

# The Invincible Meek

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Date: 07 February 2010

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our text today is found in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 5, verse 5, wherein Jesus speaks the third of his eight beatitudes.

Blessed, right on, in sync, are the meek, the gentle, for they will inherit the earth.

Really? I've been emphasizing in this series that each of the beatitudes is related to the other seven, which means that whenever we focus on one of them, we need to make sure that we have heard all of them.

In your worship folder or up on the screen behind me, you will find the text of Matthew 5, 3 to 10 printed in a responsive reading form.

Would those of you on the left of the sanctuary read the clauses that began with blessed are? And those of you on the right of the sanctuary read the clauses that began for they or for theirs?

[ 1 : 14 ] Now, assigning this side as left and this as right has no political implications. Though looking over the room, I probably should have switched it in a couple of places anyway.

Edna will lead the left side with the blessed are. I'll lead the right side with for they or for theirs. Hear the word of God. Hear the words that turn the world upside, right side up again.

Upside down and then right side up again. 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. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

For they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful. For they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart. For they will see God.

[ 2 : 22 ] Blessed are the peacemakers. For they will be called the children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. For theirs is the kingdom.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.

For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, once again we thank you that you helped Matthew, the tax collector, remember your words and write them down accurately for us.

Will you now help us understand this third beatitude? And more than simply understand, will you help us actually live in the reality it is describing?

For this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Blessed are the meek. For they, and only they, will inherit the earth.

[ 3 : 43 ] Are you sure, Jesus? I mean, are you really sure? Do you know where we live? We need to get two things straight right from the beginning of our time together.

First, the quality Jesus blesses has nothing to do with all of the negative images that are conjured up by the English word meek.

It clearly, although it is a challenge to understand exactly what this word means, it clearly does not mean no brain, no brawn, no backbone.

It clearly does not mean no convictions, no courage, no spirit, no drive, no guts. How do we know that? For one simple reason.

Only two people in the Bible are explicitly called meek. Anyone know who they are? Jesus and Moses.

[ 4 : 46 ] Jesus and Moses. Jesus and Moses. In Numbers chapter 12, verse 3, we read, Now the man Moses, and he's speaking of the man who leads this revolution, this exodus out of Egypt, the man Moses was very meek, more meek than any person on the face of the earth.

And in the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 11, verse 29, where Jesus calls us to come and take up his easy yoke, Jesus says of himself, For I am meek and humble of heart.

If of all the players in God's salvation drama, Moses and Jesus alone are called by this term, it cannot mean spinelessness.

It cannot mean just lay down and be a doormat. It just can't mean that. The third beatitude is not blessed are the doormats for they will inherit the earth.

The third beatitude is not blessed are the wimps because they'll inherit the earth. The second thing we need to get straight right from the beginning is that the promise Jesus makes inherit the earth is rock solid.

[ 6 : 08 ] We can put our full weight on this promise. Why? For one simple reason. The meek, singular, the meek one himself, singular, Jesus Christ, the meek one, will inherit the earth.

He made the earth. He owns the earth. Always has and always will. Psalm 24, verse 1.

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. Now, I'm aware of how offensive a claim that is in our pluralistic city.

But, to be faithful to the biblical witness to Jesus, we can say no other. The earth belongs to Jesus. This is why we either live his way or it does not work. It's his and we've been placed on it. The Lord Jesus will inherit his earth.

[ 7 : 22 ] Which means then that 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 question is when and in what sense. So, let's dig more deeply into this seemingly upside down beatitude.

As I have emphasized in this series thus far, the qualities Jesus blesses or congratulates are not natural human qualities.

That is, we ourselves cannot produce these qualities. None of us can say today, well, I think I'll make myself meek. It's not possible. No one is naturally meek.

We become meek because of the power of Jesus' gospel. So, I ask, why is being meek a sign that Jesus and his gospel have gotten a hold of us?

[ 8 : 31 ] The most immediate answer is that Jesus himself is meek. In the text we already cited, take my yoke upon you because I am meek. When we encounter Jesus, when we embrace his embrace of us, we start to become like him.

This, by the way, is why the Apostle Paul includes meekness as one of the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness.

When Jesus infuses us with his life, when he breathes his Spirit into us, we begin to take on his character traits. By the way, I think you can see then that in his Beatitudes, Jesus is actually painting a portrait of himself.

