

Beatitudes: Blessed When We Roll It All Onto God - week 4

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - May 24, 2020
(Based on Rev. Darrell Johnson's book *Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*)

We're continuing our series on the Beatitudes based on the book by Rev. Darrell Johnson, *The Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*.

Matthew 5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth?" You lucky bums!

Now let me ask the question that probably comes to mind when we hear this. "The meek? Are you sure, Jesus? Have you seen who runs the world? They're anything, but meek."

Because of our likely confusion about what Jesus is blessing, we need to get two things straight right from the beginning. First, the quality Jesus blesses in the third Beatitudes has nothing to do with all the negative images triggered by the English word "meek." Although it is a challenge to pin down the exact meaning of the original word Jesus uses, it clearly does not mean no brain, no brawn, no backbone; it does not mean no convictions, no courage, no spirit, no drive, no guts.

How do we know this? For one simple reason: Only two people in the Bible are explicitly described by the word Jesus uses in His Beatitude - Moses and Jesus. Hardly wimps!

In the Old Testament book of Numbers, we read about Moses, who led the great exodus of the Jews from Egypt: **“Now the man Moses was very humble [meek], more than any man who was on the face of the earth”** (Numbers 12:3). And in the Gospel according to Matthew, where Jesus calls us to come and take up His yoke, Jesus says of Himself, **“for I am gentle [meek] and humble in heart”** (Matthew 11:29). If of all the players in the great drama of salvation, Moses and Jesus alone are called by this term, then it cannot mean spineless. We can be sure right from the beginning that the third Beatitude is NOT ***“Blessed are the doormats, for they shall inherit the earth; blessed are the wimps, for they shall inherit the earth.”***

So, if Moses, Jesus, [and Paul] are the ones in the Bible of whom the word “meek” can be used, we can be sure the word does not mean all the negative things conjured up by the English word “meek.”

Then what does it mean? What is this quality Jesus blesses and embodies? What does it mean to be meek like Moses and Paul and Jesus? And why is this a sign that Jesus and His gospel are getting hold of us? Why is meekness a sign that the kingdom of God is breaking into our lives? We’ll get there in a minute.

The second thing to get straight right from the beginning is that the promise Jesus makes (**“they shall inherit the earth”**) is rock-solid. We can put our weight on this promise.

Why? For one simple reason: the meek [singular], the meek One Himself, will inherit the earth! Jesus Christ, the meek One, will inherit the earth. After all, He made the earth! He owns the earth - always has, and always will. Psalm 24:1 tells us that **“the earth is the LORD’s and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.”** The earth belongs to the Lord Jesus. I know the affirmation can be offensive in our pluralistic culture. But to be faithful to the Biblical witness to Jesus, we can say nothing less. The earth is His, which is why we either do it Jesus’ way or it does not work. The Lord Jesus Christ will inherit His earth, so this outrageous promise that the meek [plural] will inherit the earth is rock solid. Those who belong to Him will inherit the earth with Him. The only questions are when, and in what sense?

So, let us dig deeper into Jesus’ seemingly upside down Beatitude. As I have been emphasizing, the qualities Jesus blesses, or congratulates, in His Beatitudes are not natural human qualities. No one is naturally meek. Rather, we become meek by the power of Jesus’ gospel. But let me say, you’re not disqualified from God’s love or being one of Jesus’ followers for having human emotions. This isn’t a list to compare yourself to or others to in order to decide who is farther, further or forever walking with Jesus. This isn’t a check list for proper spirituality.

Simply, we all have emotions, God gave them to us. God has emotions and we’re made in God’s image. Our emotions can call our attention to some really important

things in our lives and so I think God really uses them. Again, this is not doormat theology, far from it. Jesus displayed human emotions and never received a chastisement from His Father for it. Why would we get one?

So then why is being meek a sign that Jesus and His gospel are getting a hold of us? The most immediate answer lies in the fact that Jesus Himself is meek. When we encounter Jesus, when we embrace His embrace and receive His life, we start to become like Him. **“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle [meek]”** (Matthew 11:29). This is why the Apostle Paul includes meekness in his list of the fruit of the Spirit. When Jesus infuses us with His life, with His Spirit, we begin to take on His character traits.

