

Blessed Are the Meek

Matthew 5:5

**A sermon by Dr. Calvin Warpula
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Some personalities are popular for a while and then with the passing of time their influence and recognition fades away. Such is happening to my boyhood western hero, Roy Rogers. The family is now auctioning off all his mementos that were in a museum in Branson, MO. Fewer and fewer people were attending the museum and they closed it down and all selling everything to the public. Roy Rogers once said to his son, “There’s going to be a time people aren’t going to want to see Roy anymore. If the museum starts losing money, go ahead and close it and sell everything.” For decades Roy was a Hollywood icon. He made 100 movies and he and his wife, Dale Evans, starred in a hit television series from 1951 through 1957. He closed every show with the song, “Happy Trails to You, until we meet again.” That’s life. No matter how important people are, we come, we go, and soon the memory of us fades away.

That’s true of every person, except one, Jesus of Nazareth. He is “the same, yesterday, today and forever.” Two billion people claim to follow him and the number is growing daily. We believe that he lived among us for thirty three years or more, that he was betrayed and rejected by his own people, that he was crucified on a Roman cross, buried for three days, and on the third day arose victoriously from the dead. We believe he gave many infallible proofs of his resurrection and that he ascended into heaven to be with the eternal, loving God. We believe that now he is alive, that he superintends and guides his church, that he hears our prayers and guides our lives, and that he is coming again to raise the dead, change the living, and be the judge of all mankind. We believe that he will take the righteous in their newly resurrected bodies to be with him forever and ever and that those who do not believe in him will be condemned in their sins and be separated from God forever.

Jesus lives! His words are living and powerful and so true and permanent that he said that his words would judge the world at the end of time. We are only here for a short while, threescore years and ten, but what

I'm talking about today God's people will be enjoying fifty billion trillion years from now into eternity.

We are studying the words of Jesus today from his most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7. These words are true and authoritative and we must listen to them and obey them.

The Beatitudes

The sermon begins with eight beatitudes, or beautiful attitudes. All eight are connected and as they go from one to the next they progress in meaning, one builds upon another. These eight beatitudes are eight facets of one person, a Christian, a Jesus follower. These are not spoken to the world, but to the church. These are the qualities of a person who is following Jesus Christ. The Sermon on the Mount is not for those outside Christ, or for world governments or nations. It is for those who have committed their lives in faith, repentance and baptism, a conversion process that Jesus calls the new birth, a birth of water and Spirit.

The first two beatitudes speak of our relationship to God. First, we have an intellectual awareness of our spiritual bankruptcy before God. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This means that we are humble before God. We recognize that we need God more than we need anything else. We are God-contained people, focused on God, surrendering to God, and depending on God. We know that we can do nothing to merit or deserve God's blessings or favor, and that everything is by the grace and mercy of God. The second beatitude, "Blessed are those that mourn for they shall be comforted," speaks further of this relationship with God. We have an emotional awareness of our sins. We grieve because of our own wickedness without God. We recognize that in ourselves dwells no good thing.

Paul the apostle was one like this. Even though he had been saved for 25 years, and had completed three great missionary tours for Jesus, and had written ten letters in our New Testament, yet he said in Romans chapter seven, "The good I would do, I do not. The evil I would not do, that I do. O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?" A few years later, he called himself "the chiefest of sinners." Paul mourned over his sinful self, and God comforts and blesses all who do. We also mourn over the sins and neglect of God's people and their propensity for division, for jealousy, for lovelessness, and for spiritual neglect.

These first two beatitudes then speak of our intellectual and emotional awareness of sin. If you think that you are something before God, you are nothing before God. We repent of our sins before baptism and we keep repenting of other sins after baptism. Baptism is once and for all but repentance and confession before God is a daily occurrence.

Meekness Is Misunderstood

Now the third beatitude really astounds us. Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” What? “Blessed are the meek?” Who wants to be meek? The problem is we have misunderstood meekness. In our minds, we think Jesus is saying, “Blessed are the weak.” One dictionary even says that meekness is “deficient in courage.” But weakness is not meekness and meekness is not weakness. Meekness is so misunderstood today that if someone is called a meek person we think that he or she is wishy-washy, indecisive, fragile, and quiet. Meekness is so misunderstood today that probably none of you want a plaque hanging in your business office that says, “Blessed are the meek.” We probably never would describe ourselves on our resumes as a meek person. However, our mental images are so false.

