

Blessed are the Meek

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[0 : 00] This morning we come to the third beatitude in our series. And I want to read from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, verse 5.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Some other translations have rendered the word meekness as gentle, self-control, humility, moderation, self-effacement.

And of course for William Barclay, none of these words capture the essence or the fullness and the comprehensiveness of the word meekness. And so what he has done is to give us a free and expanded translation of this verse.

And I want to read William Barclay, Matthew, chapter 5, verse 5. Quote, And because today is Mother's Day, let me give my own rendition of William Barclay.

[1 : 40] Oh, the bliss of the mother who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time, who has every instinct and impulse and passion under control because she herself is God-controlled, who has the humility to realize her own ignorance and her own weakness.

For such a mother is a king among women. And I think it's a wonderful rendition by William Barclay. But here is the truth. It really doesn't matter how you translate this verse. We've got a problem. And I want to point out two of those.

See, for us, most of the time, meekness denotes weakness and a flabbiness and a lack of conviction. When we hear the word meek, the picture of a timid soul who shrinks in the shadows of life, who never stands up for his rights, always apologizing, always too terrified to speak his mind, and is always piously delighted in allowing everyone to walk all over him, pops up in our minds. And I think one of the most pathetic caricatures of meekness was the comic strip character, Caspar Milquetoast.

[3 : 21] This was a man anyone could take advantage of on the street, in the office, wherever he goes. And of course, when he gets home, he was pushed around by his wife.

And in a sense, we can say that Caspar was the ultimate impact husband. For many of us, Caspar Milquetoast personifies the idea of meekness.

No guts, no backbone. And one commentator has said, Such a man could not inherit even his own fireside, much less the earth.

Some kind of blessedness may await people like them in heaven, but here on earth, they get dreadfully kicked around. End of quote. Of course, we all know from experience that weaklings go to the wall.

Only the tough succeed in the wall for supremacy, and in the wall for success, in our rat race society. And this is why this whole idea of meekness, being so counter-cultural, has actually been questioned by many people.

[4 : 41] The authenticity of this passage, in Matthew chapter 5, verse 5, has been questioned by some scholars. Because the whole idea of meekness is unrealistic.

And unreasonable in our modern society. And so some have come to the conclusion that in the early centuries of the church, a Quaker pacifist type slipped this verse into the Bible.

And that is why we have it. And the best thing that can happen to all of us is to expunge it from our Bibles and get on with the real life. Of course, the virtue of meekness, the grace of meekness, is all over the Bible.

This verse is an authentic part of the New Testament. And Jesus was meek himself. The other problem that comes up in our minds when we think about meekness is the fact that in our experience, the gentle, the meek, do not inherit the earth.

It is the other way around. You inherit the earth, you possess the earth by asserting yourself, by brute force, by crafty diplomacy.

[6 : 01] You possess the earth by constantly thinking about yourself, learning for yourself, hanging out with the right crowd, at the right time, and in the right place.

And if critical events in history prove anything, it is that it pays to make a display of strength.

Whether it is in politics, or in the economy, or in law, or religion, or even in relationships, people tend to possess things by asserting themselves.

And somebody has said, I want to climb the ladder of success, and I don't care whose fingers I step on as I climb up the wrongs. That is the way of the world.

You get ahead in this world by disregarding other people, by intimidating them, and shoving them out of the way. And if you can't shove them out of the way, you step all over them to get to your destination.

[7 : 08] And I need to say that for us here this morning, that is not the way of Christ. The way of Christ, the way of God, the way of the kingdom of God, is the way of meekness.

Meekness has been God's design, and God's desire for all of us. Jesus himself, speaking in Matthew chapter 11, verses 28 to 30, invites us to learn from him, for he is meek, lowly, and humble of heart.

Paul the Apostle, in his letter to the Corinthians, Ephesians, sorry, his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4, writes, God has called us to a life of meekness.

And if this is the case, what does meekness mean? What does it mean to be meek? I understand that the Greeks used this word in three or four different ways.

They used meekness to describe a soothing medicine, a soothing balm. If you have a problem, and the doctor gives you a soothing medicine, this word meekness is used to describe that.

[8 : 51] He's also used to describe a soft, gentle breeze. A soft, gentle breeze. Not a tornado. A soft, gentle breeze.

Now just think about the picture. You're hot, and you know, the heat is so much in the southern United States or in Africa, and you get this soft, gentle breeze just blowing on you.

Or you come to church on Sunday morning feeling troubled and just clueless about things, and life is so difficult for you, and you run into these brothers and sisters who come unto you as a soothing medicine.

They come to you as a soft, gentle breeze. Just think about the refreshment that this brings to you. That is what meekness is like. It was also used to describe an animal which had been tamed to obey the command of its master.

