

Blessed Are the Meek

Matthew 5:5

Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 5:5. Our study this morning brings us to the third Beatitude or beautiful attitude. Let's turn our attention to our text. Matthew, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens the following Words:

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:1-12

JESUS OFTEN USED PARADOX AS A TEACHING TOOL

- The last will be first. Matthew 20:16
- It is better to give than to receive. Acts 20:35
- Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. Luke 9:24
- Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live. John 11:25
- The greatest among you shall be your servant. Matthew 23:11
- My strength is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9
- The meek shall inherit the earth. Matthew 5:5

Jesus often used paradoxical statements to grab the attention of His hearers. To say, "Blessed are the strong and proud for they shall inherit the earth," sounds somewhat natural. But to say, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," is antithetical to human reasoning. Jesus taught principles that were totally foreign to the natural man's understanding. But the words, "Blessed are the meek" would have been particularly perplexing. Why is that? It's important to remember that that Jesus had a primarily Jewish audience as he preached the Sermon on the Mount. These were the same Jews who had been under the heavy-handed, oppressive rule of Rome for almost a century.

They had long expected a Messiah that would swoop in, at last, and give the Jewish people their rightful place in the world - a position above all other people, because, after all, they were the chosen of God. They expected a materialistic kingdom that would be inaugurated by the Messiah's victorious military conquest over Rome. The last thing they expected was a meek Messiah, who taught that His Kingdom wasn't of this world and it was to be inherited and inhabited by the humble. But meekness and humility, a lowliness of spirit, were the very attitudes that Jesus taught and practiced. The idea of a meek Messiah leading meek people was far from any of their concepts of the messianic kingdom. The Jews understood military power and miracle power. But they did not understand the power of meekness.¹ Jesus turned their thinking upside down when He said, "The meek will inherit the earth." How are we to understand meekness?

I. THE MEANING OF MEEKNESS

As with our previous studies, we want to make sure we understand the meaning of Jesus' words. Words are important because they are what God uses to communicate truth. Let's build our understanding of meekness by looking first at what it's not:

A. Meekness is not weakness, cowardice, or timidity.

Meekness is quite compatible with great strength and ability, but whatever strength a person has, it is to be accompanied by humility and a genuine dependence on God. True meekness may be a quality of the strong, those who could assert themselves but choose not to do so. The strong who qualify for this blessing are the strong who decline to domineer. Self-assertion is never a Christian virtue; rather, it is Christian to be busy in lowly service and refuse to engage in the conduct that merely advances one's personal aims.²

B. Meekness is not indecisiveness, wishy-washiness, or a lack of conviction or confidence.

C. Meekness is not shyness or a description of an introverted, reserved personality.

D. Meekness is not simply niceness.

The word "meek" is the Greek word *πραῦς* (*praus*). It carries the idea of gentleness, kindness, mildness, and benevolence. In classical Greek, it was sometimes used to describe a soothing medicine or a soft breeze. It was also used to describe colts and other animals whose naturally wild spirits were broken by a trainer so that they could perform useful work. As a human attitude, it means being gentle in spirit, submissive, quiet, and tenderhearted. It is most often used in the Bible to describe a subservient and trusting attitude before God. Meekness, therefore, is to be understood as a vertical virtue before it is understood as a horizontal virtue. It is first and foremost

¹ John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 168-169.

² Leon Morris, *PNTC: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 98.

the characteristic that makes a believer bow low before God. It is the characteristic that drives us to humbly trust God in every circumstance, which, as we'll also see, has bearing on how we relate to others.

Meekness is the opposite of self-righteousness, arrogance, haughtiness, smugness, and defensiveness. Putting it positively, meekness is unpretentiousness (unimpressive), gentleness, sweetness, and the grace to be self-effacing (modest). Meekness is having a true view of yourself that is expressed in attitude and conduct with respect to others. Martyn Lloyd Jones says, "The man who is truly meek is the one who is truly amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do."³ Meekness might be best described as *power under control* or power surrendered to God's control. A meek person is never aware of their meekness. Meekness is a virtue that one doesn't feel, for if you think you have it, you've already lost it. The moment you become conscious of meekness or are looking around to see what people think of you, any meekness that may have been present evaporates in an instant.

