

## Matthew 5:5 HE BEATITUDES #5

### *BLESSED ARE THE MEEK* 5-1-16

(Matthew 5) We are in the middle of a study in the teachings of Jesus known as *the Beatitudes*, or the *Be Happy Attitudes*, if you prefer. Jesus is telling us about the blessed life and in so doing he slaps the world in the face. To a world that says blessed are the rich and the jolly and the satisfied and the bellicose, Jesus affirms the poor in spirit, the weepy, the hungry and the gentle. Today our text is 5:5 *Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.* Most of us are more used to the King James Version, NIV, or ESV rendering that replaces the term “gentle” with “meek.” *The meek shall inherit the earth.* So, I will typically refer to it using that adjective. Our thoughts today will divide in two ways. We start by looking at the promise and then at the principle.

The promise of our text is really interesting. What does it say the meek end up getting for all their meekness? The meek inherit the earth. Huh! The earth? Take a look at this. The poor in spirit get what? The kingdom of God. That’s good. The mourners get comfort - that’s good. The merciful get mercy, the persecuted get heaven and the pure in heart see God. Compared to all that it sounds to me like the meek are sort of getting short-changed doesn’t it? The earth? Who wants the earth? I thought Christians despised the earth. I thought Christians were heavy into heaven. Why would anybody want to inherit the earth that is under God’s curse and is destined to be burned up anyway? Good questions you are asking here and they all flow out of our understanding of what eternal glory is going to be for the people of God. You know there are many conceptions of that, from the happy hunting ground to the great golf course in the sky. Islam, the world’s second largest religion conceives heaven in a very materialistic way. In fact, heaven is very much like a forever weekend at the Playboy Mansion. In speaking of paradise the Koran says, *Together with their wives.* Note the plural there. *Together with their wives they shall recline in shady groves upon soft couches. They shall have fruits and all that they desire.* Now that doesn’t sound too bad does it? But we Christians hear that and think, “How crass, how materialistic.” But we go on and make errors in the other extreme. Christians are likely to think that eternal glory means we float around as angels in the sky playing harps and flying from cloud to cloud. We speak of the immortality of the soul and forget what the Bible says about the resurrection of the body. We talk about spending eternity in heaven and forget that God promises to give us the earth. But not just any old earth. What the meek inherit is not going to be this fallen earth that is under a curse and gives birth to tornadoes and

mosquitoes and snakes. What the meek inherit is called elsewhere in Scripture the new earth. And this new earth is not simply an upgrade but a transformation. Revelation 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away.* The doctrine of the new earth is important for a proper grasp of the full dimensions of God's redemptive program. In Genesis we read of how the fall of man into sin disrupted the natural order. A curse was pronounced over all creation. And when Jesus came into the world it was not just to save certain individuals from their bondage to sin, it was to redeem the entire creation from the effects of sin. That purpose will not be fully accomplished until God has ushered in the new earth, until Paradise lost is Paradise regained. And the paradise to come is just as physical, or earthy as the paradise which was lost.

Another reason the doctrine of the new earth is important is for the proper understanding of Old Testament prophecy. There are numerous prophecies which speak of a glorious future for the earth. These prophecies tell us that, at some time in the future, the earth will become far more productive than it is now. The desert shall blossom as a rose, and the mountains will drip sweet wine. They tell us that the sound of weeping will be heard no more, that the wolf and the lamb will feed together. Since many Christians regard these images as "too earthy" to be fulfilled in heaven they assign them instead to an imagined millennial or 1000 year period. But a proper understanding of these passages assigns their fulfillment to the eternal kingdom, to the new earth which is described in images and figures in the book of Revelation, just as it is in Isaiah.

The Old Testament contains numerous promises that the people of God will inherit the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. This is a promise that later is extended to include the entire earth. When you trace out this promise you begin with God's word to Abraham in Genesis 17:8 *I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.* Let's note a couple of things in that verse. First, notice that God promised to give the land of Canaan not just to Abraham's descendants but also to Abraham himself. Yet the only land Abraham owned in Canaan was a burial cave. This promise was not fulfilled in his lifetime. If we look at Hebrews 11 we get a glimpse at Abe's attitude toward this promise. **9-10** *By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.* Now that sounds to me an awful lot like the New Jerusalem or the new earth. And you'll notice something else about the