Yes, he's painted a picture of who we are becoming in him, but also a picture of himself, of who he is. He is poor in spirit, totally dependent on his Father.

He hungers and thirsts for justice. He is merciful and pure in heart and he is meek. Hang out with him and we begin to become like him.

[ 9 : 48 ] But that's not the only thing Jesus is emphasizing in his third Beatitude. I think he's also saying that when his gospel, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near, when his gospel gets a hold of us, something happens.

Something happens. We begin to become meek. Why? In order to answer that question, we need to ask another one that's been begging to be asked and answered and that is, so what does this quality mean that Jesus blesses?

What does Jesus mean by meek? As I said earlier, it's hard to actually pin it down. No one single English word or phrase does justice to the term Jesus uses.

So, for example, some folks in the first century used this word to describe domesticated animals. Such animals have learned to accept the control of their masters.

By extension, then, they use this word meek to refer to people who know how to behave. They know how to relate to the just authorities around them.

[ 11 : 00 ] Following this lead, one commentator renders Jesus' words in the third beatitude as, blessed are God's gentlemen or blessed are God's gentlewomen.

The philosopher Aristotle taught that this quality was to be highly desired. And he describes this quality as a mean between anger and indifference.

A mean between excessive anger on the one hand and the inability to be angry on the other hand. Taking his cue from Aristotle, William Barclay then renders the third beatitude as, 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 is to look at how this word is used in other parts of the Bible and a particular help has been Psalm 37.

Psalm 37 is best known for the promise, delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. But in Psalm 37 verse 11, Psalm 37 verse 11, we read, listen, but the humble will inherit the land.

[12:19] the meek will inherit the land. Is Jesus echoing and then expanding on this Psalm text in his third beatitude?

Most scholars think so. And then go on to argue that Psalm 37 gives us the fullest interpretation of the word meek anywhere. Commentator Derek Kidner says of Psalm 37, there is no finer exposition of the third Psalm than this Psalm from which it is drawn.

So, I invite you to open your Bibles to Psalm 37. Psalm 37. It was great to hear during the week that some of you in small groups were finding this Psalm a great blessing as you worked your way through it.

Now, when you read this Psalm, you see that the whole Psalm is sown or linked together by the phrase inherit the land or inherit the earth. Verse 9, evildoers will be cut off but those who wait for the Lord will inherit the land.

Verse 22, those blessed by the Lord will inherit the land. 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.

[13:34] And then, verse 11, which Jesus works with, and the humble or the meek will inherit the land. You see that? This whole Psalm is sown together by this inherit the land.

Now, it's very important to realize where David is coming from as he composes this psalm. He's wrestling with the age old problem of the apparent success of those who ignore and disobey God. David is wrestling with the fact that in this world, it is the pushy and the grabby and the power wielding and the self assertive and the control freaks who seem to win.

Notice how I put that. Who seem to win. David frankly acknowledges that the dishonest often do have more than the honest.

He acknowledges that those who step on others often do get to the top. He acknowledges that often the rich can buy themselves out of the consequences of their sin.

[14:41] Yet, in the midst of all of that, 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 are going to win.

Now, on either side of that claim in verse 11, in the verses before verse 11 and the verses after verse 11, I think David is developing the nature of meekness. He comes at it from many different angles.

He comes at what meekness does do and at what meekness does not do. So, listen just for a moment to a litany of David's insights in Psalm 37.

The meek, verse 3, trust in the Lord. Verse 3, do good in the face of evil. Verse 3, cultivate faithfulness. Verse 4, delight themselves in the Lord.

Verse 5, commit themselves to the Lord. Verse 7, they rest in the Lord. Verse 7, they wait patiently for the Lord. You can see with that little list that meekness is not a passive quality.

[15:47] Furthermore, the meek, verse 1, do not fret because of evildoers. Verse 1, they do not envy. Verse 8, they cease from anger and forsake wrath. Verse 27, they depart from evil.

Clearly, meekness also is not a spineless quality because it takes great strength to cease from anger. So let's take a few moments and go back and look at just some of the things that David says about meekness to help us understand what Jesus is blessing.

Verse 3, the meek trust in the Lord and do good. The meek say, okay, others get away with doing evil, others get away with doing injustice, but the gentles say, we'll bank our whole life on doing the will of God come what may.

They do not trust in themselves, they do not trust in their ability to scheme, they do not trust in their ways of orchestrating their lives, rather they trust themselves to God.

