

Morning. There I am. Good morning. Welcome, everyone, to Sherwood Oaks. It feels a little mugging here to me.

Is it okay? It is, Susan. I don't know how. Here it is right here. I know there are people who know how to work this thing.

I'm going to walk over here. As I'm doing it, you just, what? Press the minus sign? Oh, what do we want it? 67, 66, 50.

We'll compromise at 67. How about that? It's at 71 right now. So we're going to take it down. It'll get slowly colder here.

Hypothermia is going to set in. About the middle of my sermon, you'll begin to drift off. Just go peacefully. That's all I say. We are in a series called over of the Blessed Life, which we're talking about the beatitudes.

A couple weeks later. A couple weeks ago, Sean Green at the Bedford campus punched into AI. Any of you guys ever used AI? Some of you are big fans. Some of you are terrified of it.

I fall somewhere at the 67 degrees on this thing, but he punched in the blessed life just to see what images would come up if he did that. So here's the first one that came up. And this is the blessed life. I like that, isn't it? You got a little cabin back there in the back.

You got a little river. You got al fresco dining. That is lovely. That is sort of a blessed life, isn't it? So he said, well, how about just a little bit more blessed life?

So he brought another one up. Oh, look, there's more friends there. There's more animals. A baby has showed up there off in the distance, untended. By the way, that's not how we do things here at Sherwood Oaks.

We keep watch over our kids. A lion is running around, a weird five legged deer. Does anyone see that in the middle there? Yeah. The deer may not feel so blessed, but he said, well, how about even more blessed?

Oh, look at that. Oh, my word. We got a rainbow. We got two houses now. Look at that big mansion over there.

The deer is back to four legs, which is good. There's a bride or a woman carrying a big bunch of flowers on her bosom. I don't know if that's a sign of blessedness. Let's go. Let's see the next one here.

The next one. Okay. Oh, there we go. Woohoo. Oh, the house has.

They've remodeled. They've bumped up the house. They're doing some

irrigation. It looks like they're around the other houses. We still all the houses have changed.

Angels have showed up. That's blessed. Okay, let's see what the next one is. Okay. Wow.

We have unicorns now. What'd I tell you? Unicorns are part of the blessed life. Yeah, unicorns. There we go.

Weird island in an. In a lake. It looks like there rainbows again. The house just gets grander and grander. We.

I think it's become a church at this point in time. Food no longer. You don't eat on tables anymore in the blessed life. You just eat right there on the ground. Okay, next.

The next one at least. There. Oh, yeah. Okay, this is. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

We've ramped it up. Let's just go to the. I think there's one more. There it is. There it is.

That's the blessed life. Okay. That's incredible. And honestly, very clever of AI to come up with those things, with the exception of the five legged deer. But this is not at all how Jesus describes the blessed life.

In chapter five of Matthew, Jesus talks about the blessed life looking like this, recognizing our poverty, embracing our mourning, hungering, starving, even for right and good things, righteousness, being merciful, keeping our hearts pure, being peacemakers, and even being willing to embrace persecution. It's a far cry from the pictures that AI generated. Jesus says that the blessed life, the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, doesn't look like that. So today we're going to be looking at one of the more, I guess, maybe misunderstood or challenging descriptions or characteristics of this blessed life. So if you've got your bibles, turn to Matthew, chapter five, and we're going to just focus on one of them today.

We've got a lot more, few more weeks to go, so we'll focus on the others later, but today we're gonna look at meekness. So I'm gonna pray as you turn. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the blessing of life in you. And it may not be rainbows and unicorns all the time, but you say that if we, if we live the life that you've called us to live this blessed life, if we embrace it, if we walk in it, if we don't shy away from it, then in the end we really experience maybe even the stars and rainbows. I don't know.

But, lord, we want to live the life you've called us to, not just the life of our own imagination. So lead us from your word today, in Jesus

name. Amen. So, Matthew five begins this way. Now, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down and his disciples came to him.

So this is an address that Jesus is going to have primarily with those who are listening in and following him. Now, there may be a few on the sides that kind of wander up. There's always those who hang out with Jesus, and there may be some of those in this instance, but he's primarily addressing his disciples, his followers, and he says this. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

And then he says this, blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Now, it's an interesting word, isn't it? A couple weeks ago, I talked about, because I lived in Germany, I'm fascinated by this aspect of their history. I talked about the reunification of east and West Germany and how it happened so unexpectedly, and the challenges of living in the two cultures or learning the new culture once you've lived in the old one. So keep that in mind, because I'm not just fascinated by when the wall fell or how it fell, but I want to know sort of the reasoning behind that.

