

The Way of Jesus: Meekness is Not Weakness
Matthew 5:5

I. Introduction – For lack of a better word...

There are times when the English language just doesn't have the right word to express an idea. When we experience or contemplate (think about) concepts like love, beauty, and grief we are often at a loss for just the right words. When words fail, music and visual art, or a greeting card can often communicate what language can't. Sometimes a touch or a hug says so much more than words.

The topic of today's message isn't "touchy-feely." It doesn't need a song or a painting to express its meaning. But the English language does not have a good word to express what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are the meek." There's something about just the sound of the word, "meek" that communicates weakness to us. As one who has studied rather thoroughly the sound of language, the double "ee" vowel sound seems to evoke smallness and impotence rather than power and control. Meekness seems equated with "mousey" or "timid." It's the kind of character that Danny Kaye portrayed so well in "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." (Play video clip. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgeY7UijvI4>)



That seems to be our idea of meekness. And it is about as far away from what Jesus meant when he gave the third Beatitude as we could ever imagine. Some translations use the word "gentle"

or “humble.” Those character qualities are an essential element in biblical meekness, but they don’t fully capture the idea. Meekness, however misunderstood and unappreciated it is, remains one of the most powerful and essential qualities of a Jesus-follower. I’ve been amazed and excited as I’ve studied and explored the Scriptures to discover what meekness really means. There is a very good word for us in this message – one that I believe will really encourage you. Before we unpack its meaning, however, let’s say the whole Beatitude together:

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Matthew 5:5

Prayer

II. The Promised Inheritance

Before exploring the meaning of meekness, I want to work backwards, starting with the promise of the Beatitude. Jesus said that the future of those who are meek would be the inheritance of the earth. OK, Jesus. If it’s not too much to ask, I’d like San Diego.

That’s not what the Lord meant. In this Beatitude, Jesus is directly quoting Psalm 37:11: (ESV)

“But the meek shall inherit the land
and delight themselves in abundant peace.”

Both the Hebrew and Greek words for “earth” are the same as “land.” (*ἡ γῆ*) Now for us to fully understand what Jesus – and by extension, the psalmist – is trying to convey we need to be Jewish in our thinking here. When you refer to “the land” to a Jewish person, you mean much more than just soil or real estate. The “Promised Land” was at the core of God’s covenant for his people. That’s why today, in Israel, they not only struggling for their survival in their little country; they are tenaciously holding on to what they believe God has always promised and intended for them. “The land” for a Jewish person is not only the possession of a literal place, but it is deeply symbolic of all of God’s faithfulness and promises. It is everything.

Psalm 37:10, then, is saying that a meek person will receive all of God's promises. The intended audience of Matthew's Gospel was Jewish people. Interestingly, this Beatitude is not in Luke's Gospel, which was written from a Gentile perspective. Matthew's readers would have immediately understood what Jesus meant by the Beatitude and that he was quoting Psalm 37.

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

What, then, is the promise for us today in this Beatitude? While some Jews in Jesus' audience may have thought he was referring to living a prosperous and fruitful life in their homeland, the Lord's intention was much bigger and broader than the national interest of Israel. While studying this promise and considering God's overall design for his kingdom, I believe “inheriting the earth” has two meanings for us today as Christians. First, we will literally inherit the earth. The end-game of God's plan – read the last two chapters of Revelation – is a new heaven and a new earth. Just as Jesus was raised with a glorified body, so to, this world will be resurrected – so to speak – in a glorified state. All the things that are broken in this world – climate catastrophes, pollution, earthquakes, weeds, - will all be done away with and the earth will be perfect. Those who are in God's kingdom – those who are meek – will inherit this new earth. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it is the meek who will receive the fullness of God's promises in this life. This is a promise for today for you and for me. I love the way that Eugene Peterson translates this Beatitude in *The Message*: “You're blessed when you are content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.” The fullness of life...the things that we really yearn for deep in our soul like love, meaning in life, contentment, and peace...those things are promised to the meek.

III. Confident Faith – the Foundation of Meekness

Peterson defines meekness as “being content with who you are – no more and no less. Warren Wiersbe defines it as “power under control.” Numbers 12:3 says, “Now Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.” The passage illustrates meekness perfectly. Aaron and Miriam, the brother and sister of Moses challenged his authority. “Why's

Moses such a big-shot,” they said, “God speaks to us, too.” Moses didn’t get angry. He didn’t defend himself.

