

The Invincible Meek

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 February 1995

Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[0 : 0 0] Our text today is the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 5, verse 5, wherein Jesus announces the third of His eight Beatitudes.

Since all the eight Beatitudes are interrelated, we need to regularly hear and see each one of them in the context of the other seven.

Let us, therefore, read again Matthew 5, verses 3 through 12, and this time the men will read the lines that began blessed, and the women will read the lines that began for.

If you are able, will you please stand for the reading of the Gospel? Blessed are the poor in spirit.

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn. For they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek. For they shall inherit the earth.

[0 : 5 9] Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. For they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful. For they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart. For they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers. For they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of me.

Rejoice and be glad. For your reward in heaven is great. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You may be seated.

Spirit of the living God, we believe that you inspired Matthew the tax collector long ago to gather these words together and put them down on the page. I pray now that by your mercy and grace you will take these words off the page and cause them to come alive in us as never before.

[2 : 1 4] For we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Blessed are the meek. For they shall inherit the earth. Jesus just lays it down as a simple fact of life.

Will you repeat the words with me out loud again? Blessed are the meek. For they shall inherit the earth. Again, please. Blessed are the meek.

For they shall inherit the earth. You lucky bums. Really? Really? We need to get two things straight right from the very beginning.

First, the quality Jesus blesses in His third beatitude has nothing to do with. It has nothing to do with all the negative images triggered by the English word meek.

Although it is difficult to pin down the exact meaning of the original word used in this text, it clearly does not mean no brain, no brawn, no backbone.

[3 : 2 1] It clearly does not mean no conviction, no courage, no spirit, no drive. How do I know that? For one simple reason. Two people in the Bible are described by this term.

Only two. Moses and the Lord Jesus. Hardly your Casper milquetoast type of people. Numbers 12.3. Now the man Moses was very meek, more meek than any man on the surface of the earth.

Matthew 11.29. Jesus says, take my yoke upon you, learn from me, for I am meek and humble in heart. If of all the players in God's salvation history, Moses and Jesus alone are called by this term, it cannot mean spinelessness.

It cannot mean just lay down there and be a doormat. We can be sure right from the beginning that the third beatitude is not, blessed are the doormats, for they will inherit the earth.

The question then, what is this quality Jesus blesses and congratulates? What does it mean to be meek like Moses and like Jesus? And why is it a mark of the gospelized?

[4 : 36] Why is it an indication that human beings have received the good news of the nearness of the kingdom of God? The second thing to get straight from the beginning is this.

The promise which Jesus makes, the meek shall inherit the earth, is rock solid. You can bet the entire wad on this. Why?

For one simple reason. The meek, singular, the meek one himself will inherit the earth. Jesus Christ, the meek, will inherit the earth.

It's a given. He, after all, made the earth. He, after all, owns the earth. Always has, always will. As the psalmist says, the earth is all that it contains, the world and all those who dwell in.

Jesus Christ will inherit the earth. There's no question about that. It's settled. Which means then, that his stunning promise, the meek, plural, will inherit the earth, is certain.

[5 : 42] Those who belong to him are going to inherit the earth with him. The only question is when, how, in what sense. Okay, let's dig in then to this apparent upside-down saying.

As I have been stressing thus far in this series of studies in the Sermon on the Mount, the qualities Jesus blesses, the qualities Jesus congratulates in his Beatitudes are not natural human qualities.

That is, we do not produce these qualities. Rather, they are the result of hearing and embracing Jesus' gospel.

The poor in spirit, the merciful, the mourners, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, are what they are because of the power of Jesus' gospel. The Beatitudes are Jesus' portrayal of gospelized humanity.

The question then is, why is being meek a mark of the gospelized? The most immediate answer lies in the fact that Jesus, the gospelizer, is himself meek, as I already cited.

[6 : 48] Take my yoke upon you, for I am meek and humble in heart. When we encounter Jesus Christ, when we embrace him, when we receive his life into our life, we cannot but become like him.

Thus, the apostle Paul includes meekness in his list of the fruit of the Spirit. Meekness is one of the natural outcroppings of being indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, meekness, faithfulness, self-control. Get infused with the very life of Jesus, and we begin to take on his character traits.

