"Blessed Are The Meek" Matthew 5:5

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Date: 12 June 2022 Preacher: Nate Taylor

[0:00] If you have your Bibles, you can open back up to Matthew chapter 5. There was this guy who lived 1,600 years ago, one of the most influential theologians ever.

His name was Augustine. He's from Hippo, and he wrote this book called The City of God. And in book 10, it says this. It's the decided opinion of all who use their brains that all men desire to be happy.

But who are happy, or how they become so, these are questions about which the weakness of human understanding stirs endless and angry controversies, in which philosophers have wasted their strength and expended their leisure.

Do you hear that? Do you hear what he said? Everybody wants to be happy. This is a universal thing. They want the good life. They want to flourish. They want to be blessed. And the Bible isn't silent on this.

But as Augustine says, who are truly happy and how you actually find happiness, that is where the disagreement lies. Right?

[1:12] That's the real question. Not whether people actually want to be happy. And Jesus, he gives an answer to the question of happiness at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Just a little refresher, if you haven't been here.

We're going through, whenever I'm here in the pulpit, through the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are these little sayings at the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. They start with this word, blessed.

And that word, blessed, that's where Beatitudes comes from. Beatus is the Latin for blessed. And what it means is happy or flourishing. Okay? R.T. France, he's a New Testament commentator.

And he says, Beatitudes are descriptions and commendations of the good life. They're not this list of things that you're supposed to do in order to curry favor from God.

Right? You don't perform to get the blessing. Rather, it's kind of an observation of those who are already in covenant relationship with God. They're not these timeless truths that are just kind of spoken out there.

You know why? There's a lot of times that people mourn and they're not comforted. It's not just giving this timeless truth. Rather, they're an invitation into a way of being in the world.

And the result is going to be flourishing now and into the age to come. And then with that said, then if you were to look through these, they are absolutely stunning statements.

Right? Poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hunger and thirst, suffering. What? Flourishing. Are you kidding me? You see, what Jesus is doing is he's flipping the status quo.

It's like Paul goes on his missionary journeys and he's with Silas in Acts chapter 17 in Thessalonica. And they face some opponents who really don't like their message of the gospel.

And this is what they say about Paul and Silas. Those men who have turned the world upside down. Because they're understanding the message of the kingdom. It is upside down.

[3:12] And so these beatitudes are not meant to be something that we just kind of like, oh yeah, let's nod at that. Let's write it in cursive on a card and draw some flowers around it and send it to someone.

No! It's supposed to be ground shaking. They're authoritative declarations of the values and the shape and the direction of the kingdom of God.

Because if the king has come, then the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And thus the world is a different place. Now there's some things going on in the gospel of Matthew.

Just a little context before we look at this beatitude. And one of the things, he's not just presenting Jesus as king, but there's these other little themes that run throughout. And there's one where Jesus is seen as a second Moses.

And without unpacking what all of that is, in this you can see at the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Just as Moses went up the mountain. And he speaks as the mediator, as the mouthpiece of God to the people.

[4:12] And what's happening? God's brought Israel and he's constituting his people. This is what it means to be the people of God. So too now, the second Moses goes up the mountain.

And he speaks not just the words of God, but God's very word himself. And he's constituting this people, what it means to be citizens of the kingdom.

Okay? So, tonight's beatitude is this. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Let me pray for the preaching of God's word before we look at that more closely.

Would you help us, O Lord, to come and to sit at your feet? To learn from you right now. For you have the words of life.

And would you let the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. We pray this in Christ's name.

[5:15] Amen. Our outline, we're going to look at the sermon for the third beatitude is the same. It's not just because I'm lazy and can't think of the different outlines. But this is what we're going to do. The first one is the question is, what does it mean to be meek?

And the second is, what is the promise attached to this beatitude? What does it mean to be meek? And then what's the promise attached to it? So, first question. What does it mean to be meek?

And similar, as we looked at poor in spirit and when we looked at mourning, sometimes it's helpful to first answer that question of what does it mean by answering what does it not mean?

Right? What is meekness not? I don't know about you, but I don't use the word meek in my everyday speech. Did anybody use the word meek this week? This year, maybe?

