

Beatitudes-Meekness is not Weakness—Matthew 5:5
College Baptist Church
June 20, 2021

Today we will continue our summer sermon series on the Beatitudes. You can find the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5. So, I invite you to turn there with me. If you didn't bring a Bible, there are Bibles in the pew racks. You will find Matthew 5 on p. 809. The sermon text is also printed in the bulletin along with space for taking notes. Today, we will be focusing on the third Beatitude, which is found in verse 5.

As you turn there, remember that the Beatitudes are kingdom blessings, pronounced by King Jesus, upon citizens of his kingdom, which is already but not yet. So, these are pronouncements of divine favor and approval from Jesus on his people that have consequences in the present *and* future.

And each Beatitude consists of a pronouncement and a promise. The first half is the pronouncement; and it begins: *“blessed are the/those...”* The second half is the promise; and it starts with the word *“for”*, which means *“because.”*

So, the promise explains the pronouncement. The promise answers the question *“why”* or *“how”* the pronouncement is a blessing, even though it might not sound like one.

With all of that as reminder, let's listen again to all of the beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12; before focusing on the third Beatitude, which is found in verse 5.

Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

⁴ *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

⁵ *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

⁶ *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

⁷ *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

⁸ *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

⁹ *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

¹⁰ *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

The Pronouncement: Blessed are the meek

Many of you will remember that before Charles Barkley was the flamboyant and ostentatious basketball color-commentator that he is today; he was “Sir Charles” Barkley of the Philadelphia 76ers, the Phoenix Suns, and the Houston Rockets. And just as Charles is filled with one-liners today...he was filled with one-liners as a player. In fact, Nike shoes capitalized on one of his most famous quotes in an ad campaign in the 90s.

The Barkley quote, which Nike emblazoned on t-shirts and posters, was Charles' own variation of the third beatitude. And it went like this. *"The meek may inherit the earth, but they won't get the ball."* Charles, Charles, Charles. Always a little clever; and usually a little off. Or in this case, quite a bit off.

But Charles' modification of the third beatitude, "the meek may inherit the earth, but they won't get the ball," tells us a lot about how most people—maybe even some of us here today—think about the word "meek." It's a word that is shrouded in a bit of mystery. Not only because we don't use it regularly in contemporary English, but because many of us don't quite know how to define it.

Clearly, Charles associates meekness with weakness. That's why he can't imagine a meek person grabbing a rebound or getting a steal. The meek won't get the ball, says Charles. They aren't strong enough or powerful enough. The meek are wimps according to Sir Charles. But Charles is mistaken. Meekness is not weakness. Let me give you a more accurate picture of meekness.

One of the wonderful things about living in rural Hillsdale County is the beauty and power of agriculture. And I'm not just talking about modern agriculture with perfectly straight rows of corn and massive tractors. I'm talking about the beauty and power exhibited on the Amish farms in our area. Take, for instance, the beautiful and powerful Belgian draft horses that you can see grazing in the fields. Those draft horse pull plows through hard-packed ground. They pull heavy wagons of timber out of the forest. They are powerful and strong; and their strength is controlled by a harness. And though they could stomp you under their 2,000 pounds—draft horses are quite gentle.

All this to say, draft horses are an excellent picture of meekness. You see, meekness is not weakness. Meekness is strength under control. Let me say that again, meekness is strength under control. But we need not rely only on draft horses for an example of meekness. God has given us human examples of meekness right here in the Bible. Let's look at one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament.

Our Old Testament example of meekness is none other than Moses. Numbers 12:3 says this about Moses. *"Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth."* So, not only was Moses meek; he was the meekest man on the planet. That's quite a compliment. And in order to appreciate and understand the meekness of Moses, we need to understand the context in which this statement was made.

You might remember that Moses had two siblings named Miriam and Aaron. And when the LORD called Moses to lead his people out of Israel there arose some significant sibling rivalry. I'm sure you've never been envious of your brother or sister, have you? Well, Numbers 12:1-2 says, *"Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses...² And they said, 'Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?'"* Miriam and Aaron were green with envy. Perhaps Miriam didn't like that her little brother was soaking up the spotlight? Perhaps Aaron didn't think that his Egyptian-raised brother should be leading the Hebrew people? They wanted a piece of the fame.

So, how did Moses respond to his whiny siblings? Did he call down plagues on them like he had on Pharaoh and the Egyptians? Did he scream at them in anger? Did he defend himself with violence? No, Moses responded with meekness. He kept his strength under control. And he waited for the LORD to defend him. Numbers 12:6-9 records the LORD's response to the complaints of Miriam and Aaron.

"And [the LORD] said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. ⁷ Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. ⁸ With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" ⁹ And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them..."

Do you see now, why Moses was declared the meekest man on the planet? He had every right to blast his siblings. He was the privileged servant of the LORD, who communicated "mouth to mouth" or "face to face" with the LORD himself. He had heard the LORD in the burning bush. He had plead with the LORD to spare his brother, Aaron, and the people after they worshipped a golden calf at Mount Sinai. But he kept his cool and he waited for the LORD to come to his defense. That's a great example of meekness—strength under control, even in the face of unfounded accusations and injustice. And if you think Moses was a great example, wait until you see our New Testament example of meekness.

You probably already guessed it. Our New Testament example of meekness is the Lord Jesus himself. Jesus described himself as meek in Matthew 11:29, when he said this. *"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."* That word, "gentle," is the same word translated as "meek" in the third beatitude. Jesus comes not to pile on heavy legalistic demands and angry words of judgment on those already weary from sin. He comes to offer eternal rest to all those who will come under his easy and light yoke. He is a gentle King of peace.