But that is not the major point that Jesus is making in the Sermon on the Mount. I think, rather, that what he is saying is that when his gospel, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near to you, when his good news of the reign of God gets a hold of us, something happens.

We become meek. Why? Well, in order to correctly answer that question, we need to go back to a question I already asked, namely, what is this quality Jesus blesses?

[7 : 59] What is it? And as I said, the exact meaning is really hard to pin down. No one English word can capture all the nuances of this term.

For example, some first century folk used it to describe domesticated animals. Domesticated animals. Such animals have learned to accept the control of their masters, and by extension, the word then refers to people who know how to behave, people who know how to submit to proper authority.

Following this line, James Boyce renders Jesus' words, blessed are God's gentlemen. Blessed are God's gentlewomen. Aristotle taught that this was a quality highly to be desired, and Aristotle described it as a mean, a mean between anger and indifference, a mean between excessive anger on the one hand and the inability to be angry at all on the other hand.

And taking his cue from Aristotle, William Barclay then renders Jesus' words, blessed is the one who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time.

Oh, to be so meek. Now, what has helped me the most, though, is to look at how this word is used in other parts of the Bible.

[9 : 20] And of particular help has been Psalm 37. Psalm 37 is probably best known for verse 4. Delight yourselves in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

But in Psalm 37, verse 11, we read, but the humble or the meek or the gentle will inherit the land. The humble will inherit the land.

Is Jesus echoing and expanding on this verse in His third beatitude? Most scholars think so, and then go on to argue that Psalm 37 gives us the best interpretation of meekness that we have.

Commenting on Psalm 37, Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner writes, there is no finer exposition of the third beatitude than this psalm from which it comes. The whole of the psalm appears to be linked together by the recurring phrase, shall inherit the land.

Verse 9, evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord will inherit the land. Verse 22, for those blessed of the Lord will inherit the land, but those cursed by Him will be cut off.

[10 : 30] Verse 29, the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever. Verse 34, wait for the Lord, keep His way, He will exalt you to inherit the land. And then verse 11, which Jesus works with, and the humble will inherit the land.

Is that the right slide? Which you can read very clearly. Now, it's very important to understand where David, the author of this psalm, is coming from when he composes Psalm 37.

He is wrestling with the age-old problem of the apparent success of those who ignore and disobey God. You've wrestled with that.

He's wrestling with the fact that in this world, it is the pushy and the grabby and the power-wielding, the self-asserting, the control-mongers who do seem to win. David frankly acknowledges that the dishonest often do have more than the honest, that those who step on others often do get to the top, that those who are rich often can buy their way out of the consequences of their sin, that they can buy their way through the court system.

Yet in the face of all of this, David makes the daring claim which Jesus repeats with His own authority, the meek will inherit the land. Contrary to all appearances, the gentle are going to win.

[11 : 55] Now, on either side of that claim, in the verses before and after verse 11, David develops the nature of this meekness. And he comes at it from a number of different angles. He talks about meekness in terms of what it does and then meekness in terms of what it does not do.

Listen to a litany of David's insights from Psalm 37. He says, the meek trust in the Lord. They do good in the face of evil. They cultivate faithfulness or trust.

They delight themselves in the Lord. They commit themselves to the Lord. They rest in the Lord. They wait patiently for the Lord. Clearly, meekness is not a passive quality. Furthermore, the meek do not fret because of evildoers.

They do not envy. They cease from anger. They forsake wrath. They depart from evil. Clearly, meekness is also not a spineless quality. It takes great strength not to be angry.

Let's take a few moments and just reflect on a few of David's insights about the meek. Verse 3, the meek trust in the Lord and do good. Others get away with doing evil.

[13 : 06] Others get away with injustice. But the gentles say, we will bank on doing the will of God come what may. The gentles trust, not themselves, not their ability to scheme, not their ability to orchestrate things, but they trust God.

God, and as a friend of mine, they do the godly thing and let the chips fly. Verse 4, the meek, delight themselves in the Lord.

They delight themselves in the Lord. That is, they have a special focus in life. Instead of focusing on the fact that they are being mistreated, instead of focusing on the fact that they do not have everything other people have, they find their joy in the living God.

The gentles deliberately redirect their emotional energies to find peace and wholeness in a person and not in the circumstances. They find their identity and their security in the very center of the universe and therefore can live with uncertainty at the circumference of the universe.