We have just sung the song, “Jesus, Meek and Gentle.” Some people think of Jesus as feminine. You ever look at some of the renaissance art? Jesus looks like a woman with a beard. Or, he’s Mr. Rogers with a beard. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is a total misconception of Jesus.

Jesus is a man, a man’s man. He is full of masculinity, integrity and moral courage. Christianity is not a religion built around a polite, nice, boring Jesus. Christianity is not just a bunch of flowers and doilies on the altar. Jesus is a man of strength, valor, courage, character, and dignity.

Christ Followers Are Urged to Be Meek Like Jesus

Jesus is meek and gentle. Hear these words again: [read Matt. 11:28-30]. The apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to consider the meekness of Christ (2 Cor. 10:1). In our dealing with those who oppose us, the apostle Paul urged us to not be quarrelsome people but to be meek. Hear him in 2 Tim. 2:20-22 [read]. Sometimes people get baptized and they bring all their old spiritual baggage through the waters of baptism and into the church.

Therefore Paul had to urge the Ephesians, [read 4:1-3]. He wrote to the Colossians something very similar: [read 3:12-14]. The Holy Spirit produces meekness as one of the fruits of his indwelling within us (Gal. 5:22). Meekness then is a quality present in Jesus, produced by the Holy Spirit as Christian fruit, and commended for all Christ followers both in dealing with one another in the church and in dealing with critics on the outside.

What Is Meekness?

Meekness is translated from the Greek word *praus*. This word was used by the Greeks to refer to a strong horse that had been trained and broken to the saddle and the plow. In other words, meekness is strength under control. What good is an out of control horse, one that will not be tamed, cannot be ridden, and will not pull a wagon or a cart or a plow? That horse could be twenty hands high, weigh 1500 to 2000 pounds and be solid muscle but what good is that if he is wild and uncontrollable? No good at all. So we can see from the original meaning and usage of the word in Greek literature that meekness is not weakness, but rather strength under control that is useful and helpful.

Things that are not under control are no good to anyone; in fact, they can be very destructive. Take fire, for example. A fire warms our bodies, heats our homes, and cooks our meals, and yet if it is out of control, it can burn down the entire forest, destroy houses and lives, and leave a wide path of charred and ruined remains. Take wind, for example. A gentle breeze is so relaxing and comforting and soothing and cooling, but if that breeze is whipped up into a hurricane like Ike or Katrina then it destroys everything in its path. Take water, for example. We need water to survive, for plants to make our food, to bathe, and to enjoy a cold drink. But if that water is unleashed in floods it sweeps away houses, people, cars, animals, highways and everything else in its path. Fire, wind and water are very important and useful when they are controlled. When they are not controlled, they are destructive menaces that bring misery and heartache.

This principle applies to us. Strength, courage, valor, power, and assertiveness are good as long as they are controlled. Mike Tyson was once the heavyweight champion of the world. He was a killer in the boxing ring. None of us could last more than 15 seconds with him in the ring. But he had no moral constraints. He got so angry at an opponent that he bit off his ear in the boxing ring. The book of Proverbs speaks of this type of power that is

out of control: “He that has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls” (Prov. 25:28). Proverbs again speaks of power under control: “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city” (Prov. 16:32).

When Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek,” he meant, “O the spiritual, happy delight of those that in their relationship to others are people that are strong but controlled, people that are submitted to God and show that submission in the way they treat others.” The first two beatitudes dealt with our relationship to God. This one deals with our relationship to others. The first two beatitudes looked upward to God; this one looks outward to others.

The Example of Moses

To help us better understand, let’s look at the story of Moses. The Bible says in Numbers chapter 12 and verse 3: “Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.” The word “humble” in the NIV is translated as “meek” in other translations. Moses is meek. Was he weak? No. He was a strong man. He was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. At age 40 he killed an Egyptian fighting an Israelite. He had strength. He ran away to the wilderness of the Sinai region. Here he married and had a family. At age 80, God called him to lead a million plus Jews out of Egypt. Moses was humble before God. He was not campaigning for the job. At the burning bush he took off his shoes and told God “No, I cannot do it” five times, but God says, “I will be with you, and you can do it.” Moses went to Egypt. He meets with the most powerful man on earth, and says to him face to face, “God says, let my people go.” Moses had strength and courage. After the ten plagues on Egypt, Moses led Israel out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, and for the next 40 years in the Midianite wilderness. He put up with murmurings, internal division, and the sins of Israel. They were a constant pain and headache to him. He was a God-focused man who treated others with restraint. That does not mean he did not get angry.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle writing some 400 years before Jesus defined *praus* (meekness) as getting angry at the right time, for the right reason, against the right people, with the right amount. Hear what he said about meekness in his Nicomachean Ethics: “Anyone can become angry, that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not easy.”