And do you remember how King Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? Was it on a war horse with a massive army? Did he come flexing his muscles to the Romans and the Jewish religious leaders. No, he came with meekness, riding on a lowly donkey.

And I would argue that even his turning over the tables in the temple was an exhibition of meekness. He was angry to be sure...but it was a measured anger. It was not an off-the-cuff, capricious act of violence. Though he could have wiped the greedy money changers off the planet, he exercised restraint by offering a firm warning of judgment instead.

But the most powerful exhibition of meekness by Jesus was at the cross. In Matthew 27:39-42, we are reminded of the mockery and ridicule that Jesus faced at Calvary. *And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him."*

But Jesus did not shout back insults. He did not come down from the place of judgment—he hung there according to the plan. In the greatest act of meekness in the history of the world, the King of the Universe harnessed his strength in order to endure the wrath of God for sinners like us. That’s meekness.

And Jesus exhibited this meekness knowing that “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*” As with the previous beatitudes the pronouncement doesn’t really sound like a blessing. We don’t think of meekness as a state of divine blessing and favor and approval; but when coupled with the promise it is. “*Blessed are the meek.*” Why? Because “*they shall inherit the earth.*”

The Promise: For they shall inherit the earth

What does it mean that the meek “*shall inherit the earth?*” Well, as Americans, we are tempted to think that this is a reference to what the 19th century settlers called “*manifest destiny.*” That belief that Americans were destined to explore and inhabit and make prosperous this land from “*sea to shining sea.*” That “*this land is your land, this land is my land, from California to the New York Island.*” That was a particularly big and bold view of our American forefathers. But if that is your view of inheriting the earth—your view is not too big. It is actually too small!

This is a reference to inheritance of the literal land—the earth. But it is more than a reference to the good old US of A. And it is also more than a reference to the little sliver of land on the coast of the Mediterranean that we call Israel or Palestine or The Promised Land. You see, this is a reference to the New Heavens and the New *Earth!* This is an eschatological promise. And that is how Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries probably thought of it. You see, this beatitude is a nearly-direct quote of Psalm 37:9-11, which says.

For the evildoers shall be cut off,

but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

¹⁰ *In just a little while, the wicked will be no more;*

though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.

¹¹ *But the meek shall inherit the land*

and delight themselves in abundant peace.

That is to say, Psalm 37 rightly understood paints a picture of a Meek Messiah and his meek people ultimately inheriting the entire earth. Jesus the Messiah—God’s only chosen King—entered the world in meekness, surrounded by evil doers and wicked men, who look like they are winning. And yet he will one day return to claim the earth as his own. Jesus is the rightful King of this earth—even though it doesn’t always look like it.

And so, Christians must grow in the meekness of Jesus as we await our inheritance of the earth. But we must keep in mind that cultivating meekness is not easy. It is not something we can do on our own. In fact, meekness is not a fruit of human, fleshly effort. It is a fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is listed in Galatians 5:21. Listen to the familiar list. “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control...*”

Gentleness is the same thing as meekness. It is the fruit of the Spirit—a fruit which the Spirit is committed to grow in all followers of Jesus.

In 1660, the Puritan, Thomas Watson, wrote,
Meekness is a grace whereby we are enabled by the Spirit of God, to moderate our angry passions. Meekness has a divine beauty and sweetness in it... Meekness is opposed to: anger, malice, revenge and evil-speaking... To yield to one's anger is easy-it is swimming along with the tide of corrupt nature. But to turn against nature-to resist anger, to "overcome evil with good"-this is truly Christian.

So, what might truly Christian meekness look like in the 21st Century? Here are a few areas of life where we ought to exhibit Christian meekness, not weakness.

- We should be meek in our parenting. This is true for both mothers and fathers. But I want to share a word of exhortation to my fellow fathers on this special day. Dads, as you are celebrated and honored today, may you remember to harness your strength for the good of your children and families. May you exhibit a tenderness toward your children—even when they are disobedient—not allowing your temper to get the best of you, but yielding to the Spirit as you discipline with gentleness not anger or rage or violence of any kind.
- We should be meek in our evangelism. As we tell the good news of Jesus to neighbors and nations we should do so with gentleness. We must remember that we can never force an authentic conversion. And regardless of how the message of Jesus is received—even if it is rejected or ridiculed—we should remember that even King Jesus was not received by all.
- We should be meek in our social media presence. Proverbs 15:4 says, “*A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.*” And I think it is also true that a gentle post is a tree of life, but a perverse post breaks the spirit. Is your social media presence meek? I’m not saying you shouldn’t defend your positions. I am saying you must do so with strength that is under control.
- And, finally, we should be meek in our political engagement. As professing Christians, we are increasingly under fire here in America. And it may be tempting to join the fray with name-calling and malicious speech in an attempt to keep this great country from slipping into further decay and debauchery. But we must resist the urge to spew more venomous words and instead exhibit Christ-like meekness—exhibiting strength under control as we live as citizens who seek to love God and love our neighbors in this secular age. And we should do so with confidence that even if the blessing of God is removed from this beloved land, no earthly government can take our blessed eternal inheritance. Because one day the meek shall inherit the New Heavens and New Earth, where Jesus shall reign not only from sea to shining sea, but wherever the sun does shine.

Benediction—Numbers 6:24-26

²⁴ *The Lord bless you and keep you;*

²⁵ *the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;*

²⁶ *the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*