*DEVOTIONS*

January 23 - 28

*Blessed are the gentle and lowly*

**Monday, January 23 Psalm 37:7-11**

*“The meek will inherit the land”*

The contrast between what is (present) and what shall be (future) provides the context for understanding the advice of these verses. The righteous live their lives not on the basis of present appearances, but based on what they know is assured in the future. So, in the midst of the present prosperity of the wicked, the psalmist can say, “Do not worry” and “Do not be envious.” Instead, we are to put our trust in the Lord and wait for him to act. The righteous live by faith and by what is always connected with faith: hope.

This also means that we are not to become enraged about the behavior of the wicked to the extent that we let ourselves be dragged down by them, giving up faithful living and acting in ungodly ways. Instead, we trust God that he will take care of the wicked. We can stop obsessing about other people’s sins and focus on our own relationship with God and on doing good works. In the end, if we stay true to God’s path, we will live securely and be well provided for by God himself – we will “inherit the land.”

*When treated wrongly by others, Lord, help me not to respond in kind. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 24 Matthew 11:28-30**

*“I am humble and gentle”*

Jesus invites all who are weary and burdened to come to him. “Weary” suggests the image of persons exhausted from their work or journey, while “burdened” brings to mind persons who are weighted down with heavy loads. Jesus’ meaning here is not physical toil but the spiritual hardship of trying to live under the burden that the legalistic traditions of the Pharisees have placed on the people. The invitation is to become his disciple and find a rest in him that cannot be found by following the way of the Pharisees.

Discipleship to Jesus brings rest because Jesus is “humble and gentle.” He exemplifies the characteristics his disciples will display as members of the kingdom of heaven. While Jesus has criticized the prideful religiosity of the Pharisees, he does not need to strut his authority. He has come gently, preaching and teaching the good news of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, and in humble human form he has brought salvation to sinful humanity.

*Teach me each day, Lord, how to live like you: humbly and gently. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 25 Matthew 21:1-5**

*“Your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey”*

The Triumphal Entry, as it is called, occurred on a Sunday, five days before Jesus would die on a cross. All four Gospels record this occasion and its significance. Having come to the village of Bethphage, about two miles outside of Jerusalem, it appears that Jesus stayed at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus for several days over the Sabbath. He sent two of his disciples into the city to find a donkey with its colt, and to bring the animals to him. Matthew sees this as fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah.

Jesus entered Jerusalem not on a white charger, but on a lowly beast of burden, not on a horse as a symbol of power, but on the colt of a donkey as a symbol of humility. Zechariah’s prophecy indicates the nature of Jesus’ arrival: he comes as the righteous One who offers salvation. He comes with reconciliation, as did rulers who sometimes rode a donkey in times of peace. Jesus is not coming to bring political change but to change the hearts of people that they may be turned to God.

*Just as you are gentle with me, Lord, may I be gentle with others. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONS*

January 23 - 28

*Blessed are the gentle and lowly*

**Thursday, January 26 2 Corinthians 10:1-4**

*“I plead with the gentleness that Christ himself would use”*

In this second letter to the Corinthians, Paul is responding to criticism leveled against him and his fellow apostles. We have only Paul’s answer to his critics and are forced to reconstruct from his responses the exact nature of the criticism. These particular verses imply that some were saying that Paul was only brave when he was writing letters, but cowardly in face-to-face situations. There are some who have suggested that Paul should simply have let his life speak for itself and ignored his critics. Paul, however, does not do that.

Paul takes on his critics because to leave the attack upon himself and his authority unanswered would allow the troublesome but persistent minority to undo all the good that had been done in the church. Paul is teaching that criticism should always be handled in the Spirit of Christ, but since Paul had been gentle and patient with them, they accused him of being weak. In response, Paul confessed to meekness and gentleness, but he claimed it was not the sign of a weak character but of a character that had become more like Christ.

*May I become more like you, Lord, responding to criticism as you would. Amen.*

**Friday, January 27 Philippians 2:5-11**

*“He humbled himself”*

One of the things that our modern world encourages us toward is aggressive self-expression, seen in such things as “assertiveness training” and the push to allow people to self-promote their personal value system. This viewpoint has been touted in books, movies and TV programming, and dominates the culture of institutions of higher education. For many people, getting what you want for yourself is everything – even if you get it through intimidation – and success is measured by how well you do.

Jesus calls for something else. He calls us to be humble servants, and when we make this choice we give up the right to be in charge. Then, amazingly, we experience great freedom. We become available and able to help others in their times of need. We lose our worry over being stepped on, manipulated, and taken advantage of, the fear of which had driven us to assert ourselves over others. What joy comes, what energizing of life, when we act out of humility and become more and more like the humble Christ we follow.

*Lord, help me to experience the freedom humility brings. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 28 Matthew 5:1-10**

*“Blessed are the gentle and lowly”*

The first two Beatitudes can be somewhat private – my complete dependence on God, and mourning my own sin. I can share these thoughts and feelings with God alone through prayer, should I so choose. This third Beatitude, however, can be more difficult precisely because we are no longer thinking just about ourselves. Now we have to think about other people. Gentleness and lowliness happens in relationship with others. It is no longer just between me and God.

What makes it even more difficult is that being gentle and lowly are traits that most people do not admire. The world thinks in terms of strength, ability, self-assurance and aggressiveness. The more you assert yourself, the more likely you are to succeed; and, the greater the share of the world’s riches you will be able to grab for yourself. But here comes the astounding statement that the world belongs to the gentle and lowly, by which Jesus means that God will ensure that those whose attitude about themselves and others mirror the attitude of Christ will forever enjoy life in his Kingdom.

*Lord, by your Spirit, produce gentleness and lowliness in me. Amen.*