

The Meek Pronounced Blessed

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

Matthew 5:5

The longer one studies great paintings, the more fascinating details one will discover. Art lovers can stand for hours before a famous painting and become engrossed with all its nuances. Such is also the case with the spiritual portrait the Lord Jesus Christ has painted for us in the Beatitudes—a precise and profound sevenfold portrait of the Christian. Thus far we have examined two of the main features of that portrait: the blessedness of the poor in spirit and of them that mourn.

We observed that Jesus begins by defining the inner disposition of true Christians: they will always be conscious of their spiritual poverty and will always grieve over their sinfulness. We will now proceed to consider the third trait of this verbal portrait—namely, that as mourning sinners, Christians will also be meek. This will complete Christ’s description of the inner disposition that culminates in a hungering and thirsting after righteousness (addressed in the fourth and central beatitude).

As we focus on this third trait of meekness, we will first consider the gracious character of the meek—a meekness not found in the natural man but rather a trait that is evidence of regenerating grace. Second, we will consider the blessed inheritance of the meek, for Christ tells us that they shall inherit the earth.

The Gracious Character of the Meek

No one will ever manifest the meekness that Jesus speaks of here unless he is experientially acquainted with his spiritual poverty. This meekness is therefore utterly foreign to the natural man. In conversation, the word *meek* is commonly used to describe someone whom we consider to be a pushover. One will often say, “Such and such a person is as meek as a lamb.” We usually don’t mean this in a flattering way.

However, Christ is not speaking of such meekness or weakness. Rather, Christ says that a believer’s meekness will be a tangible fruit of the Holy Spirit’s ministry within the soul. In Galatians 5:23, Paul therefore defines meekness as being one of the Spirit’s fruits, for we are by nature anything but meek. Fallen man is preoccupied with himself. He loves himself, worships himself, seeks himself, and cares only about himself. Men are by nature proud, arrogant, boastful, and narcissistic. Their disposition will be the opposite of what Christ describes here, for by nature we are blind to God’s greatness, holiness, and majesty.

In this beatitude, however, Christ says that His people, rather than thinking highly of themselves, think highly of God. This is a preeminent feature of the meekness Christ is defining for us. This mind-set will be the fruit of becoming aware of who God is. When God becomes real in our lives, we will stand in awe of God rather than ourselves!

When we begin to see ourselves as God sees us, all pride, arrogance, and boastfulness will vanish. We will then take our proper place before Him. Such a mind-set was utterly absent in the heart of the Pharisee in the parable of the publican and Pharisee. Although he thought of himself as the quintessence of godliness, he was utterly blind to who he really was before God. Not one shred of meekness could be found in this man; he was thoroughly impressed with himself.

Instead of humbling himself, he told God that He should be thankful for a man like him—a man not like others.

The publican, however, had learned to see himself as God saw him. He did not even dare to lift up his eyes; rather, he smote his breast and humbly cried out, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” One of the evidences of the grace of God is genuine humility, which flows from meekness. Consequently, when we begin to see ourselves as God sees us, we will come down from our pedestals and take our proper place in the dust before Him.

We clearly see such a manifestation of God’s grace in the life of David. Although he had fallen deeply into sin, rather than killing Nathan when he came and boldly said, “Thou art the man”—as any king would have done to someone who had dared to accuse him—David humbled himself. At that moment, he saw his sin in light of who God is, and that caused the great king of Israel to humble himself deeply before God.

Thus, the meekness of the Christian is an appropriate and biblically informed fear of God. The Bible frequently speaks of this fear. He who fears God will show awe, respect, submission, and humility before God. A meek person does not stand in awe of men or himself; rather, he stands in awe of God.

Several scriptural examples will illustrate such meekness. Abraham was a great and mighty man, yet when he was in the presence of God, prayerfully wrestling for Lot and his family and the preservation of Sodom, he addressed God with meekness, saying, “I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD, which am but dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27). There is not a whiff of either any pride or arrogance, and all he could say is, “Lord, I am but dust and ashes.”