II. THE MODEL OF MEEKNESS

Paul, in Philippians 2:7, speaking about Jesus says, "He made Himself nothing." His demeanor was opposite of smugness, harshness, hardness, irritability, and haughtiness. Meekness was the last thing people would expect from the Messiah. Jesus hadn't come to be an assertive, charismatic, stunning, military renegade who could draw the attention of the masses. Isaiah writes, "He was like a root out of dry ground; He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" Isaiah 53:2.⁴

In the New Testament, Jesus is our example of perfect gentleness or meekness. Jesus spoke of Himself saying, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am *gentle* and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" Matthew 11:28–30.

Think about a yoke for a moment. A yoke is essentially a wooden harness that is placed around the neck of two animals – joining them together for work. To see animals yoked together in the fields was an everyday occurrence in the first century. Jesus is intentionally using imagery that would have been very familiar to his audience. Oftentimes, a farmer would yoke a younger, untrained ox to an older, more experienced ox so the younger would learn how to follow the direction of the master. Are you starting to see the picture Jesus is painting here? As we are yoked together with Christ, who is perfectly meek, we learn how to exemplify the meekness that pleases God.

³ D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 58.

⁴ R.T. Kendall, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis, MN: Chosen Books, 2001), 38.

Jesus was like velvet steel. He never responded in a retaliatory or vindictive manner. He was meek and mild, but very much in control. We see Jesus' velvet-like attitude when He was mistreated:

- A. When Judas kissed Him in Gethsemane, Jesus called him a friend. Matthew 26:47-50
- B. When Jesus' friends betrayed Him and fled, He uttered no reproach. Matthew 26:56
- C. When Jesus was mocked and spit on, He uttered not a word. Matthew 26:67, 27:30-31
- D. When Jesus was confronted by Pilate, He kept silent. Matthew 27:11-14
- E. When Peter denied Him, Jesus restored him to fellowship and service. John 21:15-19
- F. At His death, Jesus pleaded, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."
Luke 23:34

At other times, when it came to matters of truth, Jesus was like steel:

- A. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees' hardness of heart when He healed a man's withered hand on the Sabbath. Matthew 12:9-45
- B. Jesus was angered when His disciples tried to prevent little children from coming to Him.
Mark 10:13-16
- C. Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the temple with a whip. John 2:14-17
- D. Jesus called Peter "Satan" when he tried to deter Him from His heavenly mission.
Matthew 16:21-23⁵

Isaiah refers to Jesus as a root out of dry ground. He appeared first to shepherds, and then to kings. He died on a cross – the last place sophisticated people would look for a display of God's power. Jesus was the embodiment of meekness.

III. MEEKNESS IS DEMONSTRATED INWARDLY TOWARD GOD

Meekness is a grace of the soul that exercises itself first and chiefly towards God. It's a temper of spirit, which actively submits to God, and chooses to receive His dealings with us, whatever they may be, as wise and for our good, without murmuring, disputing, or resisting.⁶

A. Meekness is seen in glad submission to God's sovereign will and providence in your life.

Meekness toward God includes submitting to God's sovereign providence over your life without getting angry or resentful. We see meekness in the life of Job after he lost his family and his possessions. Submitting to God's providence, he asked, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" Job 2:10. Later on, Job said, "Though He slay me, I will hope in him" Job 13:15. Do we share this attitude of meek submission to God's sovereignty in our lives?

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 35-36.

⁶ Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Accordance electronic ed. (2004), paragraph 387.