Maybe you're reading the Sermon on the Mount and you happened to cross it and you were reading aloud? Wow. Please let me know. Did you ever leave somebody's house and you were just like, wow, those people, they were the meekest.

Wasn't that amazing? Or would you like it if somebody described our church and they said, that church is full of the meekest people in the world? Or they met you, a Christian, and you're like, I didn't know Christians were so meek.

Like, is that the first word that you want to be described as? Like, be honest with yourself. Like, we don't think very highly of this word. You know, like, hey, could you use courageous or faithful or winsome or something like that?

But meek? Are you kidding me? The world hears meek and they think weak. Maybe you do too, right? Maybe just because it rhymes, right? The world hears meekness and thinks weakness.

Or at the very best, someone who speaks very softly and apologizes for a bunch of things that they don't need to apologize. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Oh, did I get in the wrong? I'm so sorry. That's kind of what we think of when we hear the word meek.

That is not what meekness is. There's an old joke that goes with this beatitude and it says, you know, blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. If that's okay with the rest of you.

[7:20] That's kind of what we hear when we hear this word meek. It's not weakness. It's not timidity. It's not being wishy-washy and spineless.

It's not the person in the group who can't decide on what restaurant to go to and is like, whatever else you guys decide, it's going to be fine. It's also not being blandly nice.

One New Testament commentator, D.A. Carson, he writes, some people are just naturally nice and easygoing, but then again, so are some dogs. Meekness goes much deeper.

How do we know this? How do we know this? Well, many answers, but I think one good answer is to look at the two men in the Bible who are actually described as meek.

First one, Moses. Talked about him a second ago. Numbers 12, verse 3, describes Moses as the meekest man who ever walked the face of the earth up to that point in human history.

[8:23] The meekest, Moses. Moses. And in the context of Numbers 12, what's happening is Moses' brother and sister Aaron and Miriam are kind of like, hey, who put Moses in charge?

Why does he get to lead everything? What about us? And rather than defending himself, rather than puffing out his chest and be like, did you ever speak face-to-face with God?

Who was on the top of Mount Sinai, Aaron? I forgot. Weren't you down with the golden calf? He doesn't do that. Instead, he keeps silent and he allows God to vindicate him.

Right? Doesn't retaliate. Just keeps his mouth closed. This is the guy who led people out of Egypt. Doesn't bring up his credentials. But Moses wasn't being a doormat or a pushover.

He's entrusting his identity, his status to God. So don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying there's nothing wrong with defending yourself against a false accusation.

[9:25] Right? That's not the point. The point isn't meekness. It's like somebody accuses you and you're just like, whatever. No, no, no, no. You can defend yourself against a false accusation. But here, what you see in Moses in Numbers 12 is he is controlled.

He is patient rather than quick-tempered and jumping to let people know who he is. I don't know about you, but I can tend to do this.

Right? Someone criticizes me and quickly I go, yeah, have you ever looked at yourself in the mirror? Someone slights us and we stew for days. There's a vanity, a pursuit of us being at the center of things.

There's this famous Groucho Marx skit where he's going on and on and on and on and on and on about himself. Right? And then he stops and he looks at the other person and he goes, but that's enough about me.

What about you? What do you think about me? Right? That's the opposite of meekness. There's an epidemic of narcissism in our world.

[10:31] Our culture encourages. You know, social media, right? It encourages vanity. You get rewarded for the more likes and the more airbrushed your pictures are. The more that you can mold your image.

Right? You have this opportunity to give self glory. And you're told in the world to be your true self. And what that must mean is indulging every one of your desires, not controlling and curbing your desires.

Indulge them. That's what it means to be happy. And let's be very honest. Churches aren't immune to narcissism, to vainglory, where things can become about personal preference, not the kingdom of God.

Where personalities seek to control rather than serve. Where repentance starts to become kind of vague. It's qualified by a lot of things.

We become quick to defend ourselves and slow to defend others. And it's like we would rather hear God's name taken in vain than our own. May it never be.

[11:37] May it never be. We need this beatitude. Moses is described as meek. Sunday school answer. Who do you think the other person in the Bible described as meek is?