That's what Moses did. Here in Numbers 12, Moses' authority was questioned. "Why are you the leader? Share that with us. We can lead, too." Moses held his cool. God answered from heaven and because Moses' sister, Miriam, was in on the rebellion against her brother, God struck her with leprosy. But Moses prayed for his sister, "Lord, heal her." And the Lord did. Moses held his strength under control. On an earlier occasion when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai he had been on the mountain conferring with God for forty days, and when he came down the people were dancing and cavorting about an idol they had made, the infamous golden calf. Moses got angry at sin. He was so disappointed and hurt at his people, that he threw down the tablets containing the Ten Commandments and they broke in pieces. Moses then took severe judgment against the perpetrators of this idolatrous action. Moses was angry at the right time against the right people with the right amount of force. His strength was under control.

The Example of Jesus

We spoke of Jesus a while ago as being a meek man. Was Jesus weak? No, but his strength was under control. He had mercy, kindness, gentleness and compassion on the poor, the sinful, the disenfranchised, the inadequate and the weak. But Jesus was hard on those who hurt others. Some of his strongest words were against those that abused and misused people. Jesus saw the poor being abused in the outrageous practices of those selling sacrifices for the temple worship of God. He crafted a whip out of a rope and drove the moneychangers out of the temple courts. He yelled at them, "My father's house is to be a house of prayer and you have made it a den of thieves" (John 2:12-17). No moneychanger would ever say that Jesus was weak. Jesus was strong. He defended others like a lion. He rebuked the hardness of the Pharisees' heart when they objected to his healing a man's withered hand on the Sabbath day (Matt. 12:9-45). He got angry when his disciples tried to stop little children from coming to him (Mk. 10:13-16). He called Simon Peter "Satan" when Peter tried to deter him from his heavenly mission (Matt. 16:21-23).

He stood before Pilate and calmly answered his questions and pointed to the truth of who he was. At other times before King Herod he said not a word. Pilate compromised and allowed Jesus to be crucified. They nailed Jesus to the cross and lifted him up high. Hanging there looking at the Christ rejectors, he could have called down 72,000 angels, twelve legions, but he did not. Instead he, said, "Father, forgive them they know not what

they do.” That is strength under control. The crowd shouted, “He saved others; he cannot save himself.” How right they were—if he had saved himself, he could not save us by his sacrifice for our sins; but if he was to save us, he could not save himself. Jesus was mocked and spit upon but he said nothing. The apostle Peter wrote about Jesus this way: [read I Pet. 2:21-24]. Peter says here that Jesus in his behavior, of his strength under control, is an example for us.

Jesus is the incarnation of gentleness and strength. He possesses immense strength and self-control when he does not retaliate against those who do him evil yet he stands up fearlessly in defense of others or of the truth.

What a Meek Person Does

A meek person is a God-controlled person. Moses was God controlled. Jesus was God controlled. A meek person is assertive but not self-assertive. A meek person is not pushing himself with others. A meek person is willing to serve others, even wash their feet, if need be. A meek person is not always craving the spotlight, always wanting to be first in line, always clamoring for attention. A meek person is not thinking, “What’s in it for me?” but “What can I do in this situation to serve others?” A meek person is someone who serves others and does not think of himself or herself. A meek person comes into a situation, looks around, sees what needs to be done, and then begins doing it. A meek person is not looking for extra credit, extra money, extra attention, or extra praise. A meek person wants to make things better for everyone concerned. A meek person is willing to go out of his or her way to better others.

A good translation of the word “meekness” is the word “gentle” or “gentleness.” The NEB translates this beatitude, “Blessed are the gentle.” In various places in the Bible where the word is found it might mean one of the following:

- The gentle do not demand having their way all the time.
- The gentle want to be unassuming in the presence of others.
- The gentle are eager to conform to God’s expectations.
- The gentle always want to live graciously with others.
- The gentle have a calm trust in the providence of God.

[Jerry Mercer, Cry Joy! Say Yes to Life that Satisfies. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1987, p. 43].

