

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	The Beatitudes		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	4		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Matthew 5:5		
Date:	June 28, 2020 (a.m.)		

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

If the first two beatitudes cut sharply across human perceptions, the third clashes with human expectation. One reason is that the word “meek” is often identified with being weak, indolent, retiring or lacking self-assurance.¹ If people are going to succeed in this world, we are told, they must be anything *but* meek. But *this* understanding of meekness is far from the Biblical one. As stated earlier, the individual beatitudes are not to be isolated from each other. They form a unit, or better yet, a *portrait*. In the words of the late James Boice: “This third beatitude must have been received in shocked silence by Christ’s listeners. But they could not have been much different from the people we know today. To most men and women, the association of an earthly inheritance with meekness seems incredible. The world associates happiness with worldly possessions, and it believes that the way to gain them is through ability, strength, hard work, self-assurance, and at times, even through self-assertion and conquest. The religious leaders of Christ’s day sought happiness through a materialistic and militaristic kingdom. Christ’s statement would have been a shock to them. We seek it through homes and their contents, success and the praise of men for it, power and the stature it confers. So it is a shock to us also. Against all these outlooks on life and these ambitions Jesus teaches that meekness must be a characteristic of those who are to share his kingdom.”²

- I. ***MEEKNESS DEFINED.*** Our English word does not do justice to what Jesus said. The Greek word is *praiis*. It describes that which is *under control*. Aristotle defined the man who is *praiis* as “neither too hasty – nor too slow-tempered. He does not become angry with those he ought not to, nor fail to become angry with whom he ought.”³ Stott explains, “The Greek adjective *praiis* means *gentle, humble, considerate, courteous*, and therefore exercising the self-control without which these qualities would be impossible. Although we rightly recoil from the image of our Lord as *gentle Jesus, meek and mild* because it conjures up a picture of him as weak and effeminate, yet he described himself as *gentle (praiis) and lowly in heart*, and Paul referred to his *meekness and gentleness*. So, linguistically speaking, the NEB is quite correct to refer in this beatitude to *those of a gentle spirit*.⁴ More important to our understanding, however, is that the word *praiis* is used in the LXX to trans. into English with words like *humble, lowly, and meek*. “In Hebrew thought the man who is *meek, anaw*, is the man who obediently accepts God’s guidance, who humbly accepts whatever God sends, and who is therefore dear to God, and whose life is strengthened and beautified by the gifts which God can give only to such a man⁵(cf. Ps. 9:12, 10:17, 34:2, 69:32, 76:9, 147:6, 149:4). Meekness therefore is the opposite of *self-will* toward God, and of *ill-will* toward men.⁶ In this last regard it involves *long-suffering*. In Gal. 5:22 it is mentioned as part of the fruit of the Spirit. In Eph. 4:1, 2, Paul exhorts believers to walk worthy of their calling “with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering” (cf. Col. 3:12). In 1 Pet. 3:15, 16, we are to be ready to give an answer (apologetics) for our faith “with gentleness and respect” (cf. also James 1:19-21).

II. **MEEKNESS ILLUSTRATED.** Meekness is best understood when observed. But *appearances* can be and are misleading. Humility is often used as a cloak to hide behind. Charles Dickens captured this very well by the character Uriah Heep in his book *David Copperfield*. Humbleness, as Uriah Heep practices it, is a means of getting ahead in the world. It is a pattern of deferential and self-demeaning behavior *calculated* to play upon other people's sense of self-importance, thereby procuring for its practitioner advancement. In other words, it is "self-abasement deceitfully aimed at self-exaltation."⁷

A. **Biblical Examples. Abraham.** Note his dealing with Lot (Gen. 13). Instead of asserting his rights, he gives Lot the first choice of land without a murmur and without complaint – that is, meekness. **Moses.** He is described in Num. 12:3 as the most meek man on the face of the earth, yet note his behavior before Pharaoh – is he "spineless and easily imposed on?" Hardly! **CHRIST.** Above all, Jesus is the most noted example of meekness. In Matt. 11:29 he declares, "I am gentle and humble." In 2 Cor. 10:1, Paul speaks of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." How is Christ meek? "The meek man does not demand anything for himself. He does not take all his rights as claims. He does not make demands for his position, his privileges, his possessions, his status in life. No, he is like the man depicted by Paul in Phil. 2, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Christ did not assert that right to equality with God; He deliberately did not."⁸ Yet, like Moses, Christ, in concern for His Father's glory, drove the desecrators out of the temple (Mt. 21:12, 13).⁹

