

## **Introduction**

I saw an intriguing video clip this week. A couple fishermen had landed a large northern pike and with it a large bass that it had swallowed half-way down. I also came across this picture of one fish about to be eaten by another and that one by another and so on. It's on the front of your bulletin and on the projector screen. Here is the path of success and dominance in this world as seen by the world. It's Darwin's Law of the survival of the fittest or the biggest and the strongest. It all boils down to self-assertion. The way to get ahead and come out on top is to seize control, to exert yourself. It works this way in the business world. The world of business is dog eat dog. Excel or die. And the way you excel is by overtaking others. You overtake others by using your powers and ability to aggressively go after success and grab it for yourself. The ones the world considers most likely to succeed and get ahead, essentially to rule the world, are not just the strongest and the biggest, the smartest and the most talented, but those who exert their strength and size and ability most aggressively.

But as we have seen before, Jesus' sermon on the mount stands in striking contrast. In fact, one of the things Jesus is doing in this sermon is turning the mistaken ideas that drive this sinful world on their heads. He started with the declaration that it is the poor in spirit to whom belongs the kingdom of heaven. Then he said it is the mourners who will be comforted. These statements fly in the face of what the natural man thinks. And he continues with Matthew 5:5.

[Read Text and Pray]

Paul exhorted the Ephesians in a way that highlights the distinction between the follower of Jesus Christ and those that live according to the course of this world. Listen to his emphasis in Ephesians 4:17-24:

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their

understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

The contrast Paul draws between the old self and the new self is a contrast Jesus is depicting in the beatitudes. Jesus asserts that the citizen of the kingdom of heaven is altogether different from the world. The difference is so striking that this series of characteristics represented in the beatitudes appear laughable to the natural mind. And yet they are extremely important to grasp because these characteristics define the narrow way that leads to life.

Jesus is striking at the very center of what is wrong and what is lacking in the sinner's heart. This morning we consider the declaration of blessing upon those who exhibit meekness.

## **I. Who are the Meek?**

A. In order to grasp the concept of meekness, we start with the definition. The Greek word here signifies the quality of gentleness and mildness. This is far from the mouth-open, teeth-bared attempt to aggressively gobble up the competition that we see in the world. The Jews of Jesus's day had seen that aggression in action. They were victims of it. Their history was marked by the domination of powerful enemy nations like Assyria and Babylonia and Persia and Greece and now Rome. These nations didn't come to rule them by sitting back, being gentle and mild. They were ruthless and driven. They exerted dominance over others because they went after it. They seized it; they grabbed for it; they assertively took it by force. They stepped on others to get it or they would not have had it.

This is the way the world works. And so many Jews were looking for a Messiah who would be the same way. If they were going to experience

freedom from the tyranny of Rome, if they were going to be saved from the oppressive enemy, their savior would have to be politically and/or militarily stronger and more aggressive. He would have to be more ruthless and self-assertive. The Jews were divided over how their resurgence was to come about whether by miraculous deliverance, political prowess, or sheer militaristic revolt. But one thing they knew, it was not going to come about through gentleness. They understood power. They understood aggression. They could see how these would be essential to throwing off the burden of Roman rule. But they could not see any scenario in which meekness would lead to triumph. They could not imagine any successful plan involving mildness and gentleness that would find them once again in control of their land.

But this is what Jesus came preaching. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." In the end those who stand, those who are exalted, those who have the power, those who possess the land are not the self-exalting, self-seeking predators who go after those weaker and smaller than themselves. Rather it is the meek, the gentle, the mild.

B. To get at what meekness is and what it looks like, I am going to start with living biblical examples of the characteristic.

