

# Gentleness

by Thaddeus Barnum

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of gentleness in the face of opposition and encourages listeners to develop the character of gentleness by allowing the resurrected life of Jesus Christ to work through them.*

**Duration:** 19:35

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:5, Matthew 11:28

**Topics:** "Gentleness"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the story of Thomas and the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus. He highlights the fear and hostility they faced, as they locked themselves behind closed doors. The speaker shares a personal story of encountering a difficult situation and being bitten by a dog, which led him to respond with anger. However, he learns the importance of gentleness and forgiveness, as he witnesses a friend showing gentleness towards the dog that bit him. The speaker encourages the audience to embrace gentleness in their interactions with others, even in the face of mistreatment, and promises that they will find opportunities to respond differently.

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## Transcript

Easter is here, and the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We celebrated this last week, and the question I've got here is, what impact does it make on our life? How does it impact us? How does it impact us daily? How do we walk into this? A lot of times in our culture, we don't have time for reflection. We're all very busy people.

And yet here, here is something that is in front of us today, to let the new resurrected life of Jesus Christ make a difference in us. Here we are, in front of a moment where we're about to set aside a deacon in the church, a deacon who is called to serve, which is the nature of all of us. The deacon becomes the picture of all of us, that we are called to serve, just as you heard in the gospel lesson.

When this night happened, eight days after the resurrection, and Thomas was alone, didn't believe, disciples came to him to speak and to tell him that it was true, that the Lord is alive. They knew from the first day what fear is like. Because as this story is being told in the joy of the resurrection, as the story is being told for fear of the Jews, they had locked the doors on Easter night.

There was a sense that what happened to their Lord was going to happen to them. And there was a hostility that was very present. There was a realness about what life was like.

How do you look at being in a culture of hostility, in a culture that is opposing you, and yet know this joy of the resurrection? This is the hard part of walking into the life that we live, because it is not easy. And this story is born out of that. The story of our Savior is born out of that.

They knew a culture which was brutal, which was hard, which opposed them. And this is exactly what Jesus went through. When I come to this time, I always go back and I take from what we've heard, and I look back and for me, what came out of this time of Easter, the Holy Week, what came so strong during that time, is that Jesus, our Lord, faced opposition.

And now the disciples were facing opposition. And the disciples learned how to face opposition by watching and seeing what their Lord did in the midst of opposition. Right from the beginning, the way the story begins, just let me rehearse it quickly.

The way the story begins, on Palm Sunday, you remember how the Lord came into Jerusalem, how there was great songs of Hosanna and praise, and people giving thanks and honor to the Lord. Hosanna to the King, the Son of David. And there was this great joy.

But in the midst of it, you had to ask the question, why was He coming into Jerusalem? Well, this is hard because we know that Rome was oppressing, the government was oppressing the Jews at the time. So the question is this, is He going to come into Jerusalem and so become the King of Israel, and take over? If you could lower my voice, I'd love that. What I mean by that is that the people might have questioned as to whether He was going to establish His Kingdom on earth at that time, Son of David, as the kings of Israel had done prior.

But here He is riding on a donkey. That's altogether confusing. If you're coming into war, you take a war horse.

He's coming in on a donkey. Something is very odd from the beginning. And the reason we find out is that people may have been confused.

People didn't know who He was. But He did know what was going on. And He was about to face a world that was going to bring Him down.

There was going to be in Jerusalem, as He had said prior. They were going to deliver Him up to death. They were going to scourge Him and crucify Him and mock Him.

He was coming on donkey into Jerusalem as the new king of Israel, so as to die. And it's like He welcomed it. When we walk into the story of what He faced and what He walked through, the word that changes me, the word that changes how I see it is the word that begins on Palm Sunday.

A word that was known from the prophets of the Old Testament, the prophet Zechariah. When the prophet Zechariah spoke of that moment, what he saw when he saw the son of David, the king, coming into Israel, riding upon a donkey. He uses a word which is such a... It's such a... Like, where did the word come from? Because when you think of a king walking in, you think majesty.

When you think of a king walking in, you think power. When you think of a king coming in, you think of the whole world stopping because there's awe and there's reverence. The word that Zechariah used for the king that was coming was a word descriptive.

That word is gentle. Describe the king of Israel, son of David, as gentle. Yeah.

He's riding in and he knows exactly what's about to happen to him. And he's riding in gentle. He knows what's going to happen to him.

He knows that this world is full of injustice. He knows it's full of hostility. He knows it's full of bullies that try to hurt and harm us.

And he knows it's going to happen to him. And the descriptive word that we find spoken from Zechariah and repeated by the gospel writers is he's coming on donkey gentle. And this becomes, this becomes a lens for me into the story of the Gospels.

It is his character. Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart.

It's hard when you're going through tough things in life, when you're facing death, when you're facing disease, when you're facing sickness, when you're facing the loss of somebody you love, when you're facing a world that is unjust and you look and so many people see through the lens of their circumstance and look at God and call him a monster because how could he let this thing happen to me? And yet his descriptive term here is I am gentle. Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me.

He models it as we've heard in the gospel lesson here telling his disciples whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Blessed are the gentle for they shall inherit the earth. He's describing lowliness. He's describing meekness.

He's coming into a world where he is going to face conflict and the word that's describing him is the word gentle. He is not just gentle in character. He is gentle in conduct.

And when he goes into the weak as you move through the weak what did you find in him? You found in him gentle. The way that the lens of the Holy Week goes is his descriptive term changes to the word lamb. He was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before a shearer's asylum. So he did not open his mouth. Gentle.

It's what the prophet said. It's what he lived. And everything inside of me in a world where I feel bullied and hurt and run over and uncared for and a world that's hostile and a world that doesn't treat us well everything inside of me wants to fight back.