Here are four words that are the opposite of meekness:

- *Harshness*: If you are mean in your treatment of others, if there is an absence of gentleness in your treatment of others, take heed.
- *Grasping*: If you make sure you always get yours first, if *numero uno* is the subtle driving force in your life, if you care little about how your actions affect others, beware.
- *Vengeful*: If you are known as someone never to cross, if you always get your “pound of flesh,” be on your guard.
- *Uncontrolled*: if rage fills your soul so that life is a series of explosions occasioned by the “fools” in your life, watch out.

[R. Kent Hughes, The Sermon on the Mount. Preaching the Word Series. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001, p. 36].

Of course, none of us are perfect in regard to meekness but this quality needs to be present in our lives. We need to listen to the Holy Spirit and let him form his fruit in us.

This is the person that God blesses: A person under God’s control who treats people right with the love of God. That’s a meek person. Jesus says that person is “blessed.” He or she has inward, spiritual happiness because they are living for the love and service of God and others.

The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth

Jesus said such a person “shall inherit the earth.” This is a definite promise. You’ll notice that Jesus does not say, “I think so,” “I hope so,” “possibly,” “maybe,” “it is my opinion,” or, “if I am not mistaken.” No. Jesus is very concrete and definite. He speaks decisively here as in all the beatitudes: “They shall inherit the earth.”

This expression is not original with Jesus. Jesus knew the OT and he quoted frequently from the book of Psalms. This is a quotation from Psalm 37:11: “But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.” This psalm begins with a command for us to “fret not because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong.” We are encouraged to “trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.” “Delight yourself in

the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” “Commit your ways to the Lord; he will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.” “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. . . . Refrain from anger and turn away from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.” “For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.”

This entire psalm is a celebration of God’s care for the righteous. Those that trust in him will prosper, they will be delivered, they will enjoy the land, but the wicked will be cut off and God will deal with them. To inherit the earth is to enjoy all that God has to offer. It is to enjoy and delight in God and to see the spiritual success and prosperity of those that follow the Lord. To inherit the earth is used six times in Psalm 37 and it means to enjoy the bounty of God.

When Jesus said the meek will inherit the earth he meant that their way is right, is from God, and God will see to it that this way is successful and spiritually prosperous. In other words, when we serve God, it pays spiritually. We know the Lord. We enjoy life. We are filled with praise and gratitude. We know the real purpose of life. We see how everything fits together in God’s plan and purpose. Jesus says the path to really enjoying life is a path of meekness, of gentle service and kindness toward others, of strength under control.

How Meekness Can Grow in You

But no one can do this without God. These qualities in the beatitudes are not humanly produced; they are the fruit, the product, of the Holy Spirit. One person said that he converted to Christianity because he wanted an “easy religion.” Oh, if that person only knew. It takes the surrender of your self, your total self, to the will and purpose of God. You do not live for yourself anymore. You die to selfishness, to your human appetites that crave fulfillment, and you let God function and work in you and through you. An easy religion? God forbid! The man that we follow went to the cross and he said for us to take up our cross and follow him.

Jesus said he is meek and gentle in heart. Then listen to what he tells us to do if we want to be like him: “Come to me all you that weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and you will find rest for your souls.” You see, we do not make meekness; we come to Jesus, we take his yoke, we learn of him, and he makes us like him.

In biblical times a young ox was yoked to an older, experienced ox so that the older might train him to perform properly. By bearing the same yoke, the untrained ox learned the proper pace and how to heed the direction of the master. We learn by being yoked to Christ, as we surrender our lives to him for direction.

[R. Kent Hughes, The Sermon on the Mount, p. 38].

Today, if you would be saved, the Bible says, you must receive with meekness the word of God. This thought is found in James chapter one. This letter was written to followers of Jesus who were not doing what Jesus said to do. They needed straightening up. They needed repentance and correction. Hear what the Lord's brother says here: [read 1:19-21].

When James writes of being "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" he is speaking of meekness—strength under control, and being angry at the right time for the right cause in the right amount. Meekness means that we listen to God. The NIV says to "humbly accept the word" but other translations say, "Receive the word with meekness." We must receive with meekness the word that can save us.

Do you want to live, really live? Then receive God's word with meekness, submit to it, live by it. Be God-contained and God-controlled. Be submissive to God's will and out of that respect and obedience to God, treat others right. Be kind and gentle. Be a Jesus person every day.

Whosoever will may come. Respond to the Lord. Let us help you get right with God, come, while we stand and sing.

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