Verse 5, the meek commit their way to the Lord and trust also in Him. This word translated commit literally means to roll. They roll their way onto the Lord.

[14 : 19] I like the imagery that that suggests. They roll their way on the Lord. The meek, says Stuart Briscoe, roll their lives, their careers, their reputations onto the Lord and let the Lord worry about it all.

The meek are those who when offended commit their offended egos and those who offended their egos to the perfect judge. The meek can say to himself, what she did to me was wrong, but she is answerable to God and so I will let God deal with her, but I am also answerable to God so I'm going to concentrate on doing the right thing by her.

The right thing may be to forgive, the right thing may be to confront or both. Either way, they roll it all on the Lord. Verse 7, the meek rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

In Scripture, waiting is not a passive quality. Waiting requires great concentration and a readiness to act. The sense is wait expectantly, expecting the just God to vindicate and to satisfy.

Such waiting calls for confidence that God will work and such waiting calls for courage not to do God's part in it. The meek somehow have come to trust in the sovereignty of God and in the sovereignty of God they rest.

[15 : 41] Oh, to know what the meek know. Verse 1, the meek do not fret. Literally, that word means do not get heated or more literally, they do not get hot under the collar.

We're talking great strength here now, aren't we? How much of us, how many of us waste incredible amounts of energy and time stewing over people who offend us, over people who snub us, over people who take advantage of us?

The meek acknowledge their emotional response to all that. They own their emotions. It's just that they control their emotions instead of letting the emotions control them.

They manage all that energy in a more redemptive direction. Oh, to be as strong as the meek. Verse 3, the meek do good in the face of evil.

And verse 27, the meek depart from evil. This is the key insight that David has. It's the insight which Jesus then more fully works with in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. The meek do not return evil for evil.

[16 : 44] The meek do not return evil for evil. The meek know that that is utter helplessness. They do not respond to violence with more violence. They do not respond to the twisting of justice with more twisting of justice.

I trust you can see then from this brief summary of Psalm 37 that the meek whom Jesus blesses are the invincible meek. What can stand against this quality?

The meek are strong because they are in the arms of God. The meek are wise because they see life from the eyes of God. The meek can stand firm because they are not swayed by the pressures of the present but rather are anchored in the eternal.

Psychologist Jeff Buckley is right. Christine Bitesell tells me that Dr. Buckley argues that meekness is the capacity to resist the two extremes we experience when we are under conflict or when we have great anxiety.

The two extremes of fight or flight. Meekness is the capacity to resist either of those. Meekness is the capacity to stand there and neither become hostile nor withdraw.

[17 : 55] Now this is the quality we see in Moses who according to Numbers 12.3 was the most meek man on the face of the earth. Here's the historical context in which that claim comes.

One day Miriam, Moses' sister and Aaron, Moses' brother challenged Moses' position in the life of the community and they did so publicly. They did not like the woman he had married and so they criticized him and her in public.

They were jealous that God spoke only through Moses to the people of God and they criticized him publicly. Anything like that ever happen to you?

A couple of years ago I was leading a weekend retreat. I was teaching on all the in Christ texts in Paul's letters. It was a fun time.

It was a great time although I sensed something brewing beneath the surface. And when I got through teaching I said, isn't this good news? And then opened it up for question and response.

[18 : 56] And all of a sudden as though he had been waiting for the opportunity to arise a doctor in the group in a very angry voice said, no it is not good news. It is blank, blank, blank.

And furthermore, Daryl, you are a sick man who is ruining our church with your teaching. And he let me have it for 30 minutes in front of all those retreatants.

No one stood up for me. I was glad Sharon was there. We were holding hands under the table. I was glad that she was there beside me.

I was sad that she had to witness this barrage against me. What did Moses do that day that it hit him? Moses refused to lash back at Miriam and Aaron.

He refused to criticize them or their motives. He refused to get all worked up about it. That's a miracle. And he did not demand an apology.

[19 : 54] What he did was roll it all on God. God had called him to that leadership position. God was just and God would vindicate the truth.

Is that spinelessness? Is that gutlessness? Not at all. In such moments of confrontation, it takes great strength and great courage to not react in kind, to not get into the tit-for-tat kind of game.

