. That is not meekness to be sure. But we can overcome that. We can control our temper and ill will by being aligned much with the Lord in this attitude of learning from him. Jesus said, and it was the only virtue he directly called upon men to learn from him, "Learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart." The Apostle Paul learned from him. Writing to the Corinthians, he beseeches them by the gentleness and meekness of Jesus and he tested it in his own life for he declares: "When I am weak, then am I strong." That is true with us all. When we get into the presence of God and realize what we are, how unworthy, helpless and sinful we are, when we are weak in his sight, we are strong.

Now when Jesus talked about inheriting the earth, He was using a phrase in the Old Testament, which referred to inheriting the promised land. Later, the Jews applied it to the restoration of Palestine conquered by the Romans.

But Jesus speaks about inheriting the earth, the whole earth. And the history of Christianity shows how the meek and gentle Jesus has conquered the earth. We are meant to inherit the earth. God has made it for us to enjoy, but we cannot acquire it by violence. Contrary to the usual beliefs, it is not the violent and mighty, but the meek who get things. History shows that. The Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, and Romans, one after the other crushed the world of their day under their heels and became rich and mighty in their bloody conquests, and then they died in these conquests. Our late enemies sought to inherit the earth by violence and they too have all but died in their conquests. It was only a question of time. They could never win. It is the meek that inherit the earth. The victors

were those unprepared for violence, dedicated to principles of peace and goodwill among men.

Today our nation is again eager to disarm, planning to keep only enough war equipment to secure ourselves against any potential enemy. We do not believe in force to achieve our goals. We would like to see all other nations democracies today for our own protection, as well as theirs, so that in no country a few powerful men may ever again thrust the nation into war. But it will never do to force democracy upon any people. No one wants to be forced, least of all forced to be good.

If somebody has complete control over you and if that person were good, compelling you to do what in your heart you believe you ought to do, would you love him. If you are a normal person, you would probably at the first opportunity want to stick a knife into his benevolent and virtuous back, at least figuratively. One of the best ways to make a nation do wrong is to try to compel it to do right. You will make it so angry, so resentful, as to spoil all its chances of becoming good.

You see this happening in some homes, parents demanding that their children do right and threatening them, instead of teaching them patience and by their own example. Then someday those children rebel and do deliberately the things that are wrong. You see it in our schools. Only a foolish teacher will try to beat her children into morals and good manners. You see it in industry. No personnel expert will advise wielding the big stick to preserve morals and get production. That is not the way. We would do harmful and ineffective work trying to impose our democratic ways on other people by force. They would then bide their time until we are gone and they are strong enough only to swing back in their resentment to the other extreme.

No, friends, the power is in the hands of the meek. The spirit of patience, of goodwill, which we like to believe our men abroad on the whole are showing the victors and vanquished alike, will inherit the earth.

Some people believe that money is everything and will bring the highest happiness. But money is not everything. Someone has well said that money can buy you everything but happiness and can get you anywhere but to heaven. It may be that God does not want you to have as much money as you would like. It may not be good for your highest happiness. But if that is all you are thinking about you won't enjoy beauty because it takes time to appreciate that. You won't enjoy companionship for it takes time and thought to cultivate friendships. You won't enjoy your home greatly for it takes time to sit down with the family or to read a book. The real joys belong to the meek, the kind and patient and understanding. They inherit the earth. There are the strong.

It was an honest man who wrote this epitaph for his own tombstone: "Anthony Bennedett was a poor creature and through divine favor was unable to know it."

It is always divine favor that leads us to know how poor and unworthy we are. It is when we behold God in his Son, when we take our stand at the little hill with its cross, where

the divine burden was lifted for our redemption. There we see ourselves as we are. There we do not become humble only. We become meek, we become dependent, we want to learn, we become as children adopted into the family of God. And then we become heirs. We begin to inherit all the good things of this earth.

If only men did not try to grasp and take from others, but receive in meekness what a loving God is so eager to bestow. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. May the Lord help us to keep our eyes on his Son, our Savior, and learn from Him who was meek and lowly in heart. That is blessedness.

Let us pray. Lord, teach each one of us the grace of meekness. Give us a desire to learn from Thee and grant us the power to imitate Thy beloved Son in His meekness and humility and then according to Thy promise grant us the blessedness of inheriting the earth. Hear us for Jesus, our Savior's sake. Amen.