1. Abraham. There is one of the OT accounts that as a child in Sunday School I remember hearing many times. It involved Abraham and his nephew Lot. When Abraham left his home according to the word of the Lord and headed to a land the Lord would show him, he took with him his nephew Lot. Both had herds and servants, and in the course of time the increase of the herds made coexistence difficult. The servants of the two men were at odds with one another as the land was insufficient to support both dwelling together. So Abram suggested they split. Before them lay two contrasting options. There was the lush Jordan valley and the not-so-lush land of Canaan. And here is meekness. Abram said to Lot, "You choose. You go one way and I will go the other." He put the choice in the hands of the younger man. And Lot asserted himself and took the first choice. Lot looked at the Jordan valley how it was watered and lush like the Garden of the Lord. And he chose for himself all the Jordan valley. Without any apparent murmur, Abraham went westward into Canaan while Lot went

to the east. In Abraham we observe meekness. And you may say, indeed, but Lot got the better end of the deal. Did he? Immediately on the heels of the separation, Genesis 13 provides two critical details. First, it notes that among the cities of the valley was one called Sodom, the men of which were great sinners against the Lord. Second, the text says that after Lot had separated from him, the Lord spoke to Abram saying, Look north, south, east, and west. All the land you see I will give you." What Jesus said is true. It is the meek who inherit the earth. They don't obtain it because they exert themselves. They inherit it through meekness. They wait on God and God gives it to them.

2. Another example of meekness is Moses. Numbers 12:3 states that "Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth." I think that the meekness of Moses is evident in a number of ways. One is the very fact that the future of the Egyptian palace and all its power and pleasures lay before him. But, as the author of Hebrews says, "he refused to be called the son of pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt." He embraced the disapproval of associating with Christ over the wealth of the world." He didn't grasp onto greatness with aggression. He relinquished the world and embraced its disdain without complaint.

3. And then there is David. Samuel anointed him to be the next king. And David approached Goliath with meekness. He had but a sling and 5 stones and this message: "that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel . . . and that he saves not with sword and spear . . . the battle is the Lord's." Meekness is not the absence of boldness. It is not timidity. But meekness does not invest trust in oneself or attempt great things for oneself. Meekness rests in God to do things that will glorify the name of the Lord. So David endured Saul's hostility and unkindness, and even when it was in David's hand to take Saul's life and assume the throne he had been promised, he refused because Saul was the Lord's anointed. This is meekness: humbly trusting God and God's timing for God to bring about my defense. Everything is ultimately about God and his glory not mine. I deserve no glory, but he deserves it all. If He has made a promise, he is able to deliver it without my disobedience.

4. Now look at Psalm 37. First, I want you to look at verse 11. "But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace." Jesus's statement in Matthew 5:5 is nothing new. It seems to be taken straight out of this psalm. And this psalm sets before us the character of the meek.

Look at verses 1-2. "Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrong doers. For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb." This is a mark of meekness. Meekness does not get all bent out of shape by those who do wrong. It is not the job of the meek to bring them down. Don't worry they will come down. The Romans were no threat to God's plan. Don't set yourself about bringing down the Romans. Set yourself about trusting the Lord. He's got it all under control.

Verses 3-4. "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." Meekness trusts the Lord. Meekness does good. Meekness pursues faithfulness and lets God satisfy its desires.

Verses 5-6 continue this theme of resting in the Lord. "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." Meekness does not seek to fabricate its own righteousness. Realizing the righteousness we need is not a righteousness we can accomplish, it rests in the Lord for a righteousness that shines like the noonday sun. Meekness trusts in the Lord.

Verses 7-9. "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! It only leads to evil. For the evil doers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land." The main goal of the meek is not to undo the works of the wicked, to get earthly justice, or to be vengeful, to overthrow evildoers. God is going to take care of that. The meek keep calm and wait for the Lord.

Verses 10-11. "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."