Yeah? How do you do gentle? How does that happen? How does that work? In the first order I'll take it. He said come to me all who are weary and heavy burdened, heavy laden come to me. I am gentle and humble in heart and you shall find rest for your souls.

That I love. I love the fact that I can come to him because he's gentle. He knows how to deal with us.

He knows how to care for us and love us. He knows how to be for us. He knows actually by demonstration he actually comes and serves us.

As odd as that sounds. But when I have to turn to be gentle to others I can do it when things are going well. I am so gentle.

When everything is going right I am perfect gentle. I know how to do it. I'm good if things are right.

But the moment that there's hostility the moment there's conflict the moment there's pressure the moment there's injustice the moment people just run you over and hurt you. Suddenly what happens to this word for me is it becomes immoral. Somewhere inside I want to take up the idea alright, what I need to do right now is to be gentle in response.

Have you ever tried that? Have you ever tried to employ the Christian virtue of gentleness in the midst of conflict? Oh, it's a blessing. If you've not felt guilt feel it then, baby. Feel it then because it just runs through the veins.

I am not responding to this situation the way I should. I shouldn't be doing this. I know I shouldn't.

I should be responding in kindness to the person who is spitting in my face. Let everything inside of me want to spit back because that's what we do. And then we'll go to church and confess because that's what we can do and say, Lord, I'm a work in progress.

See, the point of what Jesus is teaching us here is thanks be to God He's not come to lay down on us a moral. He's come to put that resurrected life inside of us. And so when you heard the Colossians passage read and so beloved, holy and beloved, chosen of God, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility gentleness.

Thanks be to God, He doesn't want us to try to do what we can't do. He wants to put that life inside of us. His life, His character, His character growing inside of me.

I can serve, but when I'm in conflict and you're spitting at me, I'm going to bite you back. I've got a friend who I've gone so many years with and he is so wounded right now. He is so wounded by life.

He has, you know, the infamous Mack truck has just run right over him. He is a strong and godly and a wonderful and a beautiful Christian man. And in the midst of this moment with him, I reached out my hands because Mr. Gentle, it wasn't happening to me, it was happening to him.

So Mr. Gentleness arrived on the scene to help my friend and I reached out my hand. Have you ever had your dog run over or hurt? The dog that you love and care for, but the moment the dogs hurt, what do they do? He bit me. He bit me hard.

So I, stupid me, went back. Forgive your brother, go back. And he bit me again.

He bit me so many times, I stopped going. So I'm done with you. If you want to flick me, I will flick you.

And I am good at this and now feel quite justified by the whole thing. Another friend of mine came alongside who was taking care of my other friend. And I said, has he bit you? He said, yeah.

Well, he said, we never, never leave each other. I'm staying with him. I felt so, so guilty for me that I had missed a moment here.

I know that the resurrected life of Jesus Christ wants to work through us. And this world is full of opposition. When he breathed the Holy Spirit upon them, he was in a room where they had so locked it down because they were afraid of the Jews.

They were afraid of their world. They were afraid they were going to die. And friends, in my life, in my world, this world is hard.

It is, and people are not kind. But we've got, we've got a, we've got a gift to make a difference. If we know this resurrected life of Jesus Christ inside us, then if I could go back to that text of Palm Sunday and say that the gentle king that's riding into Jerusalem on that donkey in humility, now in power resides in us.

The king of gentleness resides in us. His church. And what should his church be? What should the Christians be? The king and queens of gentleness going out that door.

No matter what happens to us. Go read the biographies you'll find. This is the amazing thing.

In the moments of opposition to the church, the church grows. It's the craziest thing. You stomp the church down, the church comes right back up.

And do you know why? Because the Lord reigns over the church. Because inside, we become a people whose character begins to look like the character of him who is called gentle. But when you're in the midst of it, oh my gosh, when you're in the midst of it, yeah, I feel the same way.

I see my own sin. I see everything inside of me that wants to do the opposite. And so I learn that he who washes my feet, I get to, praise be the Lord, I get to go and wash his and serve him.

And this is what the role and the call of the deacon has always been. Deacons stand up in the church and teach all of us to serve. Teach us to go out into that world and to give ourselves.

That's what the model of the deacon has been. And even though Ryan is a transitional deacon, he will be ordained to the presbyterate in six months time so as to pastor the church in Ithaca. But the deacon in the church has always been the symbol that teaches us we are called to go serve in a world that will not treat us well.

They will run over us. They will spit at us. They will hurt us.

But we know the power of forgiveness. We know where that forgiveness comes from. And we know that the Lord who reigns teaches us inside how to respond to hostility by gentleness.

Why? Because he's gentle. Our God is gentle and humble of heart. And so when he says in the Beatitudes, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. What he is saying there is that the characteristic of God, the imago, the image he's recreating inside of us, the character of God breathed inside of us is starting to live.

And so I promise you this. I promise you this. When you go to your office this week, ride into your office on the donkey of gentleness.

Here I am. Gentle. Me.

But I promise you something. If you take this to heart, if you take this to heart, I watch this week. You're going to find opportunities to respond back in gentleness to people who don't treat you well.

Watch and ask the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ who breathed upon us the Holy Spirit and gave us new life because of what he did on Calvary's hill to give us that new life to respond different to the people who treat us wrongly. There's new life inside of us. And this week, we're going to be able to experience it.

I promise you. And I pray that the Lord will empower you and empower this church, the Church of the Cross, to be gentle in Boston. And I pray that the Lord will bless Ryan to be deacon and servant in Ithaca and stand and serve the people that you bear on your heart.

He can't hide behind the lectern anymore. He's come out from behind. And I pray that you'll all be praying for the church in Ithaca and for Ryan and for his family.

But in the meantime, let your resurrected joy fill our hearts and teach us to be gentle. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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