

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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BLESSED ARE THE MEEK (part one)

Matthew 5:5

We will continue today our exploration of the Beatitudes of our Lord Jesus. We come now to the third Beatitude found in the gospel of Matthew. This is what we read in Matthew 5:5.

Matthew 5:5. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Happy is the man who is meek. Happy is he because God has blessed this man, because he shall inherit the earth.

What does it mean to be meek? In today's lesson, this is the question that I will try to answer. What kind of person does the Lord Jesus refer to when He talks about the meek?

Meekness: a spiritual quality

First of all, let me emphasize that meekness, in the biblical language, doesn't mean weakness, or indolence, or flabbiness. It is not a natural quality but a spiritual one. I say that because in Galatians 5:23, the apostle Paul mentions the quality of being meek as a fruit of the Spirit. Some Bible translations have the word 'gentle' for meek. 'Blessed are the gentle'. But I don't think that it helps us too much to know that meekness and gentleness are synonymous.

Many have pointed out that meekness and poverty of spirit are one and a same thing. And I do believe that it is correct. So all that we have said about being poor in spirit also applies for being meek. To be meek is to be poor in spirit. Now this will give us the opportunity to go more deeply into this important spiritual topic.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. How should we understand this Beatitude? These words of the Lord Jesus have their roots in the OT. It is more or less a quotation of one particular verse in the book of Psalms. Psalm 37:11. If we want to understand the third Beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount, we need to return to Psalm 37. This is what we read in Psalm 37:11.

*Psalm 37:11. But **the meek shall inherit the earth**, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.*

You see how this OT passage is quite similar to Matthew 5:5. Here we find also that it is the meek who will inherit the earth. The word 'to inherit' is a very important one for our purpose. It appears five times in this Psalm and it will help us to define the meaning of being meek. We will do this by observing and putting together the parallel statements that talk about inheriting the earth in this

Psalm. And progressively, the meaning of meekness will become clearer and clearer. We shall see this in a moment.

So I would like to suggest that you open your Bible and find Psalm 37. We are going to look at the meaning of meekness on the basis of Psalm 37 and I will quote many verses from it. We won't take the time to read it in full. Just be attentive to the various verses that I will point out to you.

The meek are the righteous

When we look at Psalm 37, we learn three things about the meek. What do we learn? First of all, you notice that two kinds of people are contrasted in this psalm: the righteous and the sinner. It begins with a direct reference to the sinner. It says in verse 1, *Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.* The evildoers, and the workers of iniquity. Then the psalmist makes reference to the righteous in v. 6 by speaking about those who show righteousness and justice. And it is the righteous in v. 11 who is described in his character as being meek. This is even more explicitly stated when we look at the parallel statement. Look at v. 29 and you will see the parallel.

*Psalm 37:29. The **righteous** will inherit the land, and dwell in it forever.*

You see, the meek are the righteous. They shall possess the land. They shall inherit the earth and dwell upon it forever. So this is my first point. You cannot be meek without being righteous. The meek are the righteous and the righteous are the meek. God has promised this earth to the righteous, to the meek. Those are the ones who shall inherit the earth.

Now, let us understand one thing about righteousness. In 1John 3:7, we read this: ... *he who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He (God) is righteous.* The apostle John says that it is the person who does righteousness that is righteous. It is those who, not just talk righteously, but who do it. And when we return to the Psalm, we notice that this is the reason why the righteous ones are called saints. Let's read v. 28.

*Psalm 37:28. For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His **saints** (i.e. the godly ones)...*

In some translations, the 'saints' are called the 'godly ones'. Why are they called 'saints'? Because, as we read in v. 31, the law of God is in their hearts. *The law of his God is in his heart* (v. 31). And if the law of God is in their hearts, it means that they practice righteousness. And this also applies to the meek since they are the righteous ones. The meek are the righteous and the righteous are the meek.

The meek wait for the Lord

The second thing that we learn about being meek is that the meek are those who know to wait for the Lord. Look at v. 9.

*Psalm 37:9. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who **wait on the Lord**, they shall inherit the earth.*

Here again, we see another parallel. We have the same phrase concerning inheriting the earth. We saw previously that it is the meek who will inherit the earth, that it is the righteous who will inherit the earth. Now, we read that it is those who wait for the Lord who will inherit the earth. What does it mean to wait for the Lord? It means to be still, to be quiet.

In v. 7, it says, *do not fret.* To fret, in Hebrew, means to be burning, and more exactly to be burning with anger. Fret not yourself over him who prospers. Here the anger is over the evil man who

is prospering. We feel annoyed, we feel angry, we feel the heat coming up under the collar to see that the unrighteous should prosper while the righteous are trampled down. Why should this person who cheats the government live in great style while others who earn honestly their salary struggle even to buy food and cloth? We feel angry for this apparent injustice.

The next verse says this. Psalm 37:8: *Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret, it only causes harm.* Don't be angry; it leads only to evil. But you say, 'Why shouldn't I be angry. I am justified to be angry.' The response of the psalmist is this. Look at verse 9. 'Cease from anger; don't fret.' Why? *For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more ... but the meek shall inherit the earth.* 'Don't worry. God will do something about it. God is a God of justice. Don't think that the wicked will get away with it. Sooner or later, God will execute His justice. God is our defense.'

This is the same principle that we find in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says, *Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also* (Matthew 5:39). The point is not that there is any greatness in letting yourself being abused by those who mistreat you. The point is that you accept injustice without retaliation or revenge, and that you trust in God to establish your vindication, your justification. Don't avenge yourself. Let God establish your right. That is the principle, here in the Psalms as well as in the Sermon on the Mount.