God did. He took them to the tent of meeting – in this story, more like the “woodshed” – and there, God gave Aaron and Miriam what for.

“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. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. 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?”

Numbers 12:6-8

The first two Beatitudes, dealing with humility and grief for our sins, have to do with our relationship with God. This third Beatitude that celebrates meekness has to do with how we deal with challenges from other people or circumstances. How do we acquire this quality of meekness? Where do we get the strength to not react in anger and aggressiveness when we are challenged?

Psalm 37, the original source of Jesus’ words in this Beatitude, provides the biblical foundation for what we need in order to cultivate meekness in our lives. (This is where “meekness” gets really exciting.) Before we look at the passage, however, I want you to imagine or consider a challenging situation in your life. Some of you don’t have to imagine! You’re living in the midst of it right now. But think of a situation where someone or some circumstance is really threatening you and your well-being. If you’re not in that situation now, most likely, you’ve experienced it before in your life. I want you to put yourself back into that situation...what you were thinking and what you were feeling. Now, hear the word of the Lord!

Fret not yourself because of evildoers;
 be not envious of wrongdoers!
 For they will soon fade like the grass

and wither like the green herb.
Trust in the Lord, and do good;
dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.
Delight yourself in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
He will bring forth your righteousness as the light,
and your justice as the noonday.
Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices!
Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!
Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.
For the evildoers shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.
In just a little while, the wicked will be no more;
though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.
But the meek shall inherit the land
and delight themselves in abundant peace.

Psalm 37:1-11

You see, meekness is not weakness. In fact, it is the opposite. It is the ultimate place of power.

It looks like this:



The lioness could easily crush the neck of her cub in a split second. She has that kind of power. Meekness is demonstrated in gentleness. Meekness comes from humility. Meekness is restraint under pressure. Classroom teachers know this. The best ones are those that are meek. They are power under control. Every good teacher knows that if you lose your composure with you class, you will lose ability to teach. They don't get angry. They don't yell. The most powerful teachers control their students with as little as a look. That's meekness.

Consider your situation again. There is no need to aggressively assert your power. There is no need to freak out or to scheme and manipulate. There is no power struggle. You are in the ultimate position of power when you have faith and confidence in God. God is on your side and God will win.

There is no greater example of meekness than Jesus. In fact, when you understand what meekness is, the action – or, I should say, the inaction – of Jesus when threatened by his enemies is breathtaking. Most of us are familiar with the story of Jesus' betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane leading up to his trial and crucifixion. Judas came with a great crowd armed with spears and clubs to arrest Jesus. Peter took up a sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Jesus healed the man and told Peter to put down his weapon. He knew exactly what was going to happen. He was in the position of ultimate power. Matthew's Gospel tells us that he could have called 72,000 angels to come and rescue him. But he was meek. He knew who would win.

Today, many of you are struggling with challenging people or circumstances. You may be a student who is coming to turning point in your life and you don't know what the future holds. You don't need to panic. You don't need to freak out. God is in control. "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act." (Psalm 37:5)

You may have problems with people at your work. Maybe you've got real enemies who are actively seeking to undermine or even destroy you. You don't need to fear. "Refrain from anger and forsake wrath," the Scriptures say. Stop being anxious, it leads only to evil. (vs. 8) God will win the day.

Maybe you're a parent struggling with a difficult child. Stop freaking out. When you freak out, it makes them insecure and matters even worse. Instead, be confident that God is in control. Be meek. That is the most powerful way to parent.

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

These are the words of Jesus, and he is speaking to each and every one of us this morning. Are you hearing him?

Stop freaking out.

Stop worrying.

Stop manipulating.

Earlier in the service, we read Psalm 46. Now that you understand what meekness is and the empowering promise that it holds, hear the words again...

God is your refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore, do not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling...

Come, behold the works of the Lord,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.

“Be still, and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth!”

The Lord of hosts is with you;

the God of Jacob is your fortress.

Amen.

Prayer

Song of Response: *Everlasting God*