promise in Genesis 17. How long does it say Abraham and his descendants will possess the land? For 1000 years? “It shall be for you an everlasting possession.” And, by the way, Christian, this promise is for you. Did you know that? As believers in Christ, we, not any kind of biological or political Israel, are called in the New Testament, the children of Abraham. Galatians 3:29 (NLT) *Now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God’s promise to Abraham belongs to you.* And that promise must include the Promised Land. But it includes more than that. The occupation of Canaan by the natural descendants of Abraham, in its ultimate design, was a type of the occupation by a redeemed church of her destined inheritance in glory, which is not simply a new land but a new earth. When we properly understand what Scripture says about the new earth many other Scriptures begin to make sense to us. From Genesis 17:8 we learn that God promised to give Abe and his seed all the land of Canaan for an eternal possession but in Romans 4:13 *For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.* Note that the land of Canaan in Genesis has become the world in Romans. We see the same thing in Psalm 37:11a *the humble will inherit the land.* How does Jesus paraphrase this passage? The meek shall inherit what? The earth. Now, for those who can only think of the late, great planet earth and don’t know about the coming greater restored earth that verse must be quite perplexing.

I take you to a couple of other New Testament passages that point to the renewal of the earth as the dwelling place of the redeemed. Look at Acts 3. Here Jesus is speaking to the Jews gathered in Solomon’s porch and says 19-21a *Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; 20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, 21 whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things.* That phrase “the restoration of all things” points to the renewal of all God’s creation to its original perfection at the return of Jesus. We go back to paradise. If you remember from reading Genesis, man was intended to rule the earth and when God restores all things he will. How do I know for sure? Revelation 5:9-10 *And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”* The children of Abraham are the heirs of the world, the meek shall inherit the earth and the servants of the Lamb will reign on the earth. What are you going to spend eternity? I’m gonna be right here and it’s

gonna be awesome. There won't be any more mosquitoes or blisters or celery or traffic jams. The Lord says, "Behold I am making all things new" and He is giving the new earth to the meek followers of Christ. That is the promise and it is far better than anything behind the curtain where Satan is standing.

Now let's turn to look at the condition for the promise or the principle Christ is articulating in our text which is the principle of meekness or gentleness. The adjective in verse 5 is translated variously as *meek*, *gentle* or even *humble*. Being most accustomed to the term "meek" that is the one I will use even though it is not the translation of my NAS. I want you to leave having seen four truths about meekness from God's word. First, consider the surprising nature of this beatitude. This word in verse 5 has a surprising quality about it. The world has almost always said just the opposite; that nice guys, meek men finish last. In saying this Jesus goes against the way of the world, but also against the expectations of his followers. Many of those looking for a Messiah, many of those who were attaching themselves to Jesus expected what kind of kingdom to come? A political, military kingdom, right? They expected a Messiah who would whip up on their enemies. The last thing they would have expected or wanted was someone who extolled the virtue of meekness. So this word comes with a quality of surprise.

Secondly, notice what this meekness is not. I mention two. Like all the other virtues described by Christ, this cannot be understood rightly as a temperament or mood. Meekness is not a temperament type it is a spiritual grace. It is not properly descriptive of someone who is naturally fearful, nor is it properly descriptive of someone especially shy and passive in nature. Don't confuse meekness with introvertedness or timidity.

Then too don't confuse it with personal weakness. If you have been in church very long at all you have heard it said, "Meekness is not ... Weakness." Surely it is not. The agreeable Christianette of our day, the man who is constantly nodding his head in the posture of perpetual acquiescence is not meek, he's wimpy. The great examples of meek men in the Bible teach us that meekness is not weakness. Moses was called the meekest man in all the earth, but he stood firm before Pharaoh and he led his people into war. David was a meek man and a warrior King. Jesus, who called himself meek and lowly of heart said the most biting words in all the Bible and once took up a whip to drive hypocrites from the temple. The Greek term for meek is "praus" and is sometimes used to refer to animals that have been tamed. Now a tame animal is not a weak animal is it? The difference between the tamed animal and the wild one is what? Control. And that animal, the ox,

the horse, the dog under control is one that is genuinely useful. Understood properly then, meekness is strength under control, and harnessed for good.

Alright, I'm getting into the next point on what meekness is. You can define it many ways. Strength under control is one. Here is another with a different angle that may get closer to the heart of meekness. Meekness is a denial of self-rights, rooted in an awareness of self-worth. Most clear to me about the virtue is the aspect of denying rights. Because the meek man lets go of his own claim to fine treatment he is able to do a couple of key things that display his meekness. #1 he is able to put others first. He doesn't have to be top dog; he doesn't have to get his way or be treated preferably or even equally. The meek man doesn't want the star on his door, or the special parking spot, or the top billing. He feels his inadequacy. He lives out the teaching of Philippians 2:**3** *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.* The meek man is first of all meek towards God and says to the Lord, "Not my will, but thine be done." Then the meek man is meek toward others counting their interest as greater than his own.

