

Meek: A Powerful Word Matthew 5:5

This morning we come to the third beatitude given by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount. **“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”**

As a point of sarcastic humor, Don Marquis said “pity the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” I suppose he means that in its current state, the earth as something worthy of inheriting isn’t worth much. It would be like all the poorest of the land who were left in Jerusalem after it had been ransacked and burned by Nebuchadnezzar’s army. In either case, they are left with nothing worth possessing.

Adolf Hitler said: “You see, it’s been our misfortune to have the wrong religion. Why didn’t we have the religion of the Japanese, who regard sacrifice for the Fatherland as the highest good? The Mohammedan religion too would have been more compatible to us than Christianity. Why did it have to be Christianity with its meekness and flabbiness?”

But that seems to be the rub with all the beatitudes when it comes to our culture. What Jesus promotes, culture thinks should be just the opposite. Instead of being poor in spirit, be rich. Instead of being mournful, be happy. Instead of being meek, be aggressive and assertive.

I think our culture has an improper understanding of what meekness really means. So let’s dig in and see what Jesus meant by being meek and how it is he inherits the earth. Let’s begin with a definition and for that let’s consider first the power of meekness.

I. THE POWER OF MEEKNESS

A. A Definition of Meekness

If we are going to understand what meekness is, we need to learn what meekness is not because there is a general misunderstanding in our culture of what being meek means. Meekness carries some negative connotations in our culture. It views meekness as spineless, lacking courage, having no convictions, no drive, easily intimidated and submissive. Culture

depicts a meek person like milk toast – limp and soggy. He’s the kind of person who has no guts, who lets other people push him around and walk all over him. He’s the kind of person who continually doubts himself and lacks assertiveness. They’re the last to get picked on any team, even if they try out.

Secular culture thinks that meek people get nowhere because everyone ignores them or rides all over them and tramples on them. Secular culture says it is the tough and domineering who succeed. The meek are the footstools of the assertive.

Our culture encourages people to be aggressive and assertive. It views meekness as weakness. It wants people who are filled with pride and have the drive to knock people over to get to the top. They are the bowling ball and everyone else are the pins.

But is the culture’s view of meekness what Jesus had in mind?

Meekness has been defined as power under control. The Greeks used the word to describe a horse that had been broken. Their idea wasn’t to break the horse of its power and speed, but to break the horse of its self-will so that it could be useful for service.

When I worked for hospice, one of the nurses’ boarded horses. At one time she boarded a young racehorse that could no longer race because of an injury. My friend said when she took the horse out for a run in the field, she could feel his power as if he wanted to bolt out of the gate and speed down the path, but she could also feel him tense up his muscles and restrain his explosiveness.

That’s what Jesus has in mind in using the term meekness. Meekness as Jesus used it isn’t this milk toast mindset that let’s others push you around. It is power under control.

Some scholars state that meekness is a difficult term to define in the English language. While we can describe a meek person as being gentle, patient, not given to anger or resentment, there are some slight differences. According to Jerry Bridges in his book *The Practice of Godliness*, he describes gentleness as an active trait, something you do in how you treat

others. On the other hand, he describes meekness as a passive trait, demonstrated in our attitude toward those who mistreat us.

Meekness and humility are often considered to be the same, but it's really a byproduct of humility. It's also been defined as humility first toward God and then toward others. Regarding the latter it's having the right or the power to do something, but refraining for the benefit of someone else.

In the beatitudes, notice that meekness comes between mourning over sin and hungering and thirsting after righteousness, suggesting that the person who is meek has a right assessment of himself. He sees himself as God sees him, a sinner by nature, but one, who in seeing that sin, admits and confesses it, thus humbling himself before God.

When the person who mourns over sin because he sees himself as God does, he then has a true estimate of himself and submits to God's will and leading. That person will seek after righteousness. Meekness towards God results in a submissive spirit to Him knowing that what happens to us is for our good and His glory. The person who is meek toward God will understand the truth of **Romans 8:28** that all things work for the good of those who love God and see His sovereign hand in it all. Meekness is submitting our will to God's will, where He has complete control.

But the meek person also expresses meekness by bearing up patiently with the person who would otherwise want to injure us in some way. Even in those hurtful actions he sees God's sovereign hand at work and chooses to refrain from retaliation. That brings us to the demonstration of meekness.

B. The Demonstration of Meekness

Our natural inclination is to want to retaliate in some way towards the person who wants to harm us either physically or who try to falsely tarnish our reputation. Instead of being vengeful, the meek person does not retaliate. Instead, he allows God to bring vengeance.

Romans 12:17-21

That is the character of a meek person. He chooses attitudes and actions that are opposite of how someone has treated them.