Besides the meek here in the beatitudes. Jesus, right? Jesus is. Jesus. He is the one who flips tables. He is the one who never is scared to say something that needs to be said.

He will rebuke a close friend. He will give a word of confrontation to the highest in societal standing. This is what Jesus does. And if you were to look at Matthew 11, 29.

Very famous passage. It describes the heart of Jesus. And Jesus says about himself. Take my yoke upon you for I am gentle and lowly in heart. And that word there.

That Greek word for gentle is the same word used in Matthew 5, 5 for meek. Right? Take my yoke upon you for I am meek and lowly.

[12:35] Jesus doesn't bully or belittle people to get his way. He's not harsh or easily exasperated. Dane Ortlund, he actually wrote a great book on Matthew 11, 29 called Gentle and Lowly.

And he writes this. He said, this is who Jesus is. Tender. Open. Welcoming. Accommodating. Understanding. Willing. If we're asked to say only one thing about who Jesus is, we would be honoring Jesus' own teaching if our answer is gentle or meek and lowly.

I wonder if in your mind, in your own worldview, if you believe that passion and gentleness can coexist. They do in Jesus.

And that word gets used one other time in the Gospel of Matthew. It's in Matthew 21, 5 where Jesus is in his triumphal entry. He's riding on a donkey. Right? And he quotes Zechariah 9, 9.

Behold, your king is coming to you humble. The word meek. Right? So meek can be translated gentle. It can be translated humble. Right? And mounted on a donkey. And the idea isn't that Jesus is a wimp, but that he comes to use his power to bless, to bring peace.

[13:53] He's not coming in to assert his way like the kings of the earth riding on their horses, but rather he comes to use his power for a different purpose. I mean, if Jesus is God, then meekness can't be weakness.

Right? Like omnipotent power is what we confess about what Jesus has. Okay? So that's not what meekness is. Then what is meekness? Let's work our way towards a definition.

I probably stole this from Sinclair Ferguson or D.A. Carson. I didn't write it into my notes. Not my original definition, but I like it. It says meekness is this. A controlled desire to see the interest of others advanced.

Self-sacrifice. You see how this describes Jesus, right? Meekness is the combination of patience and gentleness. Strength and humility used to submit to God and to help other people.

The meek are those who humbly submit to God's will and put their lives into God's hands. That's Psalm 37. What's going on in the context of Psalm 37 that we read?

[14:58] Right? You're looking around and seeing the bad people flourishing. And instead of saying, hey, you know what? I think I'm going to go about life that way. That's how I'm going to find the good life. Rather, they say, nuh-uh-uh.

I'm going to commit my way to God and his ways. The meek are blessed then. Do you see the flow of the first three Beatitudes then?

The first one says, blessed are the poor in spirit. It's this posture of humility. You don't trust in your own goodness, in your own resources, but in the riches and kindness of Christ. Right?

And second, blessed are those who mourn. You're not only acknowledging your need, you are mourning your own sin and the effect of sin in this world. And now, it prepares you.

It readies you. The truly flourishing person is the one whose posture of humility leads to a selflessness towards God and towards others.

[15:56] Right? Towards God and towards others. Meekness is a selfless strength. It's not the absence of strength, but it's strength directed towards the good of others.

Meekness is learning to be self-controlled even when we are not in control. You don't do whatever it takes to get ahead. One theologian wrote this.

He said, meekness is the firm resolve that it's always better to suffer than to sin. So we get later in the Beatitudes, right? Blessed are those who suffer for righteousness' sake.

You never say anything like, or come close to even saying anything like the ends justify the means. There's a way in this world to get an end result even that might look like it belongs in the kingdom of God, but you go about it in a way that is completely antithetical to God's ways.

Would you like an example? Sure. Okay. I have children. You want to know one easy, really quick way to get my kids to obey? Anger and yelling.

[17:09] They're supposed to obey me. Right? It takes time to go for the heart. Don't have time. It takes time to be firm, but gentle.

You know, meek. Right? We get the desire we want, but we don't do it in God's way. It's not meekness. There's sadly many examples of this.