Moses was not naturally easygoing and mild. He had a fiery temperament. Think of how he responded when he saw an Egyptian abusing one of his fellow Israelites! He killed that Egyptian. Later, in the wilderness, Moses became angry with the rebellion of his own people. In a moment of anger, rather than speaking to the rock as God had commanded, he took a rod and smote the rock. His natural inclination in unguarded moments was still to explode in anger.

Yet what does Scripture say about Moses? “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). How did a man with this fiery nature become the meekest man on earth? The answer is that Moses became acquainted with God! He had spent forty years alone in the wilderness, and there God cured him of all pride and arrogance. Then, at the end of that period, God appeared to him in a burning bush on Mount Horeb, where he was told to take off his shoes, for he was standing on holy ground.

Later, after he had led Israel out of Egypt, Moses met God again when twice he ascended Mount Sinai (Horeb). That experience was so extraordinary that when Moses descended from the mountain, he had to cover his face because of the emanating glory of God. He had seen the glory of God, and those unforgettable experiences transformed Moses into a meek and humble man. He had seen himself against the background of God’s glory and majesty!

Scripture tells us that God described Job as a man of remarkable godliness. Yet Job, too, had to learn in a very painful way that he was a sinful man. When God permitted Satan to take away his riches, his children, and his health, and when his friends mistakenly assumed that God was punishing Job for his wickedness, his unsanctified flesh reared its ugly head. Sadly, near the end of the book, he was still justifying himself. He was angry and did not think he was deserving of all that was happening to him.

But then, toward the very end, everything changes. Why? God summoned Job to appear before Him, saying, “Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me” (Job 38:2–3). He was

unable to answer a single question, and by the time God is finished speaking, all Job could say was, “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee?” (Job 40:4). As a result of that encounter with God, Job saw himself as God saw him, compelling him to take his proper place before God. In Job 42:6, he no longer speaks highly of himself, justifies himself, or defends himself. A meek Job now confesses, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” When God’s Spirit works savingly in our lives, Job’s confession will also become an experiential reality for us. God will teach us that essential lesson to make room in our hearts for the gospel and for His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah, called to be a prophet, had a remarkable vision in the temple of God’s majesty and glory (Isa. 6). The manifestation of God’s glory was such that the pillars of the temple were trembling. When Isaiah sees this extraordinary display, he said, “Woe is me! for I am undone; . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” That vision transformed Isaiah into a meek and humble man!

How about Peter, who could be so bold and arrogant—who had even briefly walked on water? In Luke 5, Christ commanded him to cast forth his net again after he and his fellow disciples had not caught anything after fishing all night. After Peter reluctantly obeyed this command, the net was so full that it would certainly have broken if he had not gotten some help. At that moment, Peter saw a glimpse of the divine glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he said in astonishment, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). That will be our response when God becomes real to us. A bold and impetuous Peter became a meek man!

What about Saul of Tarsus, the proud, boastful, brilliant, and arrogant Pharisee? These religious leaders thought very highly of themselves, and so did Saul, who once viewed himself as a Pharisee of the Pharisees. In his own mind, he towered above all his peers—until he met the exalted Christ on the road to Damascus. He then fell to the ground and cried out, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). Saul of Tarsus became a meek man. A genuine and experiential encounter with God will transform proud sinners.

When God, by His Spirit, works savingly in our hearts, He will cause us to become acquainted with Himself so that nothing of our pride, arrogance, or boastfulness will remain. When He compels us to take our proper place, we will realize that as guilty and bankrupt sinners we cannot stand before Him. In Psalm 130:3 the psalmist says, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” David here confessed that if God were to hold him accountable for his life, his actions, and his sins, he could not stand before Him for one moment. God will lead all of His children to the point that this will also become their confession—whatever the unique circumstances of their lives may be.

Keep in mind that Christ here delineates what all Christians have in common. Whether I am a Timothy that fears God from his youth or a Saul of Tarsus, whether I am a David or a Manasseh, whether I am a John or a Levi, or whether I am a Lydia or a jailor, all believers will be taught by the Holy Spirit to humble themselves before God and confess, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified” (Psa. 143:2). Unless there is such an experiential awareness of who God is, and that He “will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex. 34:7), we will never see our need for the Savior and hunger and thirst after Him and His righteousness.