And many times when we talk about that aspect of world history, we focus it right there in Berlin. But I want to tell you a story that happened about 2 hours south of Berlin, a town called Leipzig. This is a fascinating, fascinating story, and I believe this may be really where the true change began to happen. There's a church in Leipzig called the St. Nicholas church.

I don't know if there we have it. There it is, the St. Nicholas church in Leipzig. Big old church. There's a lot of those that look exactly like that all over Germany.

Now in Leipzig, it was like all over East Germany, life was very, very challenging under one of the most repressive regimes in the world. In addition to that, there was this constant communication. If you grew up in the eighties, the seventies, you know, this nuclear war was an ever present reality in the back of our minds. Remember that? Us old people?

Remember that? How we climbed at our desks to avoid nuclear fallout? Remember that right there? Yeah. That was not going to do anything.

God bless our teachers who made us think it would, though. So they're living in this place of. It's a repressive regime, and they're inferior. So there's a pastor, his name is Pastor Christian Fuhrer, and he called the people to pray. Now this is the pastor right there.

He just passed away not too, not too long ago. But he was a pastor of this church, and he called them to pray on Monday nights at the

church. Now at first, less than a dozen people showed up at this church to pray. But over time, in fact, over the span of six, seven years now think about how long seven years is. Over the span of seven years, 8000 people are crammed into that church, praying on Monday nights.

It spreads necessarily to other churches. Soon there are 70,000 people gathering on Monday nights in Leipzig, Germany, East Germany, to pray. Now, this catches the attention of the authorities, as it naturally would, and they were threatening to shut it all down. Officially, they had a hands off approach to churches. They were officially an atheistic government, but they.

They kept their hands off churches officially. Unofficially, they didn't. But in this instance, like, we're shutting all this down. And so they said, we're going to shut it down by any means necessary, quote, unquote, any means necessary. Which means that the night of these Monday night prayer meetings they had soldiers lining the rooftops of the streets where people were gathering outside to pray.

There were tanks and soldiers on the streets. There were barricades set up so that they could only move in certain confined places. On one night, they said, this is it. An outsized response to this group of prayers was happening. And the people who showed up that night to pray knew that this could be the last night they would be allowed to pray.

It could be, if things did not go well, could be the last night of their lives. But the pastor said, prayer changes things. Prayer reaches and touches the heart of God. Prayer impacts our world around us. And so they gather to pray.

Now, some said, that's crazy. It's crazy to fight a regime of tanks and soldiers and guns with mere prayers. But those who showed up to pray said, no, no, it's crazy to try to fight prayer with mere guns and soldiers. And so they gathered to pray. Now, as the prayer time finished in the church, the pastor dismissed them.

They were gonna walk from the church to a gathering spot in another part of the city. Barricades set up, soldiers, guns pointed down at them, pointed at them out on the outer skirts. There were police in. Troops just banked up against the crowd that was going to march. And he led them out.

The pastor led the congregation out onto the streets and they're saying, no violence. No violence. No violence. They're saying, we are the people. We are the people.

No violence. No violence. They walk past the headquarters of the secret police, the Stasi. They're saying, no violence. No violence.

And they're praying. They're praying, they're praying that that would be so. And then something wildly unexpected happened. Nothing. Nothing happened.

Like Daniel in the lion's den, the guns of the police officers, the guns of the military, never opened fire. The walk went off peacefully, without a single shot, without a single bullet being fired. And the next week, they did it again. Again, no shots. Police everywhere, guns pointed at them, but no shots.

And again, the same. Within a month, that 70,000 has grown to 300,000. People in the city of Leipzig are walking the streets, praying.

Four weeks later, and I don't think this is any. I don't think four weeks later, the Berlin Wall fell. I think there's a connection to prayer and the fall. Later, one communist official told a reporter, we were prepared for any eventuality, but we were not prepared for prayer. Now, why do I tell you this story?

Because those Monday night prayer meetings illustrate a very important aspect of the kingdom of heaven. We're to pray that the kingdom of heaven comes on earth, right? Jesus taught us to pray that way, but it's very clear that the kingdom of heaven doesn't come to earth by earthly means. I'm gonna say it again. The kingdom of heaven does not come to earth by earthly means.

It comes by doing God's will in God's way. God's will. God's way. Now, we're gonna leave that topic for just a moment. I'm gonna go back to Matthew five, where Jesus says, the meek will inherit the earth.

Anyone here expecting a great inheritance? I'm gonna put my hand down. I'm gonna put my hand down. You know, we have the story of the prodigal son. The prodigal son asked for his father's inheritance.