You can see then that there is a sense in which, in His Beatitudes, Jesus is giving us a portrait of Himself. He is poor in spirit, living in utter dependence on His Father. He hungers and thirsts for justice. He is merciful and pure in heart. And He is meek.

And, if we live with Him, we slowly become like Him. His gospel (“**the kingdom of God has come near**”) gets hold of us and something happens. We become meek. Why?

In order to answer that question we need to investigate the meaning of the term that Jesus uses, *praeis*. Some first-century folks used the word to describe domesticated

animals. Such animals had learned to accept the control of their masters. By extension, the word refers to people who know how to behave, who graciously cooperate with proper authority. Following this line, one scholar would render Jesus' words as **"blessed are God's gentlemen, blessed are God's gentlewomen."**

The philosopher Aristotle taught that meekness was to be highly desired. He described it as somewhere between anger and indifference, as the middle ground between excessive anger on the one hand and the inability to show anger at all on the other. Taking his cue from Aristotle, William Barclay renders Jesus' words, "Blessed is the man who is always angry at the right time, and never angry at the wrong time." I like that. Oh to be so meek! This is a person full of strength, powerful, and fully under control. The Holy Spirit has a hold on their life.

Rev. Darrell Johnson writes that Psalm 37 is helpful in understanding this word. Psalm 37 is best known for the great promise, **"Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart"** (37:4). In Psalm 37:11 we read, **"But the humble [or meek, or gentle] will inherit the land."**

David here in Psalm 37 is wrestling with the age-old problem of the apparent success of those who ignore and disobey God. He is wrestling with the fact that in this world it is the pushy, grabby, power-weilding, self-asserting, controlling types who seem to win.

In Psalm 37, David frankly acknowledges that the dishonest do often have more than the honest, and that those who step on others do regularly get to the top. The rich often do buy their way out of the consequences of their sin. Yet in the face of all this, David makes the daring claim, which Jesus repeats with His own authority, that **“the meek will inherit the land.”** Contrary to all appearances, the gentle will win.

In the verses before and after that claim in verse 11, David develops the nature of this meekness. He looks at it from many angles, describing it in terms of what the meek do and do not do. The meek trust in the LORD (vs 3), do good in the face of evil (vs 3), cultivate faithfulness (or trust) (vs 3), delight themselves in the LORD (vs 4), rest in the LORD (vs 7), and wait patiently for Him (vs 7). Clearly meekness is not a passive quality. It takes great strength.

Furthermore, the meek do not fret because of evildoers (vs 1), do not envy (vs 1), cease from anger and forsake wrath (vs 8), and depart from evil (vs 27). Clearly, meekness is also not a spineless quality, for it takes great strength to cease from anger!

Others may get away with doing evil and with ignoring justice. But the gentle bank on doing the will of God... come what may. The gentle trust not themselves, nor their ability to orchestrate, but God. As one pastor puts it, **“They do the Godly thing and let the chips fly.”**

The meek delight themselves in the LORD (vs 4). That is, they have a special focus in life. Instead of focusing on the fact that they are being taken advantage of, or do not have as much as the next person, they find their joy in the Living God. The word David uses for “delight” relates to the word “Eden.” The meek find their great pleasure in their Heavenly Father, their Eden, Yahweh Himself. The gentle deliberately redirect their emotions to find peace and wholeness in their Father who loves them. They find their identity and security in the very center of the universe. You lucky bums!

The meek commit their way to the LORD (vs 5). The word translated “commit” literally means “roll.” They roll their way into the LORD. I like the image the verb suggests. Stuart Briscoe says:

The meek roll their lives, their cares, their reputations onto the Lord and let the Lord worry about it all. The meek are those who, when offended, commit their wounded egos and the one offending their ego, to the Perfect Judge. The meek can say to herself, *“What she did to me was wrong. But she is answerable to God, so I’ll let God deal with her. But I am answerable to God, too. So I’m going to concentrate on doing right by her.”*

The right thing may be to forgive, confront, or both, but either way, **the gentle “roll it all” onto their Lord.**

The meek have somehow come to great trust in the sovereignty of God, and in that trust they can rest. Oh to know what the meek know!