Here is a strong, wild horse, and this horse with its strength is tamed not to renounce its strength, but to bring its strength under the control of the master.

[10 : 10] And so, biblically, therefore, we can say that meekness means strength under control. It is strength that is tamed and held under restraint for the glory of God and for the benefit of other people.

Meekness is power and energy and ability completely surrendered to God's control. And I think, in a sense, this is the miracle of the new creation in Christ.

Before you and I came to know Christ, we were wild and controlling and manipulative. We followed our own wishes and instincts. And of course, we wrote our own rules about life.

Then when we come to Christ, he changes us and transforms us. He gives us a new heart and a new desire.

And he tames our strength. And as the prophet Ezekiel wrote in Ezekiel chapter 36, God removes the heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh and gentleness.

[11 : 23] And so then, we begin to surrender ourselves to him and surrender our self-centeredness and narrowness and our own dreams and stop writing the rules and letting God write the rules for us.

We let God mold us, we let him temper us, and we let him control our lives. And so, meekness is strength under control.

Secondly, meekness is gentleness, humility, and self-effacement. I understand that the French New Testament translates this message of the 5, verse 5, as blessed are the debonair.

Blessed are the debonair. In other words, it gives you a picture of the meek person as one of God's gentle men. A meek woman is God's gentle woman, a lady, God's lady, if I may put it that way.

A meek man is God's gentle man, peaceful and unnecessarily inoffensive, who lives above the pettiness and revenge of life, whose strength is disciplined by the grace of salvation and the grace of sanctification.

[12:45] In other words, the meek person may indeed be the strongest, the most courageous, the most intelligent, that he does not make a show or display of his courage, his strength and his knowledge.

He has learned by the grace of God to surrender all of those to the divine control. Thirdly, meekness is courage and strength expressed in the face of evil and wickedness.

So we've gotten this idea that if you're meek, you're therefore supposed to be weak. Meekness for some means apathy and timidity.

It means compromise or peace at any price. Always wanting to smooth things over and refusing to confront sin and evil. But that is not a biblical view of meekness.

Jesus himself was meek and yet he confronted sin and evil. Moses is described in the Bible as the meekest man that lived on earth during his own time.

[13:59] But the Old Testament is clear that Moses confronted evil in Israel. And so meekness is the courage to confront evil and wickedness.

It is the courage to stand for the truth but here is the difference. The way you stand for the truth, the way you confront evil and sin determines whether it is meekness or arrogance.

And so God calls us to stand for the truth in our meekness with humility, with gentleness and be ready to die for the truth if God so wills.

And so our meekness will show in our willingness to be courageous and yet gentle. It will show in our willingness to put up with little honor if necessary for the kingdom of God. It will show in our willingness to be taught by the Spirit.

Our willingness to be taught by one another and to be led by Jesus Christ. Our meekness will show in our willingness to live everything ourselves and our future in the hands of God.

[15:16] Our meekness is expressed in our recognition of our sinfulness, our recognition of the fact that only by the grace of God are we accepted before God and not by anything of our own doing.

And fourthly, meekness means patience and contentment in this life. Let me apply this passage in two areas of life.

I'll start with the area of the vocation of politics and government. of course, you can fill in whatever your vocation is. I think that politicians and civic leaders, especially those who are Christians, need to manifest a little bit of meekness.

The political life is a place where you demonstrate and display your strength and your power. but I think it is terribly important for us as Christians whom God has called into the vocation of politics and the civic life or vocation in any other place in the marketplace to demonstrate for the rest of your colleagues a life of meekness.

Strength and ability under control that is used for the benefit of those to whom God has given you to lead. It is a divine vocation.

[16:55] And we need to reflect God in our various places of vocation and to honor God in that calling to which he has called you. Now, having said that, meekness does not necessarily mean that we are going to have to follow a dogmatic pacifism.

you know, if you are meek, you are therefore, as a national policy, you have to be a pacifist. If you want to prove that from the Bible, it is not from this passage.

There is need for meekness in politics, but there is also need for law and order and enforcement of law and order in politics and in every dimension of human life.

and therefore, we cannot renounce the place of strength and might in the realm of politics and the economy.

And we cannot renounce military force on the grounds of meekness. Let me, I remember, I read something some time ago about Lester B. Pearson.

[18:05] Before Lester became the Prime Minister of Canada, he was Canada's Minister of External Affairs and President of the United Nations Organization.

And some years ago when political rallies were done in the basement of churches in Canada, the good old days, when you actually talked about politics in real life and in church, I understand that he was at one of these rallies in the basement of a Christian church and they sang the hymn, Thou

whose almighty word.

We sing this hymn in our church here, Thou whose almighty word. And at the end of that hymn, Lester Pearson got up and said, here in the fourth stanza is the ideal Christian foreign policy. Wisdom, love, and might. You sing that hymn, you remember it. Wisdom, love, and might in that order. Might in the last place.