Joseph was also submissive to God's providence in his life after having been thrown into a pit by his brothers, left for dead, sold into slavery, and arrested under false accusations. He saw God's hand in his trials and said, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" Genesis 50:20. The meek person sees past the surface events and actions of people that God allows into his life. He sees God behind the trials and tragedies, and doesn't live with bitterness, resentment, or self-pity. Meekness says, "Not my will, but yours be done." Meekness whispers through its confusion, pain, and tears, "God, I trust you."

B. Meekness is seen in humble submission to God's authoritative Word over your life.

As believers, we must be willing to let the Word of God exercise complete control over our lives. He is spiritually meek who conforms himself to the mind of God and does not quarrel with the instructions of His Word.⁷ Meekness is the attitude of submitting to God's authority over your life. Meekness is required in all our decisions as we are willing to listen to and learn from God concerning our: marriages, parenting, finances, and handling difficult trials and people in our lives. God's Spirit turns proud, self-sufficient people into humble learners with teachable spirits. Is that you? We have a book filled with God's answers for all of life, but only the meek are really teachable and willing to hear God and apply His Word to their lives.

IV. MEEKNESS IS DEMONSTRATED OUTWARDLY TOWARD OTHERS

Have you ever noticed that we are usually pretty meek until someone crosses us, criticizes us, slanders us, or insults us? Meekness allows others to put the searchlight on your instead of you casting the light on yourself. We are more than content to condemn ourselves and to speak of our own failures, but we get all tied in a knot when someone else speaks of our failures. The test of true meekness is not whether we can say we are sinners, but rather how we respond when someone else reminds you that you are a sinner. The meek person is not easily angered or provoked (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:5). A meek spirit, like wet tinder, is not easily set ablaze. Like the bridle in a horse's mouth controls his movements, meekness serves as the bridle of our attitudes, actions, and words.

What about our egos folks? We all have one. Martyn Lloyd Jones notes that as a result to the fall, absorption with self is one of the greatest curses in life. But when the Holy Spirit takes up residency in a person's life, our egos have to go. It's when our ego gets in the picture that we begin to be consumed with ourselves and draw attention to ourselves.

The meek person isn't proud and doesn't glory in himself. He realizes there is nothing in himself of which he can boast. Jeremiah says, "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, or the strong man boast in his strength, or the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this,

⁷ Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes: An Exposition of Matthew 5:1-10* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 2007), 110.

that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord” Jeremiah 9:23–24.

Meekness doesn’t make sure that others give us credit for our actions. There is something about our fleshly nature that craves attention and praise from people. Ronald Reagan had a plaque on his desk in the oval office that read, “There is no limit to how far a man can go as long as he doesn’t care who gets the credit.”

See if you see yourself in this list (I certainly see myself): Meekness has nothing to prove. Meekness doesn’t need to be seen. Meekness isn’t self-promoting. Meekness doesn’t have to win. Meekness doesn’t know it all. Meekness isn’t loud. Meekness doesn’t fight for control. Meekness doesn’t seek to settle the score. Meekness doesn’t desire payback. Meekness doesn’t harbor bitterness. Meekness doesn’t keep relationships at arms length. Meekness doesn’t take sides. Meekness doesn’t fish for compliments or attaboys. Meekness doesn’t withhold forgiveness. Meekness doesn’t blame others. Meekness doesn’t seek to justify. Meekness doesn’t make demands. Meekness doesn’t claim rights. Meekness doesn’t jockey for position. Meekness doesn’t clinch its possessions with white knuckles. Meekness isn’t defensive. Meekness doesn’t worry about what other people think or say. Meekness doesn’t wallow in self-pity.

What hours and years we waste doing all these things. But as believers, who should be ever growing in meekness, we must be finished with this. To be meek means that we’re finished with ourselves altogether. The whole point of meekness is that it isn’t focused on self. The meek person isn’t self-absorbed, isn’t looking out for self, and isn’t consumed with his own interests. Meekness is a controlled desire to see the interests of others advance ahead of your own.⁸ Paul says it this way, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” And then he points us again to the model of meekness saying, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant” Philippians 2:3–7.