My context is America. So I think a lot of American churches and very famous pastors whose ministries have sputtered and ended. Why? Because there's a lack of meekness.

Many of you listened to the popular podcast in 2021 put on by Christianity Today called The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill. Mars Hill was a church, evangelical church, in Seattle, Washington, one of the most unchurched cities in America.

And what started as this small little community group to plant a church grew to 12,000 people worshiping every Sunday. Twelve different locations.

[18:13] And I think it was something like 260,000 sermon downloads every single week. But it became a cult of personality.

And people started to cover up sin. Because if we tell the truth, right, it's going to hurt the good work, the greater good that we're going for. It all implodes. And here's, honestly, here's the tragedy.

I'm not trying to sit in judgment on this man, but Mark Driscoll, the pastor, who said and did a lot of really good things. He basically built his platform on not being meek.

Right? He was sick of a world that saw Christianity as just weakness. Right? And people who kind of became wimpy. And he said, you know what we're going to do? We're going to go completely away from that.

And we're going to become brash and arrogant and proud. And the indictment's not just on him, but everybody else. They ate it up. They wanted it. But this beatitude is a rebuke to those addicted to power and arrogance.

You know, in Mark 9, Jesus' disciples are arguing over who's going to be the greatest in the kingdom of God. And then in Mark 10, two of them get very pointed and pull them aside.

And they're like, hey, we're just having a little debate. And I just want to ask you a favor, Jesus. I think we're in your inner three. Can we be number one and two in the kingdom? And the rest of the disciples are like, are you kidding me?

The arrogance of these guys just to come out and say it. What on earth? You know what Jesus says? You don't know what you're asking for. You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.

And their great ones exercise authority over them. This is the way of the world, right? You get fame and power and influence and money in order to get your way.

In order to get the good life. In order to make your life easier. But Jesus says, he continues. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

[20:21] And whoever would be first among you must be a slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Do you believe this?

Truly deep down believe this. That this is the way of the kingdom of God. That this is the way to the good life. As it captured your will and your imagination.

Let me say it again because we have to hear this. The kingdom posture of meekness is strength in serving others at the expense of self. And I think we all agree that selfless strength is a lot harder than selfish strength, right?

But that's the way of the kingdom. The power that you're given, the strength that you were given, it was made for selflessness. That's just the way of the world, not selfishness. So invading our arrogant, selfish world comes the invitation of God's kingdom.

Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the meek. Meek people, they're tender to their own failings. And so what does that look like? Well, it means that you can actually take criticism.

[21:32] Because even if it's unfair criticism, there might be a kernel of truth in it. You're like, hey man, listen. All right? I could tell you a bunch of other things. I'm poor in spirit and I've been mourning my own sin.

You're not absolutely crushed by it. Meek people are tender towards the hurt of others, but they're also not a wet noodle. You know, they're tough to defend those that they need to move towards.

And you see, kind of the question a lot of times is, but what about me? If I'm constantly giving my love and my strength to others, if it's supposed to be selflessness, when am I going to get mine?

And we forget what Christ has done for us. And we forget that he's called us into this community, one where it's supposed to be self-giving love.

And so what's going to end up happening is when I give, I know that I'm going to be poured into. I have been poured into by Christ and I will be by his people. And we act in faith.

[22:30] And we're not measuring and keeping score about how many times you've been selfless with your strength. That you trust God's will, even you strong, strong people.

You bend the knee to the Lord and you trust that he will provide. So meekness is not being a weak person. It's a patient selflessness that trusts God with the present and the future.

It takes seriously the call to be a servant. Second question then, what's the promise attached to this beatitude? You read it. It promises nothing less than this.

You will inherit the earth. The earth, it's not promised to savvy businessmen or the beautiful influencers or the healthy and arrogant or the calculating and cunning, but to the meek.

Again, Jesus, he's quoting Psalm 37, verse 11. Look at that. It says, you know, blessed are the meek. It says, the meek shall inherit. It actually says the land.

[23:35] There's an interesting difference there, right? And when it says the land, because it's talking to Israel and it's remembering God's covenantal promises. Okay? So to understand meekness and the promise that's being made, we have to understand God's covenantal promises.

