

Happy Are the Meek

Scripture: Matthew 5:5

Code: 2200

INTRODUCTION

A. The Surprise

In Matthew 5:5 Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth." That was a shocking surprise to His Jewish audience, just as the first two Beatitudes were. Jesus called for a standard of living that was foreign to those who heard Him. They knew how to be spiritually proud and self-sufficient, and were good at following an external form of religion. They thought they could survive spiritually through their own strength, wisdom, and resources. They expected that when the Messiah arrived He would say, "I am here to commend you for your wonderful spirituality. God is very pleased with you. I am here to usher you into the kingdom." But the Lord's first recorded sermon did not confirm such expectations.

B. The Progression of Thought

Meekness is different from being broken or poor in spirit, though the Greek root word is the same. Brokenness of spirit is negative in that it focuses on man's sinfulness and results in mourning. Meekness is positive in that it focuses on God's holiness and man's response to that holiness. They are two sides of the same idea. We are to be poor in spirit because we are sinners and meek because God is so holy in comparison to us.

There's a clear progression of thought in the Beatitudes: first one senses his own sinfulness (Matt. 5:3), which results in mourning (v. 4). Then he focuses on God's holiness, which makes him meek (v. 5). That in turn produces a hunger for righteousness (v. 6).

Our world is still having trouble with Matthew 5:5. People associate happiness with success, power, confidence, and conquest. Jesus' kingdom is for those who are meek.

C. The Standard We Are Called To

1. Seen in the New Testament

- a) Ephesians 4:1-2--Paul said, "I ... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation to which ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness."
- b) Titus 3:2--We're "to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men."
- c) Colossians 3:12--"Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, [and] meekness."

2. Seen in the Old Testament

a) Psalm 22:26--"The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord that seek him; your heart shall live forever." Everlasting life belongs to the meek--not the proud.

b) Psalm 25:9--"The meek will He guide in justice; and the meek will he teach his way." God identifies with the meek.

c) Psalm 147:6--"The Lord lifteth up the meek."

d) Isaiah 29:19--"The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."

Salvation, guidance, blessing, and joy are for the meek. Christ said that His kingdom would be occupied by people characterized by meekness.

LESSON

I. WHAT IS MEEKNESS?

Since the only people who are truly happy are those who are meek, we had better understand what meekness is. Meekness is commonly defined as a deficiency in spirit and courage. But that's not a biblical definition of meekness. Jesus wasn't saying, "Blessed are the cowardly."

A. The Ingredients of Meekness

1. Gentleness

The Greek word translated "meek" in Matthew 5:5 comes from the root word *praos*, which means "mild," "gentle," and "soft." A meek person is gentle, tenderhearted, patient, and submissive. The Greeks used the word to describe a soothing medicine, a gentle breeze, or a domesticated colt.

2. Being like Jesus

In 2 Corinthians 10:1 Paul speaks of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Matthew 21:5, speaking of Jesus, says, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass." Jesus rode into Jerusalem on low-class transportation. He was known for His meekness.

3. Power under control

Meekness is a by-product of humbling one's self before God. It is the taming of a lion--not the killing of it.

a) Ephesians 4:26--"Be ye angry, and sin not." The only legitimate form of anger is righteous anger. That means anger must be under control and expressed for the right reasons at the right time. We are never to be angry because of personal offense.

b) Proverbs 25:28--"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." That kind of person is out of control and needs to learn to contain himself.

c) Proverbs 16:32--"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city."

True meekness is power under control. We can see that in light of the different ways the Greek *praos* was used. Medicine taken in the proper dosage can be helpful, but an overdose may kill; a domesticated horse is useful but an undomesticated one is destructive; and a gentle breeze cools and soothes, but a hurricane kills.

4. A spirit not given to vengeance

A meek individual can joyfully accept the plundering of his possessions because he knows he has "in heaven a better and enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34). Because he has died to self he doesn't worry about injury and he bears no grudges. A humble shepherd boy in *The Pilgrim's Progress* said it well: "He that is down needs fear no fall" (John Bunyan [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967], p. 219). The meek person is not concerned about defending himself because he knows he doesn't deserve anything. He doesn't run around trying to get his due.

