

5:5 Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

Meekness in the Bible is difficult to define.

It is gentleness and the self-control it entails (Carson, 133).

It is to patiently endure personal insults.

It is to be free from thinking you are more important than you really are. It is a humble and gentle attitude toward others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves (Stott, 43).

It is a desire to see others' interests advance ahead of your own. Abraham exemplified meekness in his dealings with his nephew, Lot (Gen. 13:1-11).

It is the opposite of vengeance or violence. Joseph's life is a good example of this. Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery in Egypt. However, Joseph rose to power second only to Pharaoh. In such a high position he could have easily avenged the wrong done to him by his brothers. But instead, he only acted in kindness toward them (Gen. 45:4-10; 50:15-21). This too is meekness.

"Meekness is essentially a true view of oneself expressing itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others. A man who is truly meek is amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do. This makes him gentle, patient, and understanding in his dealings with others" (Lloyd-Jones, Stott, 43).

It is comparatively easy for us to be honest with God and acknowledge that we are sinners in His sight, but it is difficult to have others call us a sinner. Instinctively we resent it. We all prefer to condemn ourselves than having someone else condemn us. We are often not prepared to allow others to think or say the same things about us that we just acknowledged before God as true. There is a basic hypocrisy here; there always is when meekness is absent (Stott, 43).

The meek - not the strong, aggressive, tyrannical, and harsh - will inherit the earth (Carson, 133).

It is almost certain that this beatitude is a quotation or allusion to Psalm 37:11. It says, "The meek shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity." In the Greek Old Testament the words of Psalm 37:11 are almost identical with Matthew 5:5. The word for "land" in Greek and Hebrew also means "earth." The land promised to Abraham was originally the land of Canaan. However, as we read on in the OT we find the land promised to God's people included the whole earth under Messiah's rule (Psa 2:8; 72:8; Mic 5:4; Zec. 9:10); eventually, the promise takes on even greater proportions as the prophets reveal a new heaven and earth (Isa. 66:22; Rev. 21:1). Thus, Jesus' words, "the meek shall inherit the earth," are a reference to the promise of inheriting the new world that God will create; a world where God Himself will dwell among us (Rev 21:3-4).

5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.

The words “hunger and thirst” vividly express desire (Ps. 42:2; 63:1) (Carson, 134). Spiritual hunger is the characteristic of all of God’s people whose supreme ambition is spiritual, not material. Christians are not like unbelievers who have set their desires on the things of the world. They seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

Righteousness can have two different meanings. In a legal context, it is being in a right standing with God. When we believed we were justified, that is, we were declared righteous; the penalty for sin has been paid and we stand in a right relationship to the law of God. Here however, righteousness means that we are to conform our life to the will of God. The person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is the one who desires to follow God's will. To this person, righteousness becomes the most desirable thing in the world. Such a person will understand his need of righteousness. There will be a freedom from trying to get satisfaction from external things (I Jn.2:15-17). There will be a love for the things of God and the Word of God. (PS. 119:2, 14-16, 18, 20, 24, 33-40, 103, 127, 136, 148; 42:1 63:1). Jesus is saying that in order to enter the Kingdom of God, one should consider righteousness as important as food and drink.

After pronouncing a blessing upon those who recognize their emptiness and grieve over it and don't try to justify or defend themselves, Jesus now makes a transition from emptiness to fullness by saying that hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. Yet we must understand that in this life our hunger will never be fully satisfied nor will our thirst be fully quenched. Even the promise of Jesus that he who drinks of the water that He gives “will never thirst again” is only fulfilled as long as we keep on drinking. Not till we reach eternity will we hunger and thirst no more for it is there that our Shepherd will lead us to springs of living water (Stott, 45).

There is probably no greater way to progress in Christian living than to have a healthy spiritual appetite. It’s not enough to mourn over past sin (Matt. 5:3) we must hunger for future righteousness.

Probably not many truly hunger and thirst after righteousness. Many Christians sincerely want the Holy Spirit's power, true happiness, or a blessing from God. But how many hunger and thirst for righteousness? The other things aren't bad, but they are not as basic as righteousness (Carson, 134).

Looking back we see that the first four beatitudes reveal a spiritual progression of relentless logic. Each step leads to the next and presupposes the one that has gone before:

To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy. ➡ Next we mourn over it. ➡ Then we let the recognition of our spiritual poverty rule over our attitude toward others. ➡ And lastly we hunger and thirst for righteousness. What is the use of recognizing our sin and mourning over it and then leaving it there? It must lead to a hunger for righteousness (Stott, 46).

The last four beatitudes shift from our attitude toward God to our attitude toward human beings (Stott, 47).