That's just kind of a fancy way in the free church and Presbyterianism, the way that we look at Scripture and we trace the storyline of Scripture is through God's covenants.

Right? His relationships, his promises that he makes with people and they build upon each other. Okay? So, mankind. We'll start at the very beginning. We're going to go through the whole Bible, but kind of quickly.

All right? Don't worry. Calm on out. Mankind. Created to do what? To rule and reign with God as his representatives in his creation. What's given to Adam? The earth and its fullness.

And when God says that you're to subdue it and have dominion over it, you know, we hear that and we think of arrogance and selfish strength. But that is not what it is. It is a selfless strength.

[24:35] It is a bringing forth the fruitfulness of the land. It is selfless strength that sees flourishing come about because this is who we're created to be in the image of God.

But what happens? You know, that's not the end of the story. Right? Mankind rebels. They go against God's promises. Given the earth, they don't settle for that.

They want to be God. In God's place. And they lose both. Did you notice that as we're going, just a little quick aside, as you go through the Beatitudes and Jesus makes it explicit in Matthew 6.33, he says, Seek first the kingdom of God and the rest will be added to you.

All of these blessings, all of the good life, it's gotten indirectly. If you're going after the earth and that inheritance, if you're trying to get all of this happiness, if that's your main thing in life, is your own happiness, you will never get it.

You will never achieve it. You ever met somebody who's all about their own happiness? Miserable. The happiest people I know are selfless people.

[25:44] If you seek first the kingdom of God, you get that and happiness thrown in. Hmm. They're all received in directly. Try to gain the world and you'll lose your soul.

So, despite sin in the garden, though, God's promises remain. He's still a God who uses strength to serve. And so, what he ends up doing is he calls this guy named Abram.

And he promises Abram what? A land. And not just a land, but a nation, a people, a family of Abraham who will dwell in this land. That they're going to inherit the land.

And so, this nation, this people, they get drawn out of Egypt by this guy named Moses. You remember him? The meekest guy ever before Jesus. Right? And they come to Mount Sinai and Moses gives them the law.

But you see, this land that they're entering into, it's never something that's supposed to be primarily theirs, which they just get to grab and then toss off whatever God has said and do whatever they want.

Rather, they're to live in there with meekness. With meekness, right? And even Moses, their leader, at a very critical time, he doesn't act with meekness.

And what's his punishment? He doesn't get to lead the people fully into the land. He just gets to look at it. And do you remember Psalm 37? Right? God's covenantal promises, though they're still remaining.

The psalmist, he's looking around, sees the evildoers prospering. He says, yeah, it's tempting to want to be like them. Right? The vain, the arrogant. It seems like they're going to inherit the earth.

Heck, it seems like they've got the earth right now. Right? They've got everything going for them, but it's not so, says the psalmist. They're going to fade like the grass. This is not the way things work if God is in charge.

Instead, the meek will inherit the earth. They wait. And they wait. How can you be sure that the meek will inherit the earth?

[27:44] Well, because God makes promises and keeps his promises. And that promise of the land, inheriting the land, gets expanded, not just to this narrow strip in the Middle East, but to the entire world.

Because every time that God makes a promise, they go even bigger than what people first think. And that the prophet's vision is that the knowledge of the glory of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

And the kingdom of heaven that Jesus talks about, it's not this... I'm going to try to talk again. I was a little nervous there. I was not being meek, I think.

There was probably like a rebuke in there somewhere. I don't remember what I was talking about. Meekness, right? Somewhere in there. Well, let's just pick up here. So what ends up...

It's always good. If you don't know where you are, go to Jesus, right? In Jesus, then, what happens is that heaven comes to earth. The promise of the kingdom of heaven isn't that you're just going to float off into the clouds and be some disembodied state playing a harp on a cloud for eternity, but rather that God's promises will come to bear in this world.

[28:56] And he invites people to experience his meekness. He declares that the meek, not the arrogant, are going to reign. And so the promise that Jesus makes in his beatitudes, in the kingdom of God, he's talking about it is like, what's the illustration?

