

## MATTHEW 5:5

### INTRODUCTION

Like the first two Beatitudes this third one must have been perplexing to Jesus' hearers. This principle would have been foreign to the thinking of the person of the world and no doubt it was one that the disciples found hard to grasp. In the world that the disciples lived it was the proud the pushy, the aggressive and the self-assertive who seemed to make headway in life not the meek.

Let's do what we have done with the first two beatitudes and let's ask what is meant by the word meekness?

### 1. THE MEANING OF MEEKNESS

The Greek word for meekness can also be translated as "gentleness" and its basic meaning is mild or soft. The word was sometimes used to describe a soothing medicine or a soft breeze. The word was used of colts and other animals whose naturally wild spirits were broken by a trainer so that they could do some useful work. When the word was used of human beings it referred to being gentle of spirit or meek or submissive quiet and tender-hearted. It was used of Jesus during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem where he is described as gentle and riding on a donkey (Matthew 21:5). Paul lovingly referred to the meekness and gentleness of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:1) as the pattern for his own attitude.

If I may take the picture of the wild animal being tamed can I suggest to you that meekness is power completely surrendered to God's control? God controls a meek person.

We can once again see a logical sequence and progression in the Beatitudes. Poverty of spirit person sees its own condition before God and begs for God's mercy and grace. As a consequence a poor in spirit person will mourn over his sin but will find the comfort of God in the forgiveness and grace he receives through Christ.

That in turn leads one to meekness of spirit for one has nothing to boast about and is totally dependant upon God and his grace for salvation and therefore lives that truth out under the control of the Holy Spirit in meekness towards others and ultimately towards God. The word humility underlies the opening three Beatitudes because when we look honestly at ourselves we are made humble by seeing how sinful we are and how unworthy we are. This causes us to mourn our sin and to seek God and that in turn makes us humble as we see how righteous God is and how unworthy we are, therefore we live our lives before Him meekly.

Our world today knows nothing of this quality of meekness. Our world is concerned about justifying their own ways, defending their own rights and serving their own ends using their own power. The way of meekness for the world is the way of weakness and therefore many continue to be shut out of God's Kingdom because of pride and self assertive use of one's own power.

But meekness has always been God's way for God's people. In the Old Testament Moses is described as more humble or meek than anyone else on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3). In the New Testament Paul tells the church in a number of places to display this quality of meekness or gentleness (Ephesians 4:1-2 and Colossians 3:12).

Now we need to understand that in spite of how the world views meekness, meekness does not mean weakness. We have described meekness as power put under God's control like a horse that is trained and broken so that one can ride it. So a meek person is one who is in control of his emotions and his temper and his anger etc. because God is in control of his life. Meekness is the

opposite of violence and vengeance a meek person accepts the wrong done to him for he knows that His God is in control of every situation.

A meek person has really died to his own desires therefore he does not worry about what happens to him or what people say about him. The meek person does not seek to defend himself at every turn, he knows the Lord knows the truth and he also has a sense that he is not worth defending. So meekness is not weakness for a weak person does not often have power under control.

But meekness is not cowardice either; it is not a lack of conviction and it is not just being nice. But a meek person is courageous and strong and a person of principle and convictions that come from God and not from himself. You could never say that Jesus was weak or without conviction or strength.

He showed all those qualities when he threw the moneychangers out of the temple (John 2:14-15) yet he was meek in all his dealings with people. Jesus did not resist the slander that came his way nor did he threaten or seek to repay those who did evil to him. He knew his life was under the control of his father. Did Jesus ever seek to defend himself or his actions when he was misunderstood or when he was on trial for crimes he did not commit?

Of course not for Jesus knew who was really in control of every situation. Yet Jesus repeatedly denounced the wicked religious leaders of his day so he certainly was not weak or without strength and conviction. But interestingly Jesus never used natural or supernatural powers for his own welfare or to defend himself. He could have called upon the angels to come to his aid on many occasions and yet he refused to do so.

Meekness does not use power for the benefit of oneself because meekness is power completely surrendered to God's control.

## 2. THE MANIFESTATION OF MEEKNESS

The best way to describe meekness is to illustrate it, to see it in action. The bible is full of illustrations of how meekness is manifested in the lives of God's people.

Let me give you a number of incidents to consider in order to help us see how meekness is worked out in one's life. Do you remember after God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans to the Promised Land and made a covenant with him and his descendants that a dispute broke out between the herdsmen of Abraham and those of his nephew Lot.

Abraham had every right to decide where he was going to graze his cattle and sheep and where Lot was going to graze his cattle. But Abraham willingly gave up his rights and prerogatives and allows his nephew Lot to choose for the sake of harmony between the two households and for the sake of their testimony before the pagan nations who lived in the land (Genesis 13:5-9).

Harmony and witness were much more important to Abraham than his own rights to choose and it was his right to choose but he waived those rights and in meekness allowed Lot to choose because ultimately Abraham was a man controlled by the power of God. Whatever human power he had in this situation was surrendered to the control of God. Now that is how meekness is worked out in practise.

Meekness does not insist on our own way, on our rights but is much more concerned about the bigger issues which in this case were harmony and witness. Many more churches would be more effective and more harmonious if we were less concerned about having our own way and less concerned about our rights.

Then there is Joseph who was abused by his jealous brothers and eventually sold into slavery. Eventually by God's gracious plan Joseph became Prime Minister of Egypt and was therefore in prime position to take vengeance upon his brothers for their cruel treatment of him.

