

Blessed Are The Meek

Matthew 5:5

What does it mean to be meek? Meekness is not a word that we commonly use in our conversations nor hear on the news. The NASB uses the word “gentle.” The NLT reads “humble.” The BDAG lexicon says of *praus*, “**to not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance, gentle, humble, considerate, meek.**” Meekness means never asserting oneself for one’s own sake. Conceptually, the word carries the idea of restraint though one has the power to do something. Meekness does not mean weakness. The person has ability and power but **chooses** not to use it. Thus, it is a gentleness of spirit. We see this in Jesus when in Gethsemane Peter pulls a sword and lops off the ear of Malchus the high priest’s servant. Listen to what Jesus says,

Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:52–53 ESV)

We see in Jesus the gentleness and humility that he uses to keep from defending himself or acting on his own behalf. The example of Jesus shows that meekness is not conflict avoidance. Jesus engaged in conflict, but he did this as a defense of God the Father, not himself or his own pride. What we see is that meekness is strongly tied to self-control. The meekness of Jesus was prophesied by Isaiah.

He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. (Isaiah 42:2–3 ESV)

Jesus was not meek because he was powerless or weak. Jesus was meek because he had immense power, yet showed a gentle spirit and self-control, acting in accordance with God’s principles. You will sometimes see this word used in scripture tied to the idea of voluntary submission.

When Peter instructed wives concerning their conduct and adorning, he wrote: *But let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle (praus) and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.* (1 Peter 3:4 ESV)

This does not say women lack worth, power, or strength. Rather, their disposition is disciplined, controlled, and does not act for one's self. Now consider how completely countercultural this idea is. We live in a time that if you attack me, I must attack you. Further, if you do not attack back then you are looked upon as being weak. Meekness today is an insult and equals being powerless and weak, and the first century Greek saw meekness in the same way. Meekness was weakness then just as it is today. It is important to recognize that meekness is not a natural human disposition, and everyone knows it. Before we discuss how we develop a gentle and meek character, consider the result for the meek.

Inherit the Earth

Jesus declares that the meek are blessed because they will inherit the earth. Now this will cause people to immediately speculate with all kinds of ideas about what this means. But we cannot start to understand and apply this statement until we understand what this meant to Israel. What Jesus says here is a quotation from Psalm 37. Not only this, Psalm 37 is a picture about God's people receiving the promised inheritance while the wicked are cut off. Turn to Psalm 37.

Notice that Psalm 37 begins with the admonition to not fret because of evildoers or be envious of wrongdoers because they will wither and fade like grass. This is the introduction to the thoughts of this psalm. Psalm 37:8-9 declare the same thing. Do not fret for yourself and do not be angry or wrathful because evildoers will be cut off. But notice verse 9: *“But those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.”* Notice this again verses 10-11. *In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.* (Psalm 37:10–11 ESV)

Jesus quotes Psalm 37 as you can see. But Psalm 37 continues to make this point. Look at verse 22: *“For those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land, but those cursed by him shall be cut off.”* Look at verse 29: *“The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever.”* Finally, look at verse 34: *“Wait for the Lord and keep his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on when the wicked are cut off.”* You see how many times David declares that the righteous are those who inherit the land.

Now we may read this and think that the psalmist only has in mind the land of Palestine. But that was not the hope of Israel. The scriptures picture the people of God possesses all the earth and all the nations, not just Palestine. The Messiah would arrive and restore peace and order by destroying all oppressors. This is what Jews in Jesus day thought. These OT prophecies show why they were led to believe this – though wrong:

But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:35 ESV)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9–10 ESV)

Please also read Micah 4:11–13 and Habakkuk 3:6–12. The prophetic pictures of the kingdom were never about merely returning to Palestine but that the **kingdom of God will destroy the nations, fill the earth, and rule over all the earth** Psalm 2. Ultimately, this is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. Jews saw this a literal ground.

Now there is an important conclusion that we draw from these prophecies. To inherit the earth is to have the kingdom of heaven because the kingdom was pictured as the possession of the land of Israel or possession of the entire earth.

The way the people would inherit the earth is through the Messiah conquering the world (sin) and establishing his kingdom. We see this in the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61. Jesus quotes this prophecy in Luke 4 and applies it to himself. In Isaiah 61:4 you see that when the Messiah comes, he will enable the people so that they rebuild the ruins of the cities in the land, eat the wealth of the nations, receive a double portion, and have everlasting joy. You see the same connection of the land promise to Abraham is fulfilled when the kingdom arrives, and the kingdom citizens inherit the earth. In short, to inherit the earth is the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham.

Therefore, inheriting the earth does not necessitate that we think of a millennial kingdom on earth where we possess physical dirt. Our future does not mean that we have an eternity with a large plot of land in Montana or somewhere else that we desire. Saying that you would inherit the earth is the same as saying that you belong in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3) because the kingdom of God would fill the whole earth and destroy the enemies and oppressors. Listen to what Peter asked Jesus and Jesus' response:

Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life." Mt 19:27–29

Those who were beheaded for the cause of Christ and did not worship the beast were told that *"they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years"* (Revelation 20:4).

Do you see the contrast? The meek possess nothing now. They are gentle in spirit, disciplined, and self-controlled. So as a rule, they do not get ahead in life. They do not become dictator over a nation, president over a country, or CEO over a corporation. The meek do not rule now.

But the meek rule in Christ's kingdom. They inherit the earth and reign with him. The mighty and powerful do not enter this kingdom. The loud, intimidating, pushy, and boisterous do not enter this kingdom. The seeming "nobodies" are given honor and exaltation in Christ's kingdom that rules over the earth. We enjoy the blessings of Christ and his rule.

Developing Meekness/Gentleness

So how can we be meek and gentle as Jesus says here in the Sermon on the Mount? First, meekness and gentleness come directly from being poor in spirit and mourning over our sins. How can we push ourselves as greater than others and worthy of attention when we see our own spiritual destitution and sinfulness? How can we knock others down to lift ourselves up when we see our own spiritual worthlessness because of our sins? Understanding our sinfulness leads to gentleness.

Second, Psalm 37 revealed a great picture of what the meek do, so that we can know if we are the meek and gentle our Lord is looking for. Psalm 37:3-5 twice said that the meek trust in the Lord. Psalm 37:4 said that they find their delight in the Lord. Psalm 37:7 said that they wait expectantly for the Lord. Psalm 37:9 said that they put their hope in the Lord. Their hope is not in this life. Their delight is not in the pleasures of this world. Their trust is not in themselves, their achievements, or abilities. They wait with eager anticipation for the Lord to come so they can inherit all the promises that God has made to his people.

One of those promises is to have a crown of life, reigning with Christ forever in his eternal kingdom. You can try to rule the world on your own and fail or you can rule with world with God with joy and satisfaction.