

"BLESSED ARE THE MEEK"

I. Introduction

- A. The qualities that are set forth in the Beatitudes are not natural.
 - 1. No one is naturally meek, at least not in the sense that Jesus is using the word here.
 - 2. God creates meekness, along with the character traits described in the other Beatitudes, in the lives of his redeemed people.
- B. These qualities are also counter-cultural.
 - 1. This is especially evident with regard to the third Beatitude.
 - 2. Ours is an age of self-expression, self-promotion, self-image, self-realization, self-fulfillment.
 - 3. As we will soon discover, these things are the exact opposite of what it means to be meek.

II. What Is Meekness?

- A. Meekness is a word that is easily misunderstood.
 - 1. People often associate it with weakness or blandness, but that is not what Jesus means by it.
 - 2. Before we clarify what Jesus does mean, it will be helpful to remember that there is a sequence to the qualities that are listed in the Beatitudes.
 - 3. Meekness flows from the things that Jesus described in verses 3 and 4.
 - 4. It is the product of knowing your spiritual poverty and mourning over that poverty.

5. It comes from having a true view of yourself and being humbled by what you see.

B. Meekness is a spiritual quality.

1. It is not the same thing as shyness.
2. It is not simply a matter of having an agreeable personality.
3. There are plenty of non-Christians who are shy or agreeable.
4. Meekness is a matter of relating to others in view of who you know yourself to be before God.
5. The more mindful a person is of his spiritual poverty, the more patient and gentle and self-controlled he will be in his dealings with other people.
6. Meekness causes a person to stop worrying about always insisting on his rights, to stop feeling that he always has to express his opinion, to stop being obsessed with what others think about him.
7. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains, "We spend the whole of our lives watching ourselves. But when a man becomes meek he has finished with all that; he no longer worries about himself and what other people say." [Lloyd-Jones, 69]

C. This relates to another observation that Lloyd-Jones makes about the Beatitudes: not only are they sequential; they are also progressively more difficult.

1. It is one thing to acknowledge your poverty of spirit before God, but it is something else entirely to have to relate to others as one who is poor in spirit.
2. John Stott expresses this well when he says, "I myself am quite happy to recite the General Confession in church and call myself a 'miserable sinner.' It causes me no great

problem. I can take it in my stride. But let somebody else come up to me after church and call be a miserable sinner, and I want to punch him on the nose!" [43]

3. Stott's point is not that we should always be willing let other people insult us.
4. It is simply that it is much easier for us to humble ourselves before God than it is for us to humble ourselves before other people.
5. Or perhaps it would be better to say that it is easier for us to go through the motions of humbling ourselves before God than it is for us to demonstrate our humility in concrete and observable ways.

D. We find further teaching on meekness in the letter of James.

1. In chapter 1 of his letter, James says this to the Christians to whom he is writing: "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." (James 1:19–21)
2. This tells us that meekness is characterized by teachability.
3. The meek person is slow to speak and quick to listen.
4. And he especially listens to the Word of God, knowing that this is the primary means by which God carries out his saving work in the lives of his people.

E. The Lord has provided us with an extended description of meekness in Psalm 37.

1. This psalm assures us that the meek do not need to worry about being trampled down by those who are always looking out for number one.

2. It teaches us to look at things from a long-term point of view.
 3. David reminds us that the only thing that will last forever is God's kingdom.
 4. Those who have no share in the kingdom of God have no lasting hope, no matter how much they prosper in this world.
 5. When we keep this in perspective, we will not fret over the fact that selfishness and evil are so often rewarded in this life.
- F. Psalm 37 also helps us to see that the meek person responds to trying circumstances with patient faith instead of panic or defensiveness.
1. He places the matter into the Lord's hands.
 2. The key word in this psalm is the word "Wait."
 3. Meekness is demonstrated by its willingness to wait upon the Lord.
 4. In this life, things do not always go well for those who fear the Lord.
 5. But the thing that we have to remember is that we do not have the full picture yet.

III. Learning Meekness

- A. As we have noted in the previous sermons in this series, the Beatitudes are not character traits that we need to cultivate in order to obtain God's blessing.
1. Jesus is not saying that if you become sufficiently meek then God will bless you.

2. It is the other way around.
 3. Meekness itself is a blessing from God.
 4. God makes us meek.
 5. But this does not mean we become meek instantaneously.
 6. Meekness is part of the fruit of the Spirit.
 7. It is something that is cultivated over the Christian's entire lifetime.
- B. God produces meekness in us by breaking our pride.
1. As Sinclair Ferguson explains, God "sends trials, reveals the secret ambitions we have hidden in our hearts, and uncovers our reliance upon ourselves. Then, as he patiently changes us, he develops within us this meekness of character." [22]
 2. We see this in the example of Moses, who is described in Numbers 12 as the meekest person on the earth (v. 3).
 3. Moses was not naturally meek.
 4. He certainly wasn't acting meekly when he struck down the Egyptian and expected his fellow Hebrews to rally around him.
 5. God made Moses meek by humbling him.
 6. He caused him to live as a shepherd in Midian for forty years.
 7. God works meekness in us in the same way.
 8. He humbles us so that we don't lose sight of our spiritual poverty and our complete dependence upon him.