Do we not see all of this that we see in Psalm 37 in the life of our Lord Jesus Himself, especially during His trial? When Jesus was insulted and attacked, He did not react in kind.

He did not even assert His authority as Son of God against these mere Romans. As the Apostle Peter, who witnessed this event, later said, while being reviled, He did not revile in return.

While suffering, He uttered no threats. Instead, says Peter, He kept entrusting Himself to the one who judges righteously. He kept entrusting Himself to the one who judges righteously.

[21 : 00] He kept rolling it over on the Father. Oh, to have the strength to be meek, to have the spiritual maturity, to be gentle.

Now, let's go back to the question, why is this a mark of the gospelized? Why is meekness an indication that Jesus' good news is grabbing hold of us?

Ready? Because the gospelized know the great secret. The gospelized know the open secret. The gospelized know the great mystery of history.

What do I mean? The gospelized know that the time is fulfilled and that the kingdom of God has come near. The gospelized know that in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, a revolution is taking place.

The gospelized know that in Jesus, the old order of things is passing away. The new order of things is in on its way. The gospelized know that the old order of pushing and grabbing and demanding is over.

[22 : 12] It is now collapsing in on itself. Is not that what we see all over the world? The old order is dying. That's why it takes so much energy to make it work.

We're pumping, trying to pump energy into a corpse. The apostle John says, the world is passing away in all of its lusts. Why then, ask the gospelized, should we fret?

Why should we play the game by the rules of a dying order? Are you with me? Furthermore, the gospelized know the outcome of living by the old order.

In Psalm 37, verse 13, David says, God laughs at the schemes of the arrogant, the dishonest, and the ruthless. God sees their day coming, says the text. David's not referring to a certain calamity that God is going to send upon such people.

David's referring to the natural consequences of old order decisions and practices. Those who get to the top by stepping on the top stay on the top only as long as they can keep the other steppers from getting up there.

[23 : 20] Those who seize and hold power unjustly eventually fall under the weight of their own injustice. Empires built on greed are finally eaten up by the greed.

I'm a baseball fan, and I'm saddened. You see what we're witnessing right in front of our eyes. Empires built on greed getting eaten up by the greed.

God isn't bringing justice on baseball. It happens. That's the old order way of things and where it ends. The gospel eyes have seen the light and therefore can renounce the inherently self-destructive ways of the old order.

Are you with me? To put it more simply, the gospel eyes have seen the preview. They know where the movie ends. They know how it all comes out.

They know that Jesus and His meekness wins. They know the old order is being swallowed up by the new order. You know, the gospel eyes really believe the hallelujah chorus.

[24 : 28] The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever. Why then act according to the old order? To do so is foolishness, let alone futility.

Blessed, right on, right side up, are the meek, for they and they alone will inherit the earth. When? In the end, when the earth is fully redeemed.

But they will inherit the earth before the end. How? Well, think about it. Who are the people who really enjoy the earth right now? Those who grab and push and demand?

No. They're too busy pushing, grabbing, and demanding to enjoy what they got by pushing, grabbing, and demanding. Those who are always building their empires, those who are always climbing their ladders, seldom enjoy the earth.

Someone has said, a possessing spirit finally possesses, a controlling spirit finally controls the spirit. The meek, those who delight in God and delight in His great plans, are free to smell the flowers along the way once in a while.

[25 : 37] But the meek inherit the earth ahead of time for another reason. Before she became the daughter of Daddy Warbucks, little orphan Annie had nothing. But the moment she was adopted, all of his wealth became hers.

The moment you and I were adopted by the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, everything He owns is ours. 1 Corinthians 3.22, all things belong to you, you belong to you, Christ belongs to God.

To belong to Jesus Christ is to be granted the privilege of living with Him in the palace and playing with His toys and getting to go anywhere in His sprawling backyard. The earth is the Lord's and He is to own.

Meek means geek, no brain, no brawn, no backbone, no spirit, no energy, no drive, no way. Meekness is a winsome humility born of trusting the great mystery.

Here is an even more wonderful mystery. In this simple meal, Jesus Christ is really present, really present. And through this bread and through this cup, He offers us Himself as the true food and the true drink.

[26 : 59] Through this meal, He once again gives us kingdom life, His life, so that we can become more like Him. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Jesus ought to know. He is, and the earth is already His.