

'The Invincible Meek'

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Text: Matthew 5:5
Title: 'People in Sync'
Series: The Beatitudes

Our text today is found in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 5, verse 5 wherein we hear Jesus speak the third of His eight Beatitudes.

'Blessed ... right-on...in synch are the meek, the gentle for they will inherit the earth'. Really?

As we noted when we began this series of studies each of the eight Beatitudes is related to the other seven. So it is always important when focusing on one of them that we read to read all of them.

In your worship folder as up on the screen you will find Matthew 5:3-10 printed in a responsive-reading format. Would those of you on the left side of the sanctuary read 'Blessed are' clauses; and those of you on the right side read the 'for they, for theirs' clauses? There are no political implications in being designated right or left. Edna will lead the left side. I the right. Let us read words that turn the world right side –up.

Pray

'Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.' You lucky bums. Really? You are sure about this Jesus?

We need to get two things straight right from the beginning.

- 1) First, the quality Jesus blesses in third Beatitude has nothing to do with all the negative images triggered by the English word 'meek'. Although it is a challenge to pin down the exact meaning of the original word Jesus uses, it clearly does not mean no-brain, no-Braun, no-backbone; it clearly does not mean no convictions, no courage, no spirit, no drive, no guts.

How do we know this? For one simple reason. Only two people in the Bible are explicitly described by the word Jesus uses in His Beatitude. Anyone know who they are? Right – Moses and Jesus. Hardly your Casper-Milquetoast types!

In the Old Testament book of Numbers Chapter 12, verse 3, we read: "Now the man Moses' – who led the great exodus of the Jews from Egypt – "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than any person who was on the face of the earth'. And in the Gospel

according to Matthew, Chapter 11, verse 29, where Jesus calls us to come, take up His yoke, Jesus says to himself, 'for I am meek and humble in heart'. If, of all the players in the great drama of salvation, Moses and Jesus alone are called by this term, then it cannot mean spine-less-ness, just-lay-down-and-be-a-door-mat. We can be sure right from the beginning that the third Beatitude is NOT, 'Blessed are the doormats for they shall inherit the earth; blessed are the wimps for they shall inherit the earth'

Now, although only Moses and Jesus are explicitly called meek there is one other player in god's salvation drama who speaks of meekness more than any other person. Anyone know who? Right. The apostle Paul. I know of at least nine different places in his letters where he either is seeking to live in meekness himself or is calling others to live in meekness. For example,

2 Corinthians 10:1 'I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ'
Ephesians 4:2 – he calls us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called 'with all humanity and meekness'.

Colossians 3:12 – as those who have been chosen of god, holy and beloved put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness'.

In Galatians 5:22-23 he lists the so-called 'fruits of the Spirit' – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, meekness. And in many other texts (1 Corinthians 4:21' Galatians 6:1; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:25; Titus 3:2)

Paul never explicitly says anything like 'I am meek, I am gentle'. But it is what he seeks to be. I think he does not say explicitly 'I am meek' because he does not feel worthy of echoing Jesus' own words.

So, if Moses, Jesus and Paul are the one in the Bible of whom the word 'meek' can be used, we can be sure the word does not mean all the negative things conjured up by the English word 'meek'.

Then what does it mean? What is this quality Jesus blesses and embodies? What does it mean to be meek like Moses and Paul and Jesus? And why is this a sign that Jesus and His Gospel are getting a hold of us? why is 'meek' a sign that the kingdom of god is breaking into our lives?

- 2) the second thing to get straight right from the beginning is that the promise Jesus makes 'they shall inherit the earth' is rock-solid. We can put our weight on this promise.

Why? For one simple reason. The meek – singular – the meek one himself – singular – will inherit the earth! Jesus Christ the meek one will inherit the earth. He after all made the earth! He owns the earth. Always has, and always will. Psalm 24:1 'the earth is the Lord's and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it'. The earth belongs to the Lord Jesus. I know the affirmation can be offensive in our pluralistic city. But to be faithful to the Biblical witness to Jesus we can say nothing less. The earth is His which is why we either do it Jesus' way or it does not work. The Lord Jesus Christ will inherit His

earth. Which means then that this outrageous promise that the meek – plural – will inherit the earth, is rock solid. Those who belong to him will inherit the earth with Him. The only question is when? And in what sense?