- C. We find another reference to meekness in Matthew 11, where Jesus summarizes the gospel as an invitation to the school of meekness.
1. He says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28–30)
 2. The word that the ESV translates as "gentle" is the same word that is translated as "meek" in the Beatitudes.
 3. Jesus says that he is meek.
 4. We might wonder how he could say this.
 5. If meekness flows from our awareness of our poverty of spirit, then in what sense was Jesus meek?
 6. We have to remember that while Jesus was without sin, he fully experienced what it meant to be a creature.
 7. More than that, he was tempted in every way that we are.
 8. His meekness stems from his willingness to allow his divine glory to be hidden.
 9. It comes from his ability to sympathize with us in our weakness.
 10. Because he knows our frame firsthand, we can have confidence that he will always be exceedingly patient with us.
 11. Isaiah describes Jesus' meekness this way: "a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench" (Isaiah 42:3).
- D. Jesus says that we need to learn meekness from him.

1. He summons us to take his yoke upon us and learn from him.
2. If you are a Christian, then you have been enrolled in Christ's school of meekness.
3. This is a good thing.
4. Without meekness, the trials of this life will weigh heavily upon you.
5. This is why Jesus issues his summons in Matthew 11 to those who are "heavy laden."
6. But when you learn meekness from Christ, you find rest for your soul.
7. As Alexander Whyte explains, "It is not your burden that so weighs you down. It is your proud, rebellious, self-seeking, self-pleasing heart... Get a new heart from Christ -- a humble, meek, lowly heart, and your yoke from that day will be easy and your burden light." [*The Walk, Conversation, and Character of Jesus Christ Our Lord*, 320-1]
8. God knows best what is needed to complete the work he has begun in you.
9. As you grow in meekness, you will learn to submit to the hardships and sorrows the Lord ordains for you.
10. Whatever your burden is, it will be light because you are trusting that God is using it to work out his good purposes for you.

IV. The Reward of Meekness

- A. We turn now to the last part of the third Beatitude: the reward that is promised to the meek.
 1. Jesus says that the meek will inherit the earth.

2. This goes against common sense.
 3. When we look around us, we see the world being run by those who are aggressive, those who are strong, those who promote themselves and their agenda.
 4. But this is where we need to remember the lesson that the Lord teaches us in Psalm 37.
 5. We need to keep a long view, trusting that God will set all things right in his appointed time.
 6. Hope that is seen is not hope.
 7. Because we hope for what we do not yet see, we wait for it with patience.
- B. This is why meekness is one of the qualities that most clearly sets the Christian apart from the people of the world.
1. Everyone else in the world is trying to lay claim to the world.
 2. But Christians can rest upon Christ's promise that we will inherit the earth.
 3. Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out how Christians often lose sight of this.
 4. Too often, we put all of our hopes into creating large organizations to consolidate our influence in the world.
 5. But Lloyd-Jones reminds us that Jesus says, "Blessed are the *meek*," not those who trust to their own organizing, not those who trust to their own powers and abilities and their own institutions." [64]
 6. We have to be content to live as pilgrims in this present age.

- C. While this is certainly true, there is a sense in which we could say that the meek person already possesses the earth.
1. Because he is satisfied and content with what he has, he is set free from the anxious striving that so characterizes the people of the world.
 2. As Paul says to the Philippians, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:11–13)

V. Conclusion

- A. Sinclair Ferguson writes that "There is probably no more beautiful quality in a Christian than meekness. It enhances manliness; it adorns femininity. It is a jewel polished by grace. But it is all too rare. Is that because so few of us know what it is to be poor in spirit and to mourn for our sins?" [23]
- B. We all need to grow in meekness.
- C. And the way to do so is to grow in your knowledge of God.
- D. In his light we see more clearly who we really are.
- E. Listen to these thoughts from John Calvin: "As long as we do not look beyond the earth, being quite content with our own righteousness, wisdom, and virtue, we flatter ourselves most sweetly, and fancy ourselves all but demigods. Suppose we but once begin to raise our thoughts to God, and to ponder his nature, and how completely perfect are his righteousness, wisdom, and power -- the straightedge to which we must be shaped. Then, what masquerading earlier as righteousness was pleasing in us will soon grow filthy in its consummate wickedness... man is never sufficiently touched and affected by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God's majesty." [*Institutes*, 1.1.2-3]

- F. The more you keep your eyes fixed upon Jesus and his meekness, the more you will find him creating a meek spirit within you.