As a friend of mine interprets this word, he says, it is that they do the godly thing and they just let the chips fly. Verse 4, the meek delight themselves in the Lord.

[17:04] That is, the meek have a special focus in life. Instead of focusing on the fact that they do not have what others have, instead of focusing on the fact that they are being taken advantage of, they find their joy in the living God.

This word delight in the Hebrew is related to the word for Eden. They find Eden in the Lord. They find their pleasure in Yahweh.

The gentle deliberately redirect their emotions and find their peace and wholeness in a person. They find their identity and their security in the very center of life and so can live with a lot of uncertainty on the circumference.

Oh, to so live. Verse 5, the meek commit their way to the Lord and trust also in Him. This word commit literally means to roll on.

They roll their lives on the Lord. I love the imagery it suggests. The meek says Stuart Briscoe, roll their lives, their careers, their reputations onto the Lord and let the Lord worry about it all.

[18:19] He continues, the meek are those who when offended commit their wounded egos and the one offending their egos to the perfect judge. The meek can say to himself, what she did to me is wrong, but she is answerable to God so I'll let God deal with her, but I'm answerable to God too, so I'm going to concentrate on doing the right thing by her.

The right thing may be to forgive or to confront or both. Either way, the meek roll it all on God. Boy, I could use some help.

What does that really feel like it look like? Verse 7, the meek rest in the Lord and they wait patiently for him.

In scripture, waiting is not a passive activity. The waiting scripture speaks of involves great concentration and readiness to act.

The sense is waiting with anticipation, expectantly, on tiptoe, expecting God to work and do something in the situation.

[19:31] You might know that in scripture, the greatest imagery for waiting is that of an eagle. Take some time and go and watch an eagle.

They'll go out on the end of a cliff on a high rock or they'll stand on the limb of a high tree and then they just sit there on the rock or sit there on the branch.

And if you look at them at first, they look very passive and inactive. But take your binoculars and look more carefully. Eagle is moving, twitching, testing the water.

They're waiting for the wind to come up, the thermals to come up from the canyon. And the eagle just puts his wing out, not yet, not yet, not yet, just waits for the wind to come and then the eagle just spreads his wing and he flies effortlessly on the wind.

I think my wings and just going at any time. It requires great strength and concentration to wait on the Lord and rest in him.

[20:45] Oh, verse one, the meek do not fret. Literally, it means do not get heated or more literally, they don't get hot under the collar.

now we're talking strength. How many of us just waste enormous amount of energy stewing over what people say to us or do to us or do not say to us or do not do to us.

The meek acknowledge all of their emotional responses to this, but they offer their emotions to God who manages them all in a redemptive way.

one more. Verse three, the meek do good in the face of evil. Verse 27, the meek depart from evil. This is the great insight that David has in Psalm 37 which Jesus then develops in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. The meek do not respond to evil with evil.

[21:50] evil is utter weakness. There is no power in that. They know that this is weakness.

They know that to respond to violence with more violence is just weakness. They do not respond to injustice with more forms of injustice. Well, I think you can see from that brief survey of Psalm 37 that the meek Jesus blesses are the invincible meek.

What can overcome such people? They're strong because they're held in the arms of God. They're wise because they see the world through the eyes of God.

And they are stable because their lives are rooted in the eternal and not in the passing fads. Oh to be what Jesus blesses.

Now all of this we see played out in the life of Moses who is very meek says the text more meek than any man on the face of the earth.

[ 23 : 00 ] Let's recall the historical context in which that claim is made about Moses. One day his sister Miriam and his brother Aaron challenge his position in the life of the community and do so publicly.

in the Middle East that is a hugely shameful thing to do. Miriam and Aaron do not like the woman Moses has married and they say so publicly.

Miriam and Aaron do not like the fact that God is only speaking through Moses. They're jealous and they say so publicly. This is a public shameful act in a shame based culture.

Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever been publicly insulted or ripped by somebody else? I have a number of times.

What does Moses do in this situation? Not what would be expected. He refuses to lash back at Miriam and Aaron.

[ 24 : 03 ] He refuses to judge their motives and their insolence. He refuses to get all worked up about it. We're talking miracle here. What he does is roll it all over on God.

He knows that God has called him to this position of authority. He knows that God is just and is going to vindicate him. Is this spinelessness?