III. **MEEKNESS' INHERITANCE.** The meek are said to "inherit the earth." This statement is drawn from Ps. 37:9-11. Note the importance of the word "inherit." It is **not** something earned or achieved. The meek are promised the inheritance of *this* earth. The citizen of the Kingdom has a *right* to this possession and will *certainly* receive it. "The spirit of meekness," wrote A. W. Pink, "is what enables its possessor to get so much enjoyment out of his earthly portion, be it small or large. Delivered from a greedy and grasping disposition he is satisfied with such things as he has: *A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked* (Ps. 37:16)."¹⁰ I understand this promise in light of texts like Isa. 66:22 and Rev. 21:1 with reference to the "new heaven and the new earth." John Brown, one of the great Scottish expositors, noted, "We are to recollect that our Lord was speaking to Jews, and that he uses phraseology familiar to them, and accommodates himself to their mode of thinking. His words, literally rendered, are, *they shall inherit the land, i.e., Canaan – the land of promise.* He speaks of the blessings of the new economy, in the language of Old Testament prophecy. Israel, according to the flesh – the external people of God, under the former economy, were a figure of Israel according to the spirit – the spiritual people of God under the new economy; and Canaan, the worldly inheritance of the former, is the type of that aggregate of heavenly and spiritual blessings which form the inheritance of the latter. In reference to the state of things under the Messiah, it is said, *Thy people also shall be all righteous;* none but the truly righteous are members of the true spiritual church; subjects of Messiah the prince: *they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.* To *inherit the land* is to enjoy the peculiar blessings of the people of God under the new economy; it is to be *heirs of the world, heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ Jesus.* It is to be *blessed with all heavenly and spiritual blessings in Christ;* to enjoy that true peace and rest – of which the rest of Israel in Canaan was a figure – which a man enters into on believing the truth, and which will be perfected in heaven. Such, I apprehend, is the true meaning of the phrase, *they shall inherit the land;* so that our Lord in this beatitude, materially says, *You call the proud and the prosperous happy, and you suppose they are likely to inherit Canaan under the Messiah. I tell you, the truly happy are the meek sufferers; they, and they alone, shall be possessors of that spiritual inheritance, of which Canaan was merely a figure.*"¹¹

CONCLUSION: What is it that colors the attitude of the citizens of the Kingdom? Those who are “poor in spirit” *will* mourn, and they will be, as a result, meek. As such, the things they *value* have reference to God first and foremost. What does this produce? Humility – and what is humility but a proper perspective – one in which we see ourselves as we really are before God. This “eternal” perspective, as Augustine wrote long ago, “is the very rest and life of the saints. . . . Therefore let those who are not meek squabble and quarrel over earthly and temporal things; but *Blessed are the meek, for they will possess the land by inheritance, and they cannot be driven from it.*”¹² Once again, listen to Jeremiah Burroughs: “Meekness is easy to be entreated, and has a gentle spirit. Its nature consists especially in a gracious moderation of the passion of anger. Sometimes there is a natural meekness from a person’s natural constitution, while others have a more choleric temperament. These are not so prone to anger naturally as other men are. But this blessed meekness goes beyond natural meekness. This natural meekness may not be as angry as others in some outward thing, but it quenches zeal for God. Spiritual meekness is a grace of the Holy Spirit that includes zeal as well as patience. Grace will teach men and women to be meek and gentle when they are personally crossed, but grace will never teach them not to be angry when God is dishonoured. In Scripture, those marked as the most eminent for meekness in their own cause, when it came to God’s cause, were the most eminent in zeal! Moses was the meekest in all the earth, but when he came down from the mountain and saw the people worshipping the golden calf, he was all on fire! Jesus, our pattern of meekness, when he saw the moneychangers in the temple, took a cord, and whipped them out of the temple. And so Paul, who was very meek, and taught Timothy so (2 Tim. 2:25), set his eyes upon Elyman, who sought to draw away Sergius Paulus from the faith, and said, *You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?* (Acts 13:10). What! Does any man speak more terribly than he did to Elyman? This meekness is mixed with zeal. When a man or woman can be weak in their own cause, and can moderate their anger, but yet, when it comes to the cause of God, they can be all on fire, this is the right meekness that is pronounced blessed!”¹³

ENDNOTES

¹ One of the definitions listed in *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, ed. D. B. Gurainik (World, 1972), is “too submissive; easily imposed on; spineless; spiritless,” p. 883.

² J. M. Boice, *The Sermon On The Mount* (Baker, 2002), p. 31.

³ As cited in W. Barclay, *The Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer for Everyman* (Harper & Row, 1963), p. 41.

⁴ J. Stott, *The Message of The Sermon on The Mount* (IVP, 1978), p. 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶ Church History provides us with many examples of those who fit this description. One that comes to mind is Joseph Alleine, a 17th century English Puritan, whose ministry (both preaching and writing) had tremendous influence (his book, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, published after his death in 1672, was one of the most widely-read books of the time). George Whitefield and Charles Spurgeon held him in high esteem. He died at age 35. The last few years of his life were filled with much suffering, yet he continued to bless God for all things and urged his flock to bear no ill-will towards their persecutors, but to pray for them and continue to trust God and acknowledge His mercy. “Go on and fear not in the way of your duty, verily there is a reward for the righteous. God hath given us a great reward already, but this is but the least; we look for a kingdom.” Charles Stanford, *Joseph Alleine: His Companions and Times* (rpt. R. E. Publications, n.d.), p. 342.

⁷ Robert C. Roberts, *Spirituality and Human Emotion* (Eerdmans, 1982), p. 59.

⁸ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Eerdmans, 1959), p. 69.

⁹ Martin Luther wisely states that we must distinguish between a person’s **character** and a person’s **function** or **office**. “From the outset here you must realize that Christ is not speaking at all about the government and its work, whose property it is not to be meek . . . for the punishment of those who do wrong (1 Peter 2:14).” *The Place of Trust: Martin Luther on the Sermon on the Mount*, ed. M. E. Marty (Harper & Row, 1983), pp. 57, 58. The Reformer is simply stating the obvious. A police officer, for example, is sworn to uphold the civil law and to use any necessary means to prevent lawlessness. As such he is charged with upholding and maintaining the rights of the society he serves. He must *assert* his rights as a public servant.

¹⁰ A. W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Baker, 1953), p. 24.

¹¹ John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord I* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1967), p. 124.

¹² *The Preaching of Augustine*, ed. J. Pelikan (Fortress, 1973), p. 4.

¹³ Burroughs, *The Saints’ Happiness* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1982), p. 70.