The meek are opposite to the wicked. The wicked carry out evil schemes. They threaten others. They may enjoy power, prestige, and popularity. They seem to be prosperous. Their ways of aggression seem to be paying dividends. The meek, however, do not approach life that way. No. They do not exert themselves. They do not assert their wants over against the wants of others. The meek commit their way to the Lord and leave it to the Lord to defend them and to supply them with their heart's desires. Their concern is not to get but to honor him. They trust God to make things right. They do not try to bring it about themselves; they leave it to the Lord. They follow his direction. If he says march around Jericho seven times, that's what they do. If he says to Gideon 32,000 warriors are too many to face 135,000 Midianites, then they are too many. If he reduces the ranks down to 300, you go with 300. Because the battle is not yours, it is the battle of the Lord almighty. Meekness rejects the pleasures of the world, the pursuits of the world, the methods of the world and the wisdom of the world. It embraces the ridicule of the world to wait on the Lord, to seek the Lord, to delight in the Lord.

5. I could cite more examples of meekness, but I will limit myself to the supreme example, and that is Jesus himself. He proclaimed that he is meek and gentle and he showed it in all of life. He did not aggressively trample over people. He did not resort to any evil whatsoever. He was gentle according to the weak and vulnerable. He suffered the scorn and derision of the world. He kept entrusting himself to the Father. And in reality the entirety of his descent to earth a human being was a demonstration of meekness. He was in the form of God but did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself and humbled himself taking the form of a servant and of a man and was obedient to death on a cross. Isaiah epitomizes his meekness saying, "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth."

Suffering in the place of others, bearing punishment that you do not deserve, that is meekness. Coming as God among sinful man not to be served but to serve. That is meekness. That is the opposite of going out and trouncing his enemies. That is Jesus. And that is the path into the kingdom of God.

C. And with these examples and this scripture as the foundation, here I will give you a summary expression of meekness. It is the humility of heart that derives from owning the fact that one is spiritual impoverished. In light of one's vile sinful nature, he divests himself of all pride. He does not see himself as a good person but as the chief of sinners. And as such he assumes this position before God and before others. He casts himself upon the Lord and trusts in the Lord and lets the Lord act in his defense when it seems good to him. He yields his rights to God because he belongs to him and deserves nothing.

This one is not weak. He is strong for the Lord. He is not strong for himself. Lloyd-Jones says, "he does not assert himself. . . . The meek man . . . does not demand anything for himself. He does not take his rights as claims. He does not make demands for his position, his privileges, his possessions, his status in life. . . . The man who is meek is not even sensitive about himself. He is not always watching himself and his own interests. He is not always on the defensive. He is never sorry for himself."

## **II. Why They Are Declared, "Blessed."**

A. Remember the word "blessed" has a root understanding of happiness. It is a rich, full, and enduring happiness. It is a joy that transcends circumstances.

B. Why do the meek experience such a happy sense of divine favor? They shall inherit the earth. Psalm 37 to which Jesus is alluding, speaks of inheriting the land, the land of Canaan, the promised land. This was the inheritance promised to Abraham, a promise which still stands. Ultimately the promise of Jesus is the inheritance of the new heavens and the new earth. These are the kingdom citizens which obtain the fullness of the promise.

But there is also a present reality to this promise. Lloyd-Jones writes, "The meek already inherit the earth in this life, in this way. A man who is truly meek is a man who is always satisfied, he is a man who is already content." Paul expressed this to the Corinthians when he said he was treated as "having nothing, yet possessing everything." He reminded the Ephesians that God has already blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. We told the Romans we are joint heirs with Christ.

## **Conclusion**

God is on a mission to turn the ways of the world on their head. This fallen world is puffed up with pride. It thinks much of itself and its ways, of its power and its wisdom. But God makes foolish the wisdom of the world. It is not by man's effort or by man's righteousness that humanity will be right with God. It is not by asserting oneself that one will acquire the kingdom and inherit the land. Rather, it is the one who admits the absence of goodness and righteousness in oneself and who does not insist on his rights and privilege who will enter the kingdom. It is the meek and the mild and the gentle, not those who seek good for themselves but those who seek it for others.

And for those who are meek, this characteristic will be evident in every relationship on every level to the glory of God.