His father. I don't know why he did it, but he gave it to his son. He sold off half of his assets so his son could have this wad of cash. What did his son go do with it? He goes.

He spends it on riotous living. I am convinced that God has put me in a position where I can expect no inheritance because he suspects that I would spend it all on riotous living. He may be right. God's right. So God does not trust me to have an inheritance without wasting and squandering it.

I keep thinking there's going to be an uncle, a rich uncle or a rich aunt. I'll take either one. I'm not biased, but no, God has not entrusted even rich uncles and aunts to me. So we're just going to have to live within our means. But inheritance are interesting things.

In addition to all the random junk that we leave our kids when we

leave this life. And they've got to sort it out after our death. There are also some specific treasures that we entrust to our children. We handpick them out and we leave them to specific people. The ring goes to my daughter.

The handmade clock is going to go to my son. This wooden tool chest is going to go to my grandchild. These are treasured items that we leave to those that we know will love and treasure them the way we do. Right? So Jesus says this.

He says the meek will inherit the earth. The people who are going to get by valued, treasured possession are the meek. In other words, I'm going to entrust this precious thing, this precious thing to me who understand, like I do, its worth and its value. I'm going to entrust it to people who will care for it. Well, I'm going to entrust the earth to the meek.

The meek. There's another word. I don't think we use the word meek enough. Maybe because it's so rare to actually find it. When we use it, we tend to use it in a dismissive way.

If you're like me, I don't think you can't help but think of someone who's a little brow beaten. Maybe they're unwilling or unable to stand up for themselves. You think about the wife who's afraid of her husband or the husband who's afraid of his wife. Even if you look on the web, dictionary.com describes meekness this way. It's an adjective, spineless or spiritless, compliant.

That's not a glowing recommendation for meekness. But the Bible speaks of meekness in a different way than dictionary.com speaks of meekness in numbers twelve three. It describes Moses this way. Moses was very meek above all the men who were upon the face of the earth. Now, if you know the story of Moses, you know that Moses was the guy who led over a half million people.

Some estimates are up to a million people through the desert, out of slavery. He confronted the powers that be moved, moved his people out of slavery, took them through the desert up to the place of the promised land. I know that Moses had to raise his voice at least once to those millions of people. I know Moses oversaw leaders, an incredible leader who oversaw incredible leaders. This is a guy who negotiated with kings and rulers as they went through enemy territory.

This is not the picture of a guy who's spineless, who's compliant, who's wimpy. It is not the picture of a guy who gets treated like a doormat. So meekness must mean something different to God. Than it does to us. Yes, words change over time, don't they?

The word nice used to mean ignorant, awful used to mean amazing. Naughty used to mean you were poor. Dinner used to mean breakfast.

Cleave, you heard that in a wedding ceremony recently, cleave used to mean something that connected a connection. Now it means you take your cleaver and you chop a steak into two pieces, you tear something apart.

Meek has also experienced sort of this change in meaning. When the Bible uses the word meek, it is not referring to the powerless. It is referring to the powerful. The powerful who use their power in a specific way. Now, what is that specific way?

So you might get an idea. If you look in your own bibles, the word translated meek in your bibles may be something different. So if you look there, you might see the word humble. Blessed are the humble. Or you might see blessed are the gentle, or blessed are the kind.

Different Bible translators translate the word meek different ways. But all of those adjectives sort of dance around the real meaning of the word meek as God uses it. Meekness. Is this doing God's will? Yes, God's way.

Meekness is our power submitted to a higher power, to God's power. In the case of Moses and anyone else who wants to enjoy the blessings of Jesus kingdom, it means submitting our power and authority to the power and authority of God. Now, we think of a horse. Any of you guys? I know we have some horse people here.

So you think of a horse before it's broken, it can buck, it can kick, it can do a lot of damage and harm. Once it's broken, that changes, doesn't it? It becomes submitted to the authority of the person breaking him. Putting a bit in a horse's mouth changes that horse completely. When you put a bit in a horse's mouth, you can use its power, its horsepower, for higher purposes.

So the disciples of Jesus, who submit their authority to his authority to put his bit in their mouth in every aspect of their lives, the Bible says, this is the meek person, not helpless, but submitted to God's strength. These are the people who say, not my will, but thine. It's a picture of Jesus. Now let's go back to Leipzig. So with 300,000 people on the streets that Monday night, they could have exercised their power in pretty devastating ways.