Like yeast working its way through the dough and expanding, right? And because of that, because you are built for meekness and called to meekness, chances are this side of Jesus coming back, your life devoted to selfless strength is going to be overlooked.

Operation meekness, it's not going to be flashy. It will often look like foolishness to the world and even to us at times. The number of billionaires in the world is rising so much that Jeff Bezos, he doesn't even want to inherit the earth.

He's going for outer space, right? All the billionaires are launching themselves into space. There will be no statues of you, though, if you're meek. No song is written about you.

Most of your labor will be scrapped and forgotten by the world, and you're going to be buried in obscurity. Aren't you so glad you came tonight? But not a drop of your meekness will be wasted.

[30:14] God will bless it. He will look and say, that, that is a people after my own heart. That is a kingdom of priests. That is the good life.

So when you think about meekness, don't for a second pity the meek. Because those buried in obscurity will be raised from their graves.

What is sown in weakness will be raised in power. And they will come into the new heavens and the new earth. And they will be the kings and the queens in the new heavens and the new earth.

And Jesus will say, come and reign with me. And they will say, no, I'm not qualified. And Jesus will say, that is precisely what qualifies you.

Come. Come. Inherit the whole earth. This is the promise. And that promise, it should create a longing inside of us of what meekness could be like.

[31:18] Look. Aren't you tired of arrogance and vanity in your own life and in this world? It is exhausting. No more self-promotion.

No more self-protection. But self-giving love. What will it be like when Jesus reigns and we reign with him in meekness? It is this world full of meekness.

And that will be heaven on earth. Do you want that? Maybe you're sitting here and you're thinking, you know, that's nice, but how do I even begin being meek this week, right?

The answer is, every Sunday school answer is, Jesus, look to the meek one par excellence. In this world full of self-promotion and self-protection and self-strength, Jesus enters in.

And do you remember what happens when he gets arrested? What does one of his disciples do? Peter pulls out a sword and he starts chopping at ears. And he says to Peter, Peter, put away the sword.

[32:21] Don't you think that if I really wanted to, I could just ask my Father in heaven, and he would send 12 legions of angels to my defense?

He goes to the cross. And he's hanging there and they mock him. He saved others. You can't even save yourself. But he could.

But he's meek. A selfless strength. Because you see, if he saved himself, you and I wouldn't be saved. This beatitude, no one would be inheriting the earth.

But he does. And you see, that's where the meekness starts. And that's where it starts to well up inside of us. Is what we do in the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, it has a little simple phrase that's very important that we need to apply to our lives.

It says this, His disciples came to him. And so we come to him. We come to the one who is gentle and lowly. Who invites us.

[33:30] We come again and again to the foot of the cross. Where nothing will fit under its shadow but the poor in spirit. And those who mourn. And the meek.

I mean, there's nothing seemingly powerful here. We've got some walls. We've got some carpet. Some nice looking people. Had tea and coffee earlier today. That's not what the world says is going to change everything.

It's not the powerful. But if Jesus really triumphed through self-giving love. If his invitation to lay aside all that vain striving and come to him is actually sincere.

If he was really crowned Lord through the cross. Then blessed are the meek. Happy and flourishing are the meek. Because they are going to inherit this earth.

And they will reign with Christ forever and ever. In perfect love and joy. Thanks be to God. Let's pray to him right now. Father, we do come before you and confess our vanity.

[34:37] Lord, you know where we want to promote ourselves. Not you. You know where we would rather seek to make ourselves look great. And use our resources for us.

And propping ourselves up. Rather than for helping others. And for blessing your name. Father, we pray that you would change us. That you would give us eyes to see the meekness of Christ.

That you would give us feet by the power of the Spirit. Who run to his bosom. That we would take his yoke upon us. Because he is meek and lowly. That you are not one who will turn away the poor in spirit.

And those who mourn and the meek. But rather, you will assure us of your love. And you will equip us and send us out. Give us imaginations to see that the service to you.

Service of others in small ways. Are the things that will be celebrated for eternity. Father, we pray that this would be a place. Full of the meek.

[35:36] We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.