But when that need becomes an experiential reality, Christ will become so precious to our souls that we behold His beauty as the all-sufficient, suitable, willing, and able Savior of sinners. As a meek and humble sinner, I will see in Him exactly what I need. I will then hunger and thirst after Jesus as a most precious Redeemer, so that in Him I may be restored into a right relationship with God.

As the Holy Spirit increasingly sheds light on who we are in ourselves, Jesus will become more precious and we will hunger and thirst after His righteousness. We will increasingly learn to trust in nothing other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Therefore, the beatitude of meekness will never be present without the traits of the other beatitudes. Only they who are poor in spirit, who mourn, and who are meek will experience salvation. We therefore read in Psalm 147:6, “The LORD lifteth up the meek,” and in Psalm 149:4, “He will beautify the meek with salvation.”

Meekness is also an abiding spiritual character trait and thus one of the components of Christlikeness. Christ did not often give a description of Himself. However, He did say one thing about Himself in Matthew 11:29: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” The Lord Jesus Christ perfectly manifested that meekness in his humanity, living in perfect submission to his heavenly father. He honored His heavenly Father, and as the Mediator He knew His proper place at all times.

And so this meekness, this humble disposition of heart—the humbleness that flows out of living in *coram Deo*, or in the presence of God—means we live our lives in the experiential awareness of God’s omnipresence. When we live in that awareness, we will be a meek people. Recognizing how gracious God has been to us will render us gentle, patient, and forgiving toward others. When we learn to take our proper place before God, we will also be content with the circumstances of life that God has sovereignly decreed for us.

We need to understand, however, that biblical and gracious meekness does not make us pushovers. Instead, our reverential awe for God and His Word will motivate us to take a strong stand for Him. To be truly meek therefore means that when our own name and reputation are at stake, we will behave as lambs, whereas when God’s name and reputation are at stake, we will behave as lions. By nature, the reverse will be true. When someone offends us, we will respond like lions, and when God’s name is taken in vain, we behave like lambs. However, when God becomes real and we live in *coram Deo*, our names will no longer matter. Then only God’s name and honor will matter.

Therefore, when Moses came down from the mountain, he cast the tablets of the law on the ground—not because he was being either dishonored or offended but because he witnessed how greatly the people were dishonoring God. Having just been in the presence of God, he was meek and therefore filled with holy anger. When Jesus saw merchants turning the house of God into a carnal place of business, He overturned their tables. Why? Because He, as the personification of meekness, was preoccupied with the honor of His Father, saying, “Ye have made it a den of thieves” (Matt. 21:13). Thus, meekness does not mean weakness!

The Blessed Inheritance of the Meek

Jesus attaches a wonderful promise to His beatitude about meekness: “They shall inherit the earth.” What a remarkable and fitting promise indeed, for the experientially meek person will honor God, the Creator of heaven of earth, and render Him His worthy praise. Thus, Christ says that they who acknowledge God for who He is, the meek, shall inherit the earth.

Such was the inheritance God gave our first parents! When He created Adam and Eve in the state of rectitude, He gave them the earth as their inheritance. He commanded them to work and beautify the earth that had been especially created for their habitation and benefit. When they fell, however, that earth was subjected to God’s curse. It began to produce thorns and thistles, for God said, “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the

field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:18–19).

But Jesus says that the meek citizens of His spiritual kingdom shall again inherit the earth. They are a content people, even when they do not possess the riches this world has to offer. They understand in some measure that their time here below is but a brief preparation for their eternal residence in the new heaven and earth. The grace of God will therefore begin to cure the meek from lusting after the riches of this life. It will redirect their entire focus, teaching them that their real riches are to be found in Christ—and thus in God Himself.

Christ says that the meek have a blessed and extraordinary future, for the day will dawn when there will be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell, and God’s redeemed people will be its inhabitants. By a mighty act of His creative power, God will completely refurbish the entire universe and restore this earth, which is now groaning under the curse of sin. Christ is pointing to the great goal of redemption, saying that the people of His kingdom will experience complete restoration.

Man, after all, was the crown jewel of God’s creative work. No creature in the entire universe so beautifully displayed God’s glory as man, who was created in the image of His only begotten Son. Christ is thus affirming that His people shall forever be the crown jewels of God’s redeeming work. They will inherit the new earth in which righteousness will dwell.