Instead of responding evil for evil, he responds with kindness.

Instead of holding a grudge or feelings of resentment, he chooses to forgive.

Instead of withholding basic needs, he provides the things that would sustain those who oppose him.

A.W. Tozer writes that the meek person **"is happy to let God defend him. The old struggle to defend himself is over. He has found the peace that meekness brings."**

According to Puritan pastor Thomas Watson, meekness toward other people consists of three things: the bearing of injuries, the forgiving of injuries, and the returning of good for evil. That's why my response can never be natural and must be supernatural. My natural response wants to treat others as I have been treated. But the supernatural response is one that allows the Holy Spirit to respond differently because it is His fruit in us that He is developing.

Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience (long-suffering), gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control; against such there is no law."

True meekness is not in our nature, nor can we produce it in our own power. Only the Holy Spirit can produce true meekness in the believer.

Matthew Henry describes the person who has the character of meekness as radiating the fragrance of Christ, which tells me that to exhibit any other attitude carries the stench of the world.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes meekness by saying that it **"denotes a humble and gentle attitude towards others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves."** He says that it's easy to be honest about ourselves before God and admit that we are sinners. But when others say things about us, it's difficult for us not to respond with resentment.

Let me sum up the demonstration of meekness from

Vine's Dictionary where it defines meekness as "an inwrought grace of the soul. It's exercise of it is first chiefly toward God. It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. It is closely linked with humility. It is only the humble heart that is meek and does not fight against God."

Meekness is first, then, a proper attitude toward God. Then a proper attitude toward others. Vine's continues: "it is meek toward others, even evil men who inflict insults and injuries against us, which are permitted by God to chasten and purge Christians. Meekness is manifested by the Lord and commended to the believer is the fruit of power – power under control. It is opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest and not occupied with self at all."

That is the power of meekness defined and demonstrated. But scripture doesn't leave us in the dark about what it looks like in action. Let's look at the portraits of meekness through four examples found in the Bible.

II. THE PORTRAITS OF MEEKNESS

The first portrait we will look at is Abraham.

A. The Portrait of Abraham – Genesis 13:1-12

In **chapter 12** we read that God called Abram to leave his family and culture and move to a place he would be shown. God promised to bless him and make him a great nation through which all the nations of the world would be blessed. This was the beginning of his faith journey with God. It was at Haran that Abram first learned to trust God. He had some ups and downs in that journey, but it was in that journey that we see his meekness growing.

By the time we get to **chapter 13**, Abram has grown quite wealthy. When he left Haran, he took his nephew Lot with him. Lot was the son of his brother Haran. Maybe he felt sorry for his nephew. Maybe he had made a vow to his brother to watch over his nephew. Whatever the case, wherever Abram went, Lot went.

Because of a famine, Abram found himself in Egypt. When the famine was over, God told him to return to the land he had left. They travelled east and came to a place called Bethel where he built an altar and called on God. While in Egypt Abram grew wealthier with lots of flocks. So did Lot. Trouble brewed when the flocks of both men grew so large that the land couldn't sustain all they owned. Arguments broke out between their herdsman.

To put an end to the arguments Abram had a discussion with Lot to agree on a solution so the men would stop arguing. Abram proposed a plan. If Lot went to the left, Abram would go to the right. If Lot went to the right, Abram would go to the left. He gave Lot the choice.

This is where we see his meekness. Lot was a tag along. Abram had every right to tell Lot where to go. After all, God had led him to this land which would be given as an inheritance to his offspring. It had been promised to Abram. But instead, Abram chose to restrain the power or right he had over Lot and give him the first choice. Power under control.

Fast forward a lot of years and we find ourselves back in Egypt. There's a young ruler in the land. It's the true rags to riches kind of story. In **Genesis 42-50** we have the portrait of Joseph.

B. The Portrait of Joseph – Genesis 42-50

Joseph shows us that the person who in meekness humbles himself before God, will be exalted. One minute he was the prisoner of Egypt and the next minute he was the prince of Egypt. Only Pharaoh was greater in the land than Joseph. He became the secretary of agriculture, responsible for storing grain for a coming famine. We learn that the famine not only affected Egypt but all the surrounding region. It's widespread and when people heard the news that Egypt had plenty of food to sell, they travelled from all over to buy grain. That included Joseph's father's family in Canaan.

Jacob sent 10 sons to buy food. Joseph realized who they were but withheld his identity and acted

harshly toward them. He said they couldn't return unless they brought their younger brother. It was all a part of Joseph wanting to see if there had been any change in them since they sold him into slavery.