BEWARE OF COUNTERFEIT MEEKNESS

Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” Sometimes we try to exalt our humility and seek to impress others with our lowliness. Let me suggest to you that to do so is to be motivated by fear instead of the pleasure of God. When we try to impress others in any way, it’s because we are starving for attention. Debasing yourself and speaking negatively about yourself isn’t a virtue, it’s actually false humility. It’s a defense mechanism to try and garner the approval of others.

⁸ D.A. Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1978), 20.

WHAT DOES THE WORD HAVE TO SAY ABOUT MEEKNESS

A. Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **gentleness** (praus), self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22–23*

B. Meekness is to characterize our response to God's Word.

*Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with **meekness** (praus) the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. James 1:20–21*

C. We are to share our faith with meekness.

*But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with **gentleness** (praus) and respect, 1 Peter 3:15*

D. A spirit of meekness is to characterize our relationships within the body of Christ.

*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, **meekness** (praus), and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Colossians 3:12–13*

E. We are to help a brother caught in sin with meekness.

*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of **gentleness** (praus). Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Galatians 6:1*

F. We are to respond to those who oppose God's Word with a meek spirit.

*Correcting his opponents with **gentleness** (praus). God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 2 Timothy 2:25*

G. Meekness is a part of what it means to walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and **gentleness** (praus), with patience, bearing with one another in love, Ephesians 4:1–2*

H. Meekness is to be shown to all people.

*Speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect **courtesy** (praus) toward all people. Titus 3:2*

ARE WE GROWING IN MEEKNESS

J. Vernon McGee once said, "Only the Spirit of God can break you and make you meek. If you could produce meekness by your own effort, you would be proud of yourself, wouldn't you? And out goes your meekness! Meekness is not produced by self-effort but by Spirit effort. Only the Holy Spirit can produce meekness in the heart of a yielded Christian... The Beatitudes present

goals which the child of God wants to realize in his own life, but he can't do it on his own." We must yoke ourselves to Christ and learn from Him.

It goes without saying that our meekness is imperfect, but we should be seeking growth towards this attitude of Christ. After all, as believers we are being conformed into His image (Romans 8:29). It's painful to be meek. It's unnatural to be tamed, controlled, and utterly out of the picture. But, this is a sure sign that God is working in the life of a person, that we have become a new creation – the old has passed away and all things have been made new (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). It's a sign that we have died to sin and are alive to God in Christ (cf. Romans 6:11).

V. THE REWARD FOR MEEKNESS

The reward for the meek is grand! Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." A helpful translation of the third Beatitude might be, "Blessed are those who are humbly submissive to God and courageously gentle towards others, for they, and they only, shall rule and reign with Christ when His earthly Kingdom comes." We would expect that the meek would be ignored or trampled over and the strong and powerful would endure. But Jesus isn't teaching the survival of the fittest; rather, He's teaching the survival of the meekest.

It is probably best to understand Jesus' blessing as being eschatological (future) in nature. In other words, it's looking forward to Christ's coming Messianic Kingdom. In the end, it's the meek, not the self-assertive, who will have a place in Christ's Kingdom. While we receive the earnest of our inheritance now, we'll receive the full inheritance in heaven. Paul said, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" Romans 8:18. Life's trials and difficulties will seem small when we behold Christ in heaven!

Can you see the logical sequence and progression in the Beatitudes? Poverty of spirit (the first) results in mourning (the second). Meekness (the third) results in hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Being poor in spirit causes us to turn away from ourselves in mourning, and meekness causes us to turn toward God in seeking His righteousness. Next week we'll see Jesus employ one of the elemental and natural human instincts, to hunger and thirst, for spiritual use. Join us back as we unpack the fourth Beatitude, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

CLOSING BENEDICTION:

Hear this benediction from Paul in Philippians 2:3-5, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." And all God's people said, "Amen!"