The second way that meekness is displayed is through patience when wronged. The first definition for meekness in the dictionary was just this: *enduring injury with patience and without resentment.* The opposite is *violent, vengeful.* This is especially where I feel my own failings in this area. I have a passion for justice, but a passion that is twisted toward myself. Some people would call me competitive. I fear that Jesus would call me simply "proud". My lack of meekness used to come out on the basketball court in my harsh words to referees and to players. It came out toward my children and still comes out in the way I address my wife. And behind all the cutting remarks is a disgusting but deeply held conviction that I deserve better referees, better players, better children and a better wife – oh, even better church members. I so often fail to deny self-rights because I lose awareness of my God-given self-worth. Does that ever happen to you?

The spiritually and emotionally strong man is free to lay aside his rights. Two Proverbs come to mind, both of which I committed to memory long ago because I know I need them so much. 19:**11** *A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.* The world says it is his glory to avenge one. God says the opposite. The other Proverb is 16:**32** *He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.* That is describing a meek man - slow to anger, and a spirit under control. A few examples -- Moses - confronts the mighty pharaoh of Egypt, gets his people freed from their Egyptian bondage,

crossed the Red Sea with a miracle. You would think Moses had won the confidence of his people - but no. Out there in the desert they start challenging the right of Moses to lead. And Moses didn't grow huffy and quit. Even when God suggested they wipe out the whole ungrateful bunch of rebels, Moses said, "No, Lord." Moses was a meek man. David - David had all kinds of reasons to be hateful and vengeful toward Saul, but he wasn't. He endured ill treatment with incredible dignity and grace. When he was king he actually had an encounter with a relative of Saul named Shimei who was cursing him and throwing stones and sand at him. One of David's secret service guys asked if David would prefer this fellow dead or wounded, but David said, "Leave him alone. Perhaps God has sent him to rebuke me." Amazing! Jesus - what was He like when He was mistreated? Peter describes it this way in his first epistle I Peter 2:**23** (ESV) *When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* The gospels say that as a lamb is led to the slaughter so Jesus stood before the accusations of puny, wicked men and did not open his mouth. He had defended the woman caught in adultery. He had spoken up for John the Baptist, but the meek man does not use his power for self but surrenders that power to the will of God.

I thought of a couple of examples of meekness that I remember seeing in my lifetime. One was a friend named Tom, a huge, physically powerful man who was coaching a basketball game, a tournament game that was very close, very tense. And with a minute or so left the referee made a very bad call that really hurt Tom's chances to win. A certain spectator who watched this injustice went ballistic and got thrown out of the gym. The opposing coach had been ranting and raving for some time, but Tom acted the gentleman, Tom acted the Christian and endured injury with patience. Tom was physically the biggest, strongest guy in the building that day but the muscle he showed off was the spiritual strength of meekness. Then I think of a much smaller friend named Ken. Ken was the headmaster of the Christian school that was part of our church's ministry in Florida. I was the head guy for the church and every now and then our jurisdictions would sort of run into each other. There was potential there for conflict, for getting feathers ruffled, for feeling insulted, offended, mistreated. One day I mildly challenged Ken on the way he had used his authority and the brother did the strangest thing. He changed his mind and quickly reversed his previous decision before me and before others. When he did that God said to me, "Hey, That is meekness." Most people would have been so insecure over being challenged they couldn't think straight. Their egos would have demanded standing up to me. But Ken was secure enough in Christ

that he could afford the insult to his ego that changing his mind involved. As I thought of Ken this week I located a quote I from Paul Tournier's book, *Reflections*. Using the word "strong" the way Christ uses the word "meek" he writes, "The strong can afford to give in majestically, for they have no need of victory in order to gain prestige; the weak become desperately obstinate in order to reassure themselves. They will argue against plain logic and even against their interests because they cannot stand being defeated."

"The strong can afford to give in majestically." That is what Christ Jesus did for us when He went to Calvary, didn't He? He gave in to death, to the will of His Father, majestically and He calls us here to do the same. But how unnatural this is! All the positive thinking in the world won't make you meek. This is the work of Christ's Spirit in our souls, making us like Him. If you want this quality of meekness, if you want to be able to put others first, to endure injury with patience, to deny your self-rights because you know your self-worth then make it your prayer to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus who said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am meek and humble in heart." Let's Pray -