When some of Joseph's brothers came to Egypt asking for grain for their starving family, Joseph could easily have refused to give them any and in fact he could have put his brothers into slavery and been cruel to them. Yet remarkably he showed them tremendous love and forgiveness and finally treated his family with great kindness.

Now Joseph had the power and the right to treat his brothers unkindly but he was meek and so he refused to use his power for his own ends but instead showed great kindness to his brothers. The reason for Joseph's action are clear for Joseph believed that God was in control of every situation and that he had brought Joseph to Egypt and to his position so that he could save God's people and his own family from starvation (Genesis 45: 5 & 8 and 50:19-20). Now that is meekness in action, meekness refuses to use one's position of power and influence for one's own benefit.

Sometimes in churches it is possible when in positions of power to try and manipulate situations for our own benefit or to use our influence to get one's own way. It is possible to make things easier for ourselves but in doing so we might be making it harder for others.

But meekness brings one's power and influence under the submission and control of Jesus Christ because one is conscience that ultimately God is in control and working his purposes out within the lives of his people and his church.

Think of David who was chosen by God and anointed by Samuel to replace Saul as King. Yet when he was in the cave of Engedi escaping from Saul who wanted to kill him David had the perfect opportunity to take Saul's life. Yet he refused to do so for he had respect for the position of King as God's anointed. So even though to have killed Saul would have promoted him to his rightful place as King he refused to take revenge and to leave it all in God's hands. (1 Samuel 24:1-6). You see that is meekness David refused to take an opportunity to better himself or to take revenge on one of his biggest enemies because he knew that God was in control and that means that God was in control of David's life.

It's so easy as Christians to take opportunities to better ourselves at the expense of one of our work colleagues by deliberately taking an opportunity to put him down and exalting one's self. It's so easy to take an opportunity to get even with someone who constantly makes our lives hard and difficult. Even in churches it is possible to constantly expose people's weaknesses in order to exalt our strengths. That is not how meek people behave.

When we turn our attention to the New Testament we could again look at the life of Jesus but apart from Jesus there were many other meek people. But let me mention one of them. Think about Paul he was by far the most educated of all the apostles and one as far as we can tell that the Lord used most effectively.

Yet Paul refused to put any confidence in the flesh, he refused to boast about himself for he knew that he could only serve God because he was being strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit (Phillippians 3:3 and 4:13). Isn't it so easy in churches for the best educated or the most zealous Christians to dominate and to think that they have the right to leadership and to make the decisions within the church?

But meek people don't behave like that; for meek people know that Christ is head of the church and is in control of the lives of each one of God's people.

### 3. THE RESULT OF MEEKNESS

Obvious one result of being meek is blessedness that is an inward happiness and contentment that does not depend on personal circumstances or well-being. But there is another result, which ultimately leads to blessedness and that is that the meek shall inherit the earth. It is clear that Jesus is quoting from Psalm 37:11 where the Hebrew word can mean earth or land.

So if we want to know what Jesus means by this phrase then we have to understand what it meant in Psalm 37. It seems clear that the opening 11 verses of the Psalm describe the meek person who trusts in God and does not fret because of the evil that surrounds him. Instead he trusts, delights and commits his way to the Lord. (Psalm 37 vs. 3-5). The Psalmist is urged to wait patiently for the Lord and not to panic when he sees evil men prospering (v 7).

He is not to become angry because God will cut evil men down and it is the meek who will inherit the land (vs. 9-11), which in the Old Testament is God's promise to his people of his inheritance. So meekness is a quality that means that the meek person will receive God's inheritance which in the Old Testament is linked to the land of Canaan.

Now if I can apply this Psalm to our New Testament verse we can say that inheriting the earth is clearly teaching that one day it's the meek who receive God inheritance, which is of course heaven and all that, that entails. While we live in this world where it seems evil and wickedness prosper we are to keep displaying our meekness through trusting in the Lord and doing good at every opportunity (Ps 37v 3).

We are to delight ourselves in the Lord and commit our way to him (Ps 37 vs. 4-5). Meek people wait patiently for the Lord to deal with wickedness and to bring His inheritance to his people. We must not fret at the prosperity of the wicked and we certainly must never get angry for we know that it is the meek that inherit God's inheritance which for us is living in God's new heaven and earth the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:13).

So although in this world we are told to be self assertive and aggressive for that is how to get on in life. The Christian person refuses to behave like that but is enabled by the grace of God to act meekly which involves all the things mentioned in this Psalm like trusting, delighting, committing, waiting and refraining from anger. We are enabled to do this because we know that meekness is a quality that God gives to His people.

We also know that the result will be that one-day we will live in God's new heaven and earth in perfection enjoying and presence of God and delighting ourselves in His Son Jesus Christ.

We have a great future; this world is not all that matters therefore if we lose out in this world by failing to be self assertive and aggressive. If we see the wicked prosper while we struggle do not fret for ultimately it is the meek that prospers and the wicked that not only miss out but also are judged and condemned by God.

Can I appeal to any who have yet trusted in the Lord for salvation to do so because ultimately it is those who are saved by God's grace that inherit the earth and not those who refuse to submit themselves to God? So turn to Him today and receive God grace so that you will know what it is to be poor in spirit and to mourn for your sins and to surrender all natural power to the supreme control of the all-controlling God.

Amen