B. An Illustration of Meekness

First Peter 2:21-22 says, "Hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." Christ never did anything wrong. All the accusations against Him in the trials prior to His crucifixion were false. He was punished, abused, and mocked without justification. Verse 23 says, "When he was reviled, [He] reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

Jesus never defended Himself. But when His Father's Temple was desecrated He twice made a whip and beat those who had defiled it (John 2:13-16; Matt. 21:12-13). He condemned the hypocritical religious leaders of Israel and fearlessly proclaimed divine judgment unrepentant sinners, yet the Bible says that He was meek. Meekness is not impotence but power under control.

After you've acknowledged your sin and mourned over it you see God's holiness and are willing to die to defend His holy name. Many who heard Jesus were not meek. They spent much of their time defending their own holiness and hypocrisy. They lashed out at anyone who offended them. Their power was out of control.

II. HOW DOES MEEKNESS MANIFEST ITSELF?

A. Five Positive Examples

1. Abraham

While Abraham was living in Ur of the Chaldees, God made a covenant with him, saying, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 12:1-2). When Abraham left Ur he took his nephew Lot with him. Genesis 13:7 says, "There was a strife between the herdsmen of [Abraham's] cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle." In the dispute Abraham could have pulled rank and chosen the best land for himself--he was the one with the covenant while Lot was essentially tagging along with him. However, Abraham said to Lot, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left" (vv. 8-9).

Abraham didn't want to argue with Lot so he let him take whatever land he wanted--and Lot took the best. Now that's an illustration of meekness. Abraham didn't enforce his position of power and privilege because He knew that God was in control and would work things out. We need to display the same kind of meekness in our own lives. When we understand we are nothing more than sinners, we will "give preference to one another in honor" (Rom. 12:10, NASB) as Abraham did.

2. Joseph

Joseph's brothers hated him because he was their father's favorite child (Gen. 37:3-4). They sold him into slavery and he was taken to Egypt. Years later a famine forced Joseph's brothers to travel to Egypt to buy grain. By that time Joseph had risen to the rank of prime minister. He was second only to Pharaoh in authority. He was in charge of the grain supplies and his brothers, not recognizing him, asked to buy grain. Joseph, instead of being bitter, looked at his brothers with love and gave them what they needed. He noticed that his youngest brother Benjamin wasn't there and longed to see him. He was a mighty man but he was also meek: he kept his power under control.

3. David

a) His meekness towards Saul

First Samuel 24-26 detail how King Saul chased David in order to kill him. Saul hated him because he knew God had anointed David to be the next king over Israel. The fact that Saul's son Jonathan loved David made matters worse. On one occasion during the chase David had the opportunity to kill Saul while he was asleep (1 Sam. 26:7-12). On another occasion he could have killed Saul while hidden in a cave (1 Sam. 24:3-7). But even though David was the anointed king he didn't kill Saul. He would not act on his own behalf--only God's.

b) His meekness towards Shimei

Second Samuel 16 tells how David and his son Absalom warred against each other. Absalom chased his father out of Jerusalem. While David was in the wilderness one of Saul's relatives, Shimei, came up to David and started cursing him. In effect he told David that he was getting his just desserts. Abishai, who was with David, said, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord, the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head" (v. 9). But David told him to leave Shimei alone--he wouldn't act in his own defense. His attitude was one of subservience, trust, and submission towards God's will.

God works only with those who are subject to Him, not with those who do their own thing. In Matthew 5:5 Christ was saying His kingdom will be occupied with people who are submissive.

4. Moses

Numbers 12:3 tells us "the man Moses was very meek, above all the men who were upon the face of the earth." Yet he was the man who killed an Egyptian to protect an Israelite slave. On behalf of God he told Pharaoh, "Let my people go" (Ex. 5:1). When Moses came down to the camp of Israel after receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, he saw them worshipping a golden calf and participating in an orgy. "Moses' anger burned, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and broke them beneath the mount. And he took the calf which they had made, and burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it" (Ex. 32:19-20).

Now that doesn't sound like a meek man according to our society's standards. But the reason Moses was so angry was that the Israelites had violated one of God's commandments: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). He was defending God. When God chose Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex. 3:7-10) Moses tried to decline. He thought himself inadequate and uneloquent. He would not defend himself before God, but he would defend the Lord before anyone. That's what meekness is all about.

5. Paul

In Philippians 3:3 Paul says, "[We] have no confidence in the flesh" but in Philippians 4:13 he says, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." Paul was a meek man because he put no confidence in himself but had great confidence in Christ.