How many of us waste enormous amounts of energy and time, stewing over people who offend us or take advantage of us or ignore us? The meek acknowledge their emotional response to all that; they own their emotions. They manage their energy, channeling it in responsive directions.

The meek do good in the face of evil (vs 3). The meek “**depart from evil**” (vs 27). This is David’s key insight, which Jesus more fully unfolds in the rest of His Sermon on the Mount. The meek do not return evil for evil, for they know that that is utter weakness. They do not respond to violence and injustice with more twisting of justice.

I trust you can see from this brief survey of Psalm 37 that the meek Jesus blesses are the “invincible meek.” You can find more about Psalm 37 in Darrell Johnson’s book on the Beatitudes.

What can finally undo the meek? The meek are strong because they rest in the arms of God. The meek are wise because they look at life through the eyes of God. The meek can stand firmly because they are anchored to our Eternal Father. Oh, to be what Jesus blesses!

Do we not see all that Psalm 37 says about the meek lived out in Jesus, especially during His trial (Matthew 26-27; John 18-19)? The local police spit on Him, they blindfolded Him and hit Him in the face. The foreign military personnel repeated the insults and violence - they thrust a crown of thorns onto His skull, put a royal purple robe on Him, and mocked Him. Then they too spit on him and hit Him again and again.

But Jesus refused to respond in kind. He did not echo their spirit and actions. As the apostle Peter (who witnessed these scenes!) later said, **“while being reviled He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats”** (1 Peter 2:23). Instead, says Peter, Jesus **“kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”**

Roman soldiers knew power when they saw it. One of the soldiers stationed at the cross was so overcome with awe at the way Jesus handled all the evil, saying, **“Truly this man was the Son of God”** (Mark 15:39).

Oh, to have the strength to be meek! Oh, to have the maturity of Jesus to be so gentle! Meekness is then a sign of the New Order of God’s Kingdom come upon us.

Back to the question, why is this quality a sign of being grabbed hold of by Jesus and His gospel? For one single reason: When the gospel breaks through, we realize the great open secret, the mystery of history: **“The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God has come near.”**

In Psalm 37:13, David says that God laughs at the schemes of the arrogant and dishonest. **“God sees their day coming,”** says David. David is not referring to some calamities God will bring on them, but to the natural consequences of old-order decisions and practices. Those who get to the top by stepping on others last only until the next group of steppers step on them. Those who seize and hold power unjustly eventually fall under the weight of their own injustice. Empires built in greed are eventually eaten up by greed. Those grabbed by Jesus’ Gospel have seen the light and can therefore resist the inherently self-destructive ways of the old order.

To put it more simply, they have seen the preview, and they know how the movie ends. They know how it all comes out. They know the old order will be swallowed up by Jesus’ new order. They believe the Hallelujah chorus - **“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever”** (Revelation 11:15). Why then act according to the old order? To do so is foolish and futile.

Blessed, right-on, in sync are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Inherit the earth? When? In the End, when the earth is fully redeemed.

But they also inherit the earth before the End - now. Who are the people who really enjoy the earth? Those who

grab and push and demand? No! They are too busy grabbing and pushing and demanding to enjoy what they get by grabbing and pushing and demanding. Those who live delighting in God and delighting in God's great plans are free to smell the roses along the way.

The meek inherit the earth ahead of the End in another sense as well. I've talked about adoption in the ancient world in previous sermons. Once a person was adopted their past debts were canceled, because they joined a new family and all that belonged to that family belong to the adopted. The moment you and I are adopted by the Father of Jesus, all our Heavenly Father's wealth becomes ours. **"All things belong to you, and you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God"** (1 Corinthians 3:22). To belong to Jesus is to be granted the privilege of living in the palace with Him, playing with His toys and enjoying His backyard. The earth is the Lord's, and He gives it to His own.

Does meek mean weak - no brain, no brawn, no backbone? No spirit, no energy, no drive? No way! It is through the meek that the world gets turned right-side up!