Is this gutlessness on the part of Moses? Not at all. In such confrontations it requires great strength and courage not to react in kind, not to play tit for tat, not to echo the other person's spirit or words. All over the world we see this echoing and it's getting us nowhere. here. Now do we not also see Psalm 37 being lived out in our Lord Jesus?

Especially in his trial? The local police spat on him. They blindfold him and hit him in the face. The foreign military personnel then repeat all the insults and injuries.

[ 25 : 19 ] They thrust a crown of thorns on his head. They put a purple robe on him and they mock him and they too spit on him and they hit his face again and again but he refuses to be an echo of their behavior.

His behavior will not be determined by theirs. As the apostle Peter reflecting on this scene later he was present at that scene says while being reviled Jesus did not revile in return while suffering threats Jesus uttered no threats.

It goes on to say that instead Jesus kept entrusting himself to the one who judges righteously.

Jesus kept rolling it all over on the father. Roman soldiers knew power when they saw it.

And one of the Roman soldiers who was at the foot of the cross guarding Jesus saw how Jesus reacted to all of this evil and he got down on his knees and he said certainly this is the son of God. This is power. Oh to have the strength to be meek. Oh to have the spiritual maturity of Jesus to be so gentle.

[ 26 : 40 ] Now let's go back to that question why. Why is this quality a sign of being grabbed by Jesus and his gospel? for one simple reason.

When the gospel breaks through we discover the great secret. It's an open secret. We discover the mystery of history.

The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near. Those grabbed by Jesus in the gospel realize that in his birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, a revolution is taking place.

The old order is on its way out. A new order is on its way in. The old order of pushing and grabbing and demanding is over.

It is now collapsing in on itself. This is what we see all over the world in every era. The old order is dying. That's why, by the way, it takes so much energy to pop up the old order.

[ 27 : 49 ] It's as though we're breathing oxygen into a corpse. The apostle John says, the world is passing away in all of its lusts.

Why then, ask those grabbed by the gospel, why then should my behavior be determined by the rules of the old order? Those grabbed by Jesus and his gospel know the outcome of living by the old order.

Those who seize power and hold power unjustly eventually fall under the weight of their own injustice. I've lived long enough to watch that now hundreds of times.

Those who grab the earth unjustly end up collapsing under the weight of their own injustice.

Empires built on greed eventually are eaten up by their greed.

And those grabbed by the gospel have seen the light and therefore they can renounce the inherently weak and foolish ways of the old order.

[ 28 : 58 ] To put it more simply, those grabbed by the gospel have seen the preview. They know how the movie ends. They know that the old order is going to be swallowed up by Jesus' order.

Maybe the simplest way to put it is those grabbed by the gospel really do believe the hallelujah chorus. The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever.

Why then act according to the old order? It's weak, it's foolish, it's futile. Blessed right up in sync are the meek.

for they will inherit the earth. When? Well, in the end, when the earth is redeemed, but also they inherit the earth before the end.

Now, really? How? Well, think about it. Who are the people in our time who really enjoy the earth? those who grab and push and demand?

[ 30 : 10 ] No. Those who push and grab and demand are too busy pushing, grabbing, and demand to enjoy what they got when they pushed and demand and grabbed.

Those who are always building their kingdoms and trying to climb up the ladder, seldom enjoy the earth. Am I right? Someone has said a possessing spirit eventually possesses the spirit.

A controlling spirit eventually controls the spirit. And there's no time to enjoy the earth. The meek, who delight in God and in God's purposes, can smell the roses along the way.

But the meek inherit the earth in another sense. Before she was adopted by Daddy Warbucks, little orphan Annie had nothing. But the moment Daddy Warbucks adopted her, she had everything he had.

And the moment you and I are adopted by the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, all that God has becomes ours. 1 Corinthians 3.22, all things belong to you, you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

[ 31 : 28 ] to belong to Jesus Christ is to be granted the great privilege of sharing life with him in his great palace, to be able to play with his toys and to enjoy his sprawling backyard.

The earth is the Lord's, and he gives it to his own. Meek means weak, no brain, no brawn, no backbone, no spirit, no energy, no drive, no way.

It is through the meek that the world gets set right side up again. Hear what the Spirit says through the prophet Zechariah.

Rejoice greatly, O daughters of Zion. Shout in triumph, O daughters of Jerusalem. Look, your king is coming to you, just and endowed with salvation, meek and riding on a donkey.

He will speak peace to the nations. His dominion is from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth. Jesus wins.

[ 32 : 40 ] Jesus wins.