You know, this world has a saying. It is the survival of the fittest. It is those who are the strongest and the fittest who will survive the harshness of this world. So we are brought up to fight for ourselves. Because if we don't fight for ourselves, who will fight for us? Nobody! Right? Nobody? Perhaps it is true of the natural world. But in the spiritual world, it doesn't work like that. You have to change your way of thinking. In the spiritual world, your strength doesn't come from you. Spiritual power comes from God.

Look at v. 34: *Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and **He will exalt you** to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.*

We see from this verse that it is those who wait for the Lord whom the Lord will exalt. Humble yourself before God and the Lord will exalt you. He will lift you up. The meek are those whom God will exalt by His power. Understand well this principle of spiritual power. It is God who is at work to fight with us and for us. And we will experience this power as we let Him continually change us through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So strength in the spiritual world is a matter of power, of spiritual power. And it is those who wait for the Lord who will experience this power that comes from above.

The meek are generous

The third mark of the meek is that he is generous. Look at verse 22. Here again we find another parallel.

Psalm 37:22. For those who are blessed by Him shall inherit the earth; but those who are cursed by Him will be cut off.

Who will inherit the earth? Those who are blessed by the Lord. And who are those who are blessed by the Lord? For this, we have to go back to the preceding verse, v. 21, where we read that it is the righteous who shows mercy and gives. It is the one who is generous in his giving, so generous that in his giving, he shows mercy. Look at v. 26: *He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed.* The meek is a generous person. He gives and gives, and lends, and by this, he proves to be ever merciful.

You know, there is something interesting that is said of the meek in relationship to his generosity. Notice what the psalmist tells us in v. 25.

Psalm 37:25. I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.

‘I have lived for many years,’ the psalmist says. ‘But I have not seen the righteous, or the meek, forsaken by the Lord, nor his descendants begging bread.’ That is why he trusts the Lord. The meek are never forsaken. His children will not be seen on the street begging bread because the Lord will see to his needs. Does that remind you of another part of the Bible? This takes us right back to the Lord's teaching on the Sermon on the Mount again. Remember what the Lord Jesus says in chapter 6 of Matthew. You trust the Lord and He will supply your need. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Because if God looks after the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, He will look after you. You can be sure of that. And because of this, the meek is generous. He shows mercy and gives.

So then, when the Lord Jesus says, *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth*, we now have a much better understanding of the kind of spiritual quality that He is referring to. The meek, as we have seen, are those who are righteous. The meek are those who know to wait for the Lord. And finally, the meek are those who are generous in their giving.

Moses: an example of meekness

Now, in the Bible, there is a man of whom it is said that he was very meek. In fact, the Bible tells us that he was more meek than any man who was on the face of the earth. Do you know who is this person? Listen to Numbers 12:3.

Numbers 12:3. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth.

Moses was this man. He was very meek. He was very humble. In the Septuagint, the Greek OT, we have the word *praus*, the same Greek word that we have in Matthew 5:5 and which is translated by the word ‘meek’. In the Hebrew OT, the word that is translated here as meek is also the same word for humble. It can also mean to be poor, either physically or in spirit. That is why I said at the beginning of this lesson that meekness and poverty of spirit are one and a same thing. They are synonymous terms. To be meek is to be poor in spirit. These are terms referring to the quality of being humble.

So Moses was more humble, more meek than any man on the face of the earth. How so? Where do we see that in Moses? Well, in this passage in Numbers 12, we have the case where Moses' elder siblings, Miriam and Aaron, are speaking against him. They thought that in virtue of their personal association with Moses as brother and sister, they had the right to speak against him. They criticized the fact that Moses had married an Ethiopian or Cushite woman. Moses had married somebody who was not of the Israelite stock. She was a Cushite. And they couldn't agree with that. Look at Numbers 12:1.

Numbers 12:1. Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

And immediately after saying that, they made this additional complain. This is what they said in v. 2.

Numbers 12:2. So they said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the Lord heard it.

In other words, they were saying, 'Are you, Moses, the only prophet around here? What about us?' You see that at the root of this dissension, there was envy and jalousie. Moses was appointed by God to be the leader, the prophet in Israel. And Miriam and Aaron were beginning to be quite envious of Moses. That is what made them to criticize their brother Moses about his marriage and about his leadership.

Now here comes Moses' meekness. We don't see Moses saying, 'Hey, come on. You be careful. I am the prophet of God around here.' It doesn't seem that Moses said one word or that he debated this matter with them. I suspect that instead of talking back, he fell on his face and he waited for the Lord. And it was probably to highlight this point that we have in v. 3 the statement that says that Moses was very meek. Otherwise we could have skipped this verse, and jumped from v. 2 immediately to v. 4 without changing anything to the meaning of the rest of the text.

Compassionate intercession

Miriam was punished by God for what she said about Moses. As we see in v. 10, she *became leprous, as white as snow*. And Aaron's reaction was to turn to Moses to ask for his intercession before the Lord so that Miriam can be healed. And what was Moses' response? 'Get lost. Good for her. She deserves it.' No, no. Look at v. 13.

Numbers 12:13. So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "Please heal her, O God, I pray!"

O God, heal her, I pray. No sign of vengeance. Only compassion for what is happening to his sister, in spite of what she said to him. Such is the greatness of this man. No wonder Moses is said to be more meek than any man on face of the earth.

Now you know what kind of person the Lord Jesus is thinking of when He said, *Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the meek, just like Moses was meek, for they shall inherit the earth*. May we all come, by the grace of God, to that point of meekness.

In our next lesson, we will look at the second part of this Beatitude and see what it means to inherit the earth and how it fits the Lord's teaching on salvation.