B. A Negative Example: Uzziah

Second Chronicles 26 tells about King Uzziah, a great king and military leader of Judah. We are told "he went forth and warred against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities about Ashdod, and among the Philistines. And God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians who dwelt in Gurbaal, and the Meunim. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah; and his name spread abroad even to the entrance of Egypt; for he strengthened himself exceedingly" (vv. 6-8).

His army was huge: "the whole number of the heads of the father's houses of the mighty men of valor were two thousand and six hundred. And under their hand was an army, three hundred thousand and seven thousand and five hundred, that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and coats of mail, and bows, and slings to cast stones. And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong" (vv. 12-15). God gave Uzziah victory in his military conquests.

Verse 16 records the beginning of Uzziah's downfall: "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction; for he transgressed against the Lord, his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense." Only the priests were allowed to burn incense but Uzziah apparently believed he was so great that he could usurp the function of a priest. That angered God, who struck Uzziah with leprosy. So "Uzziah, the king, was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a separate house, being a leper" (v. 21). A proud man inevitably disobeys God. A meek obeys Him.

III. WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF MEEKNESS?

A. Receiving Blessing from God

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek" (Matt. 5:5). If you are meek you will be happy. Christ wasn't talking about the world's flippant, circumstantial happiness, but about a true and lasting joy.

B. Inheriting the Earth

The meek will inherit the earth. Long before God promised Israel the land of Palestine He gave man the earth. God told Adam and Eve to "be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28). According to Matthew 5:5 when you become a believer you enter the kingdom and receive the original inheritance of dominion over the earth that was given to Adam and Eve.

Ultimately believers will possess the earth. They are the meek who will reign on the earth with the Lord Jesus Christ in the coming kingdom (Rev. 20:6).

1. In the future

a) The inheritance of Israel

Today Israel possesses only part of the land that God promised Abraham, which extends east all the way to the Euphrates River (Gen. 15:18-21). So there is a sense in which God's original promise is unfulfilled. Isaiah 57:13 and 60:21 say a day is coming when the Messiah will give Israel all its land. The Jewish people in Christ's time thought the kingdom belonged to the strong, proud, and defiant. But Jesus said the earth will belong to the meek. The meek, part of which will include redeemed Israel (Rom. 11:1-31) won't take the earth for themselves--Christ will give it to them.

b) The inheritance of Christians

An emphatic pronoun in the Greek text makes Matthew 5:5 read, "Blessed are the meek, for only they will inherit the earth." Proud people won't inherit the earth. Jesus said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

The Greek word translated "inherit" (kleronomeo) means "to receive an allotted portion." The earth is the allotted portion of the meek.

(1) Psalm 37:9-11--"Evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait upon the Lord shall inherit the earth.... The meek shall inherit the earth." To the righteous who wondered at the prosperity of the wicked the psalmist said, "Fret not thyself because of evildoers.... Trust in the Lord, and do good.... Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him" (vv. 1-5).

(2) 1 Corinthians 3:21-23--"Let no man glory in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

(3) 1 Corinthians 6:2-3--"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?... Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"

(4) Psalm 149:4--"The Lord taketh pleasure in his people; he will beautify the meek with salvation." A day is coming when Christians will partake with Israel in the Kingdom. The Lord will take the earth away from the wicked and give it to us.

2. In the present

There is a sense in which the Kingdom is already ours now--it's as though its in escrow. The fact that I will one day possess the earth gives me a sense of possessing it right now. The nineteenth-century hymnwriter Wade Robinson spoke of that reality in his hymn, "I Am His and He Is Mine":

Heav'n above is softer blue, The earth around is sweeter green; Something lives in ev'ry hue
Christless eyes have never seen! Birds with gladder songs o'er flow, Flow'rs with deeper beauties shine,
Since I know, as now I know, I am His, and He is mine.

George MacDonald wrote, "We cannot see the world as God means it [in the future], save in proportion as our souls are meek. In meekness only are we its inheritors. Meekness alone makes the spiritual retina pure to receive God's things as they are, mingling with them neither imperfection nor impurity of its own" (Life Essential: The Hope of the Gospel [Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw Pub., 1974], pp. 45-46). Because we are in the kingdom we see the world in a way different from non-believers. The earth is ours now and forever.