If you know the story, after the second trip, he revealed his true identity to his brothers. Stunned probably doesn't fully capture what they must have felt in that moment. Fear and panic can only begin to describe their feelings as they stood before the second most powerful person in Egypt. After all they did to him, how would he treat them? They could only cower in fear at what they thought was coming, what they deserved. But there is a great little verse tucked in the story that gives us the portrait of Joseph's meekness.

Genesis 45:5 “do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.”

Fast forward about 20 years and dear old dad dies. The brothers think that Joseph has been waiting to drop the proverbial hammer on them and give them what they thought they still had coming. They went and pled with Joseph not to take revenge. Listen again words that demonstrate his meekness.

Genesis 50:19-21 “But Joseph said to them, ‘Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children. And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.”

Humanly speaking Joseph would have been justified to take revenge on his brothers, but a greater, supernatural work was in play as he well understood the sovereignty of God and displayed meekness – power under control.

From there, let's travel in time another 400 years to take a peek at another example of meekness. We're still in Egypt as we look at the portrait of Moses.

C. The Portrait of Moses – Numbers 12:3

Moses didn't start out with a meek nature. It took

40 years in God's time-out chair to shape him into the kind of person that God could use. Born a Hebrew, but through the providence of God, he was raised in the courts of Pharaoh. At some point he understood that his true people were the Hebrews and not the Egyptians. But his silver spoon seemed to get in the way of what he believed God wanted him to do by delivering his people from bondage. He attempted to free them in his own power. As the prince of Egypt, he thought his status carried certain clout. But he soon realized he couldn't take matters into his own hands and had to flee once his picture was posted all over for murdering an Egyptian.

But God got his attention and 40 years in the school of wilderness education made him pliable in God's hands as His ambassador. After their deliverance, his brother and sister had had enough of his leadership and thought they should also have a say in things. Moses didn't have to say a word because God intervened. Here's God's assessment of Moses. **Numbers 12:3 “Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth.”**

Throughout their years of wandering, we see the evidence of his meekness exhibited in how he handled the obstinate, unruly, disobedient people he led out of Egypt. At every turn, they battled Moses and yet God tells us that he was very meek.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says we spend our whole lives thinking about ourselves, thinking we're something, but he goes on to say that the meek man is finished looking at himself. That's what we find with Moses. **Does God see me as meek?**

It shouldn't be a surprise who our fourth example is.

D. The Portrait of Jesus – Matthew 11:28-30

Your translation may say “gentle” or “meek”. It's the same word in the Greek. Throughout His ministry, Jesus demonstrated meekness. But of all the examples we could cite, His meekness stands out around His trial and crucifixion.

We see power under control first in the garden when the troops came to arrest Him. They wanted to know if He was Jesus. When He said He was, they

all fell down just from the power of His voice (**John 18:6**). When Peter drew his sword and lopped off the ear of the High Priest's servant, instead of taking up arms, Jesus stooped down and healed the man's ear. He said that if He wanted to, He could call on His Father to send legions of angels to deliver Him (**Matthew 26:53**).

Standing before Pilate, He refused to answer some questions, Pilate remarked that he had the power to set Jesus free or to crucify Him. Jesus responded by telling Pilate that he had no power except what had been given him by heaven (**John 19:11**).

And then during His beatings and the crucifixion itself as He hung on the cross the crowds taunted Him to free Himself if He was really the Messiah. Instead of calling down thunder to consume the mockers, He displayed meekness. After all, He came to seek and save the lost, not destroy them. He had the right as God, to do whatever He wanted but instead submitted to His Father and the cross.

Paul gives us a portrait of Jesus' meekness in writing to the Philippians.

Philippians 2:5-8

Every day we have opportunities to demonstrate meekness.

When the guy cuts us off on the highway.

When the person cuts in front of us at the checkout counter.

When a co-worker belittles us to others.

When the neighbor spreads untrue rumors.

Will we retaliate, or will we display meekness?

How then, do we pursue meekness?

III. THE PURSUIT OF MEEKNESS –

Psalm 37:1-11

This psalm gives us a great description of those who are meek. Notice that **verse 11** is almost the same thing that Jesus says in **Matthew 5:5**.

When we consider the last part of the verse regarding the inheritance of the land, we see that those who wait or hope in the Lord (depending on your translation) are the ones who receive this

promise. It's a reference to the meek. The psalmist is saying that those who are meek are people who wait or hope in the Lord.

What does it mean to wait on the Lord?

First off, I think it means that the meek person trusts the Lord.

A. A Meek Person Trusts the Lord

Look again at **verse 5**. **“Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this.”**

That's what we learn from **Proverbs 3:5-6**. **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.”**

When we trust the Lord in all our ways, He gives us a peace we can't understand, especially when our trouble comes from others who would in some way want to harm us. That peace comes because the meek person realizes God meant what is happening for our good and His glory and He gives us peace. **Isaiah 26:3 “Thou will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because He trusts in Thee.”**

There's a little word tucked in that verse that is of utmost importance if we are going to trust God and experience His peace, something that helps us remain meek. It's the word **“stay”**.