Might that is necessary and indispensable in a world peopled by international gangsters, but might that is held in wisdom and controlled by love.

[19 : 26] Might that is held in wisdom and controlled by love. And I think that is a wonderful foreign policy and national policy.

And so meekness does not mean the renunciation of strength. It does not mean the renunciation of might or power or authority. It means strength, power, and authority controlled and held in restraint under God.

And if any nation has no strength or authority, it is not really clear whether it has anything to be meek about, in the biblical sense of that word.

Secondly, we need to apply meekness in every aspect of our lives, in every station of our life. As husbands and wives, and as mothers, as employees and employers, we need to watch ourselves and control our power and authority.

We need to control our egos and tempers and our tongues and our wills so that we can deal with gentleness, with meekness, with those who love, trust, and depend upon us.

[20 : 45] We must take our meekness into our homes, into our legislature, into our offices, into our church life, and into our ministries and places of leadership and submission.

Jesus said, blessed indeed are the meek. They are blessed by God because they shall inherit the earth. They shall not take over the earth, but they shall inherit the earth.

And I think the logic is very, very clear. If the meek shall inherit the earth, then it means that the bully and the violent men and women who want to seize the earth or take control of it by sheer power and deceit will, of course, lose it.

The violent person will be a victim of his own strength and he will be, he will blunder himself into self-destruction. the violent will die by the sword.

And of course, the final analysis is that the violent who wants to seize the earth will vanish from the face of the earth. And that is God's verdict.

[22 : 08] And I think the reason is very clear. The Bible says that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness they are of. And everything that is in it all belongs to the Lord. And when men and women ignore God in their lives, they do not have a place, a right, to inherit God's earth.

Because God himself resolves the right to give his earth to whomsoever he wishes. And God will give his earth to those who are meek.

That is God's determination. And it will be given to them as a gift that will not take over. And so if God's plan for the meek is to inherit the earth, is it this earth?

Is it inherited downtown and all the buildings downtown? I don't think so. You get back into the rat race if you go that route. To inherit the earth is to receive the peace, the sense of satisfaction, the sense of contentment, the sense of joy that God gives to us in this world even in the midst of having nothing.

In this world, to inherit the earth is to receive the sense of peace and satisfaction and contentment and joy in this world. and of course, part of it is if there is meekness in our marriages, our marriages will be a lot healthier and we can inherit the earth in that sense.

[23 : 47] If there is meekness in our churches, our churches will be stronger. And if there is meekness in the workplace, both the employer and the employee and the organization will definitely benefit a lot more.

And so, as Paul says, having nothing and yet possessing all things because God is our inheritance. But possessing the earth also has a future reference.

And the future reference is the gift of eternal salvation, the gift of the new heavens and the new earth that Revelation 21 talks about. God in this new heaven and the new earth, God will answer and provide the fundamental longing for land and space that each and every one of us have.

We all have a longing for home. We have a longing for land. We have a longing for space where we can be totally free, free from sin, free from Satan and free from oppression and free from the rat race.

God will give it to us as a gift. If we suffer with him, we shall reign with him, as the Bible says. How then can we become meek?

[25 : 10] Somebody asked me this question this week. I said, I'm preaching on meekness. He said, okay, that's wonderful, but how do I become meek? And I thought, yeah, that's a good question. Good question. The Bible looks at meekness as a gift of grace and the fruit of the Spirit.

And when you and I receive Jesus Christ by faith, we receive meekness as a gift of grace and as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. If you are a believer, you have the capacity to be meek because the Spirit of God is in you and God's grace of meekness is inside of you.

But also, meekness is a command of God. It is a divine obligation to use the gift that God has given to you and to work out the fruit of the Spirit of meekness which God has given to you.

And that means a life of obedience, a life of prayer and dependence on God Himself. But I think there's one practical thing that is important if we're going to pursue the life of meekness and that is this.

We must remove ourselves from the center of life. As long as you are at the center of life, as long as you want to control everything, you're never going to be meek because you will not listen to God and you will not listen to anybody.

[26 : 39] You are still in control. And so for us to be meek, we need to put God in the center of things and remove ourselves from the center and we need to put others in the center and remove ourselves from there.

Blessed indeed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. And let me conclude with this quotation from Leonard Griffiths and I quote, the meek have strength but they have learned to control their strength.

They know their rights but they do not insist on their rights. They have ability but they do not advertise and assert their ability.

They have grievances but they do not press their grievances. They have advantage but they never take advantage. they cooperate rather than dominate.

They assist rather than accuse. They forgive rather than avenge. And of course, may God enable us to be truly meek by his grace.

[27 : 54] Amen.