The citizens of God’s kingdom are therefore called to be strangers and pilgrims in this world. The more Christlike or meeker we become, the less that this life and this world will mean to us. We will realize that our ultimate destination is this new earth. That is why God will wean us from this present life, so that ultimately we will desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. To achieve this, God sometimes has to use the scourge of affliction, especially for all who live in such a remarkably prosperous and comfortable culture as ours. God will therefore cause the meek to long for the inheritance that awaits the people of God.

Remarkably, the Greek word translated as “inherit” refers to the receiving of one’s inheritance by lot. When the children of Israel arrived into Canaan (the physical Canaan being a picture of the heavenly Canaan), they received a specific portion of that land by lot: “By lot was their inheritance” (Josh. 14:2). In biblical times, the casting of lots was considered very important. Those who believed in God trusted the casting of the lot, knowing that God Himself would direct it. When Joshua could not understand why Israel had been defeated by Ai, God directed him to cast the lot to determine who it was that had sinned (Josh. 7). The casting of the lot was directed by God Himself, for “the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Prov. 16:33).

Therefore, when the Israelites had finally settled in their new home, the land of Canaan, every Israelite knew a particular section of land to be theirs because God had directed it so. The godly Naboth, for example, would not sell his property to King Ahab, for he knew that his property was his by divine direction.

By using the word *inherit*, Christ thus infers that the blessing to be bestowed on the meek has its origin in God’s eternal and sovereign good pleasure. The meek shall inherit the earth because the lot has eternally fallen on them. What a remarkable affirmation that there is no reason to be found in the meek that they should receive such an inheritance! Nothing in ourselves makes us worthy of such an inheritance. If there is anyone who understands that, it will be the graciously meek person! The meeker we are, the more we will see ourselves as God sees us, and so much the more we will understand that nothing in ourselves renders us worthy of such a salvation and redemption, culminating in inheriting the earth.

Believer, when the day dawns that you will eternally inherit the earth, you will receive your inheritance by lot. Paul therefore writes in Ephesians 1:11–12, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.” There you have it! They who are poor in spirit, mourn over their sins, and are meek will receive an inheritance because they have eternally been predestined to receive it. The apostle Peter speaks of an inheritance “reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4).

Who stands in awe of this? The graciously meek! They understand experientially that there is no reason in them whatsoever why they should inherit the earth. They will increasingly understand that there is but one explanation: their citizenship is rooted solely in the sovereign good pleasure of a triune God. Christ highlights this when He speaks of the final judgment: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). The meek shall inherit the kingdom; they shall inherit the earth.

Dear reader, will you belong to that number? Do you already belong to the people of God? Do you recognize yourself in this verbal portrait the Lord Jesus Christ is giving us? Are the distinctive marks of citizenship in God’s kingdom also descriptive of your internal disposition? Do you understand experientially what it means to hunger and thirst after Christ and His righteousness because you are poor in spirit, mournful, and meek? Is this what makes Christ so precious to your soul?

Unless you are a believer by these biblical standards, you will not inherit the earth. Paul said, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 15:50). If we live and die as we are born, we will not inherit the earth. As stated earlier, each beatitude implies a curse. Thus, cursed are they who are not poor in spirit, who do not mourn, who are not meek, and who do not hunger and thirst after righteousness. If you die as you were born, as an unbeliever, you will inherit hell. You will hear out of the same mouth of Christ, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41). That is the inescapable future for all who do not fear God.

Be not deceived by what the world admires, because what the world esteems highly is despised by God. Our culture says that blessed are they who inherit this earth. However, God says that the meek are blessed, for they, and they alone, shall inherit the kingdom of heaven.

This meekness should be one of the ornaments of the believer’s life. We read in Colossians 3:12, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved . . . meekness,” and in Ephesians 4:1–2 Paul says, “Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness.” Such meekness will manifest itself only when we abide in Christ. The more we abide in Him, the meeker we will become, and the more we will begin to resemble the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed indeed are the meek, for as inheritors of the earth they will be able to say with profound gratitude for God’s sovereign and distinguishing grace, Thou “hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10).