IV. WHY IS MEEKNESS NECESSARY?

A. It Is Necessary for Salvation

Only the meek will be saved. Psalm 149:4 says the Lord "will beautify the meek with salvation." A person who doesn't come to God with a broken spirit, mourning over his sin, and recognizing God's holiness cannot be saved.

B. It Is Commanded

Zephaniah 2:3 commands us to "seek meekness."

C. It Is Necessary for Receiving God's Word

James 1:21 says, "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." A

person who doesn't have a humble spirit can't receive God's Word.

D. It Is Necessary for Effective Witnessing

You can't witness effectively if you are filled with pride. First Peter 3:15 says, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."

E. It Gives Glory to God

First Peter 3 says not to adorn yourself externally if you want to glorify God. Rather, adorn yourself with "a meek and quiet spirit" (v. 4).

V. HOW CAN I KNOW IF I AM MEEK?

A. You will get angry only when God is dishonored

B. You will respond humbly and obediently to God's Word

C. You will make peace

Those who are meek forgive, restore others, and make peace. Ephesians 4:2-3 says we are to be characterized by "lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Only meek people make peace and preserve unity.

D. You will receive criticism well

Do you love those who offer you criticism? If you are meek you will.

E. You will be gentle in instructing others

Second Timothy 2:24-25 says, "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose him."

Conclusion

Meekness is power under control. It shows itself when you seek to defend God, not yourself. It results in blessing and in inheriting the earth. It characterizes every true believer because it accompanies salvation, is commanded by God, is needed for receiving and communicating His Word, and glorifies Him. Examine yourself to see whether you are truly meek.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What did Jesus' Jewish audience expect the Messiah to say to them when He came? What happened instead?
2. Explain the distinction between brokenness of spirit and meekness.
3. What kind of people is Jesus' Kingdom for?
4. How does the New Testament describe those who are meek?
5. What does the Old Testament say about those who are meek?
6. What does the Greek root word for "meek" mean? How did the Greeks use that word ?
7. Illustrate meekness as power under control.
8. Why don't meek people worry about injury or bear grudges (Heb. 10:34)?
9. How do we know Jesus was meek?
10. How did Abraham exemplify meekness? What does a meek person do (Rom. 12:10)?
11. Why didn't David kill Saul? Why did he tell Abishai to leave Shimei alone?
12. What does Numbers 12:3 tell us about Moses? How does he illustrate what meekness is all about?
13. Why can we conclude that the apostle Paul was a meek man (Phil. 3:3; 4:13)?
14. What are the results of meekness?
15. What promise is made to Israel in Isaiah 57:13 and 60:21?
16. What does the Greek word translated "inherit" mean (Matt. 5:5)? Using Scripture, explain how we know that the meek will inherit the earth.
17. Why is meekness necessary? Support your answer with Scripture.
18. How can you know if you are meek?

Pondering the Principles

1. What is the practical cost of taking offense only when God Himself is attacked? J.C. Ryle wrote that a Christian "must be content to be thought ill of by man if he pleases God. He must count it no strange thing to be mocked, ridiculed, slandered, persecuted and even hated. He must not be surprised to find his opinions and practices in religion despised and held up to scorn. He must submit to be thought by many a fool, an enthusiast and a fanatic, to have his words perverted and his actions misrepresented. In fact, he must not marvel if some call him mad" (Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots [Welwyn, England: Evangelical Press, 1979], p. 69). To follow Christ will cost many dearly, but will result in eternal blessing. Are you willing to pay the cost?

2. So far our examination of the Beatitudes may make Christianity seem to be a dismal prospect. Christians are to be poor in spirit, mourn over sin, and be meek. A person might ask himself, What hope is there in those things? But each of those attitudes demonstrates the new nature of the believer. J.W. Alexander said, "No sooner does the believer's eye fairly open upon the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, than he rejects all other modes of pardon and peace. Thus the beggar abandons his rags, when gifted with white raiment. Thus the shipwrecked mariner forsakes his parting raft, to be received upon some rescuing vessel. All the past, with its imperfections and its cares, is forever thrown into the shade, while the believer exults in the work of his Redeemer" (God Is Love [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985], pp. 276-77). Strive to focus on the Person of Jesus Christ, and it will be less hard to be meek in a proud world.

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