They could have smashed windows, they could have set buildings on fire, they could have overturned cars, all in the very noble goal of protesting brutal living conditions under a brutal regime. They could have terrorized their way to freedom. But what did they do? The pastor said, we're going to walk peacefully through the streets and we're going to pray. And so that's what they did.

They submitted their power, their will, their abilities to another's authority. And like the bit in the horse's mouth, they allowed God to

control them. They did God's will, God's way. Jesus says, these are the kind of people who will be entrusted with God's most treasured possession. God so loved the world.

God so loved this place that he gave his only son. God loves this earth and everything in it. It belongs to him now. Other rulers, other authorities will fight and kill and storm to retain or gain power. But in the end, who gets it all?

The meek. Those who do God's will. God's way. What does that look like? It means gently.

It means humbly. It means kindly. It means patiently. Patiently. Patiently, patiently.

That's where the rubber often hits the road, doesn't it? We're all about doing God's will, but we sort of want to do it our way. God's perfect will comes when we do it God's perfect way.

The world around us can be scary and uncertain, and it is very tempting to try to control the world and the people in it, others around us, so that it's not so scary, so that it's a little more predictable, so that we remove uncertainty and fear from it. So we get into fighting matches and just contortions of relationship stuff, trying to make our world safe for us.

We get in fighting matches over politics and values.

And as Dallas Willard says, we find ourselves demanding to have the last word in any argument. You ever been there? Even with God? We say, God, I'm all in. I'm all in on your will, but I'm not sure about your way.

God's ways are mysterious. We know that. We know that.

But if we remember the lessons of those on those Monday night prayer meetings and marches in Leipzig, then I think we'll understand that God has the power to accomplish what mere human effort cannot. Because the kingdom of heaven doesn't come by earthly means. God's perfect will only comes by doing it God's perfect way.

Again, that way is mysterious, but we discern it in prayer.

God's perfect way always looks like the path of prayer to start, doesn't it? So in those places where we're scared, confused and threatened, and you feel like you need to get control back, God says, here's what I want you to do. I want you to ask. Ask, and it will be given. I want you to seek seek and you will find.

I want you to knock. Knock and the door will be. And I want you to

pray because in prayer, walls of oppression fall down. Karl Barth, who some describe as the world's greatest 20th century theologian, said this, to clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world. This is where it starts in praying.

Prayer is the path by which we discern what God wants us to do and how he wants us to do it. We want to do God's will, God's way. That's meekness. And if we can be entrusted to be obedient to God and to be faithful in the small things that he puts around us, our family, our friends, our churches, our communities, our country, then God says, I'm going to trust you with bigger things. I'm going to let you inherit the earth.

We're going to jump into a time of communion. We're going to move into a time of communion. I don't expect anyone to jump. It's still very muggy in here. But this is a question we ask ourselves.

And we have to ask ourselves, are we trusting God with the scary or confusing things and places and people in our lives, or are we still trying to maneuver and manipulate those people in those situations so that they fit the way we want them to fit in our lives? Are we pressing where we need to be resting? Are we pushing where we need to be simply praying? Because Jesus invites us with that beautiful invitation that encompasses everyone in this room. He invites those who are, who are weary and heavy laden to come and find rest in him, peace for our souls.

He says that's what we find when we bring that to him. Release control, surrendering of our rights and our right to have the last word and say, lord, not my will, but yours. I wanna do your will your way. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the commission that you gave us to go into all the world to be salt and light. And many times we take that to mean that we need to go in and make it happen.

But time and time again you remind us that we don't make it happen. You make it happen. You call us to pray, to submit our lives to yours, to cement our actions, our will, our strength to yours, to do your will your way. So, God, where we are harsh, I pray that we would be gentle in Jesus, where we are forceful. I pray that we would be mindful God in those areas where we're afraid.

And our fear makes us say and do things that are foolish, that are harsh, that are mean, spirited. I pray that you would remind us that you bring all things under you, even us. So help us engage with the world. Help us engage with each other in ways that. That look like you.

We want to do your will in your way. As we take communion this morning, we are so thankful for Jesus who said, not my will, but thine, and submitted himself to the cross. Lord, that was. That was a

terrifying, scary moment, submitting to death. But the scriptures say that, that he rose again, he did obediently what you asked him to do in the way that you asked him to do it.

And you opened tombs, destroyed barriers and walls, and brought us into life and light and freedom, all because he did God's will. God's way. Lord, may we, like Christ, submit ourselves as well to your perfect way and your perfect will. Bless this time as we share in the cup and the bread. Meet us here, convict us, change us, and remind us that you're good and you're working all things out for good.

In Jesus name, amen.

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