Ok, so let us dig deeper into Jesus' seemingly up-side-down Beatitude.

As I have been emphasizing thus far in the series, the qualities Jesus blesses, or congratulates, in His Beatitudes are not natural human qualities. We cannot produce these qualities No one is naturally meek..

Rather, we become meek by the power of Jesus' Gospel.

So, I ask, 'why is being meek a sign that Jesus and His Gospel are getting hold on us?'

The most immediate answer lies in the fact that Jesus Himself is meek. 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am meek'. When we encounter Jesus, when we embrace His embrace and receive His life we start to become like Him. This is why the apostle Paul includes 'meekness' in his list of the fruit of the spirit. When Jesus infuses us with His life, with his spirit we begin to take on His character – traits.

By the way. You can see then that in His Beatitudes Jesus is giving us a portrait of Himself. Yes, a portrait of who we are becoming because of Him but also a portrait of who he is. He is poor in spirit living in utter dependence on His Father. He hungers and thirsts for justice. He is merciful and pure in heart. And he is meek. Hang out with Him and we slowly become like Him.

But that is not the only point Jesus is making His Beatitudes. He also is saying that when His Gospel – the kingdom of God has come near – gets hold of us something happens. We become meek. Why?

In order to answer that question we need to ask 'so, what is this quality Jesus blesses? What does Jesus mean by meek?'

For example, some first century folks used the word to describe domesticated animals. Such animals have learned to accept the control of their masters. By extension the word refers to people who know how to behave, who graciously co-operate with proper authority. Following this line one scholar renders Jesus' words 'blessed are God's gentlemen, blessed are God's gentlewomen' (Sermon on the Mount, John Bruce, pg 37)

The philosopher Aristotle taught that this quality was something to be highly desired. He described it as a mean between anger and indifference; as a mean between excessive anger on the one hand, and the inability to show anger at all, on the other. Taking his cue from Aristotle William Barclay renders Jesus words 'blessed is the one who is always angry at the right time, and never angry at the wrong time' (Matthew, Vol 1 pg 91). Oh to be so meek!

What has helped me most is looking at how this word is used in other places in the Bible. And of particular help has been Psalm 37. Psalm 37 is best known for the great promise “delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart” (37:4)

In Psalm 37:11 we read. “But the humble (or meek, or gentle) will inherit the land.

Is Jesus echoing and expanding on this Psalm text in His third Beatitude? Most scholars think so. And go on to argue that Psalm 37 gives us the fullest interpretation of the word ‘meek’. Commentator Derek Kidner says of Psalm 37, ‘there is no finer exposition of the third Beatitude than this Psalm from which it is drawn (psalm 1-72, p 148)

So would you please turn to that psalm? Psalm 37.

The whole psalm appears to be linked together by the recurring phrase ‘shall inherit the land’ Shall inherit the earth.

Verse 9 - For evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land

Verse 22 - For those blessed by Him will inherit the land, But those cursed by Him will be cut off.

Verse 29 - The righteous will inherit the land And well in it forever.

Verse 34 - Wait for the LORD and keep His way, And He will exalt you to inherit the land;

And verse 11, the verse Jesus works with ‘and the humble / the meek will inherit the land’ See that?

Now, it is very important to understand where David (the author of the psalm) is coming from when he composes Psalm 37. He is wrestling with the age-old problem of the apparent success of those who ignore and disobey God. He is wrestling with the fact that in this world it is the pushy, grabby, power-wielding, self-asserting, controlling-types, who seem to win. Who seem to win.

David frankly acknowledges that the dishonest do often have more than the honest. And that those who step on others do regularly get to the top. And that the rich often do buy their way out of the consequences of their sin. Yet in the face of all this, David makes the daring claim, which Jesus repeats with his own authority, ‘the meek will inherit the land’. Contrary to all appearances the gentle will win.

Now, on either side of the claim in verse 11, in the verses before and after that claim David develops the nature of this meekness. He looks at it from many angles, describing it both in terms of what the meek do and do not do. Listen to a listing of David’s insights in Psalm 37. The meek trust in the Lord (vs 3), do good in the face of evil (vs 3), cultivate faithfulness (or trust) (vs 3), delight themselves to the Lord (vs 5), rest in the Lord (vs 7), wait patiently for the Lord (vs 7). Clearly meekness is not a passive quality.