The dictionary has three entries for that word. We generally think of it in terms of staying put, to stop or stand still. We tell our dog to stay. We tell our children to stay in their room. We understand it to mean to continue or remain in that place, to not move. It can also mean to live or dwell.

But there is a deeper meaning to the word than just halting our activity or movement. It also refers to a piece of material that acts as a support or brace. Way back in the day when I played basketball and sprained my ankle, I wore a brace with metal bands that run up the side of the brace to keep my ankle from turning. It kept my ankle in place.

We talk about a structure having a support beam to hold it in place. Think about **Isaiah 26:3** this way: God will keep in perfect peace the mind of him whose support or brace is God Himself. Why? Because He trusts in God.

The meek person has learned to commit all His ways to God. He has learned to cast all his care on God knowing that God cares for him no matter what the circumstances (**I Peter 5:7**). He trusts God's unchanging nature to be with him no matter what path he is asked to travel (**Psalms 23:4**). The meek understand that God is trustworthy leaving them with nothing to fear (**Isaiah 41:10**).

John Piper says this person has "a steady calm that comes from knowing that God is omnipotent, that He has their affairs under His control, and that He is gracious and will work things out for the best."

The meek person doesn't have to worry about what other people may be doing to him because he knows God has allowed it for a reason and whatever happens, he knows God will give him peace. The meek person trusts God.

A second way to pursue meekness is to have a teachable spirit.

B. A Meek Person Has a Teachable Spirit – James 1:19-21 James 3:13, 17

Instead of flying off the handle and becoming angry, James says we are to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. **How do we do that?** The answer is found in **verse 21**. We humbly (it's the word meekness in the Greek) accept God's Word which has been planted in you. Then in **James 3:13**, James says that meekness comes from wisdom. Where do we get wisdom? From God's Word.

If we want to know the kind of meekness that is approved by God, then we must have a teachable spirit that gets its instruction from God's Word. Let me again stress that meekness is not something we can produce ourselves. It is a divine character trait we develop through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul urges believers in **Ephesians 4:1-2** to be meek. He tells the Colossians (**Colossians 3:12-14**) that meekness is among the traits we are to put on as part of the new nature.

He tells Timothy to be meek (**I Timothy 6:11**) and adds in his second letter that Timothy should deal with others in meekness (**II Timothy 2:24-26**).

A meek person will be known for having a teachable spirit.

Another mark of a meek person is that he tempers his attitude.

C. A Meek Person Tempers His Attitude

By temper I don't mean he will become angry and fly off in a rage. The word temper can mean to forbear or to be longsuffering when ill-treated. Remember that the simple definition of meekness is power under control. A meek person will have the same attitude as Jesus. He won't let others get the best of him, but keep His attitude and actions in check by responding in kindness and longsuffering rather than in resentment or retaliation.

What does Jesus promise the person, then, who is meek? Let's conclude with the perks of meekness.

IV. THE PERKS OF MEEKNESS

First, there is his blessing.

A. There Is His Blessing

As we discovered a couple of weeks ago the word "blessed" can be translated happy, but means much more than an emotional feeling of contentment, which stems from positive circumstances or favorable outcomes. It refers to what one author describes as "the ultimate well-being and distinctive spiritual joy of those who share in the salvation of the kingdom of God." In other words, this blessing can't come from anything we can do, nor from positive circumstances alone. It's something divinely given for those who put their trust in the Lord. It's reserved for those who fear the Lord and do His will. The person who has estimated himself in light of who God is and has the right assessment

of himself will become meek through the work of the Holy Spirit. The meek person is blessed by God.

Second, there is his birthright Jesus promises.

B. There Is His Birthright

Jesus says the meek person who is blessed receives an inheritance. The meek inherit the earth.

When Israel went into their promised land, they had to fight for it. But Jesus says it's not by might but by meekness that the meek inherit the land. And while we may experience God's blessing now, the fulfillment of this promised inheritance is yet to come. He's not speaking about this present earth that groans, but rather a new heaven and new earth that will be ours (**Revelation 21:1**). This inheritance is not something we can earn but given to those who are called the sons of God through receiving Christ as Savior. An inheritance is something that is guaranteed and can never be taken away. It is ours by birthright when we become the children of God.

This future promise gives us blessing, peace, and hope today.

Would you be described as a person who is meek?

That person has a true estimation of self, expressed in attitude and conduct first in respect to God and then toward others.

Jesus says you are blessed if you are meek and if you are meek, you will inherit the earth.