Furthermore, the meek do not ??? because of evildoers (vs 1), do not envy (vs 1), cease from anger and forsake ??? (vs 8), depart from evil (vs 27). Clearly meekness is also not a spineless quality. For it takes great strength to cease from anger!

Let us take some time and go back and reflect a bit more on some of David's insights.

The meek 'trust in the Lord and do good' (vs 3). Others may get away with doing evil, with ignoring justice. But the gentle say 'we will bank on doing the will of God.. come what may'. The gentle trust not themselves, not their ability to orchestrate but God. As a friend of mine puts it, 'they do the Godly thing and let the chips fly'. (David Warth)

The meek 'delight themselves in the Lord' (vs 4). That is, they have a special focus in life. Instead of focusing on the fact that they are being taken advantage of or do not have as much as the next person, they find their joy in the Living God. The word David uses for delight relates to the word 'Eden'. The meek find their great pleasure in the Lord, their God, Yahweh Himself. The gentle deliberately re-direct their emotions to find peace and wholeness in a Person (D. Kidner). They find their 'identity and security in the very center of the universe! Oh to so live!

The meek 'commit their way to the Lord' (vs 5). The word translated 'commit' literally means 'roll'. They roll their way into the Lord. I like the image the verb suggests. The meek, says Stuart Brescoe, 'roll their lives, their cares, their reputations onto the Lord and let the Lord worry about it all. The meek are those who, when offended, commit their wounded egos and the one offending their ego, to the Perfect Judge. The meek can say to herself, 'what she did to me was wrong. But she is answerable to God, so I'll let God deal with her. But I am answerable to God, too. So I'm going to concentrate on doing the right to by her'. The right thing may be to forgive, comfort, or both. Either way, the gentle 'roll it all' onto their Lord.

The meek 'rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him' (vs 7). Now, in Scripture waiting is not a passive activity. Waiting requires great concentration and readiness to move. The sense is 'wait expectantly' on tip toe, expecting the just God to vindicate and satisfy. Such waiting calls for confidence that God will act. Such waiting calls for courage not to act too quickly. The meek have somehow come to great trust in the sovereignty of God and in that trust can rest. Oh to know what the meek know.

The meek 'do not fret' (vs 1) Literally the word means 'do not get heated' (Kidner). The meek do not 'get hot under the collar'. We are talking great strength here. How many of us waste enormous amounts of energy, and time, stewing over people who offend us or take advantage of us or ignore us? The meek acknowledge their emotional response to all that; they own their emotions. They manage their energy, channelling it in responsive directions.

The meek 'do good in the face of evil' (vs 3), The meek 'depart from evil' (vs 27). This is David's key insight which Jesus more fully unfolds in the rest of His Sermon on the

Mount. The meek do not return evil for evil they know that that is utter weakness. They do not respond to violence they do not respond to injustice with more twisting of justice.

I trust you can see from this survey of Psalm 37 that the meek Jesus blesses are the 'invincible meek'. what can finally undo them? The meek are strong because they rest in the arms of God. The meek are wise because they look at life through the eyes of God. The meek can stand firmly because they are anchored to the Eternal. Oh to be what Jesus blesses!

All of this we see played out in Moses. 'Very meek'. says the text" 'more meek' than every man on the face of the earth.

Recall the specific context in which Moses is called 'very meek'. One day his sister Miriam and brother Aaron challenged his position within the community and did it publicly! In the Middle East, a very shameful thing to do. They did not like the woman Moses had married – and criticized her publicly. they were jealous that Moses alone spoke God's word to God's people –and said so publicly. Very shameful in a shame based culture. Anything like that ever happened to you? It has happened to me a number of times. A number of years ago I led a weekend retreat for a group of church members. We worked our way through apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians. we had a great time! At the closing of the last teaching session, I asked 'Is this not good news? I invited feedback. All of a sudden as though he had been waiting for the opportunity to arise a man within the group said in great anger "No, it is not good news.. it is so much blankety blank. And furthermore you are nuts to believe it and you are ruining our fellowship with your teachings" And lit into me, saying all kinds of awful things about me , in front of the retreaters for what felt like 10 minutes.

What did Moses do that day when he got hurt? he refused to lash back at Miriam and Aaron. He refused to judge for their insolence, he refused to get all worked up about it. No small miracle! What he did was 'roll it all' in God. He knew God had called him to that leadership role. He knew God was just and would vindicate the truth of the situation. Is that being spine-less? Is that being "gut-less"?. In such confrontations it takes great strength and courage not to react in kind, not to play tit for tat, not to echo the attackers spirit and words.

Do we not see all that Psalm 37 says about 'meek' lived out in Jesus? Especially during His trial? (Matthew 26-27, John 18-19). The local police spat on Him. they blindfolded Him and hit Him in the face. The foreign military personnel then repeated the insults and violence ; they thrust a crown on thorns into His skull, put a royal purple robe on Him, and mocked Him. Then they too spat on him and hit Him again and again.

But He refused to respond in kind. He did not echo their spirit and actions. As the apostle Peter who witnessed the scenes, later said, 'while being reviled Jesus did not revile in return: while suffering, Jesus uttered no threats (1 Peter 2:23). Instead , says Peter, Jesus 'kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously (2:23).

Roman soldiers new power when they saw it. One of the soldiers stationed at the cross was overcome with awe at the way Jesus handles all the evil. And he fell to his feet, saying "this is certainly the Son of God" (Mark 15:39)

Oh to have the strength to be meek! Oh to have the maturity of Jesus to be so gentle!!

Now, let us go back to the question, why?

Why is their quality a sign of being grabbed hold of by Jesus and His Gospel? For one single reason. When the Gospel breaks through we realize that great secret, the great open secret. We discover the mystery of history. "the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near".

Those grabbed by the Gospel realize that in the birth, life, death, resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth a Revolution is taking place.: the old order of things is on the way out, the new order of things is on the way in. The old order of pushing, grabbing, demanding is over. It is now collapsing in on itself. We can see it all over the world. The old order is dying. It is why it takes up so much energy to make the old order work; it is like trying to pump life into a corpse. As the apostle John says 'the world is passing away; and all its lusts' (1John 2:17). "Why then" ask those who know the Gospel, should we fret? Why should we play the game by the rules of a dying order? Furthermore, those grabbed by Jesus and His Gospel know the outcome of living by the old order. In psalm 37:13 David says "God laughs at the schemes of the arrogant, dishonest ???". God sees their day coming " says David. David is not referring to some calamities God will bring on them but to the natural consequences of old order decisions and practices. Those who get to the top by stepping on others last only until the next group of steppers steps on them.. Those in seized and hold power unjustly eventually fall under the weight of their own injustice. Empires built in greed are eventually eaten up by greed. Those grabbed by His Gospel have seen the light! And can, therefore, resource the inherently self-destructive ways of the old order.

To put it more simply, they have seen the preview, they know how the movie ends. They know how it all comes out. they know the old order will be swallowed up by Jesus' new order. They believe the Hallelujah chorus "the Kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever" (rev 11:15) Why then act accordingly to the old order? To do so is foolish and futile.

Blessed, right on, in synch are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Inherit the earth. When? In the end. In the end when the earth is fully redeemed.

But they also inherit the earth before the End. Now How?

Well think about it. who are the people who really enjoy the earth? Those who grab and push and demand? No! They are too busy grabbing and pushing and demanding to enjoy what they get by grabbing and pushing and demanding. those who live delighting in God and delighting in God's great plans are free to smell the roses along the way. the meek inherit the earth ahead of the End in another sense. Before she became the daughter of daddy Warbucks Little orphan Annie had nothing. But the moment she was adopted all his wealth became hers. The moment you and I are adopted by the Father of

the Lord Jesus Christ, all God's wealth becomes ours. 1 Corinthians 3:22 'all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God'. To belong to Jesus Christ is to be granted the privilege of living in the Palace with Him, playing with His toys, and enjoying His ??? backyard. the earth is the Lord's and He gives it to His own.

Meek means weak? no brain, no braun, no back-bone? No spirit, no energy, no drive? No way! It is through the meek that the world gets turned right side up!

The Holy Spirit is saying to us what He said through the prophet Zachariah: Rejoice greatly, o daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughters of Jerusalem! look! Your King is coming to you. He is just and endowed with salvation. Meek, and mounted on a donkey. And He shall speak peace to the nations, And His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.