

Main Idea: This morning, in Matthew 5:5, Jesus reveals that the person that meets God’s approval is the person who is meek.

I. The Beatitudes (3-8)

- A. The first four pertain to our relationship with God.
- B. The last four pertain to our relationships with our fellow human beings.
- C. All eight point us to Christ.

II. The Meek (5)

- A. What does it mean?
 - 1. It is the opposite of a weak person.
 - 2. It is power under control.
- B. What does it look like?
 - 1. It is not natural, but supernatural.
 - 2. It must be received from Jesus, then shared with others.
“The man who is truly meek is the one who is amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do.” MLJ, p. 69
- C. What is the result?
 - 1. The meek person knows what is coming and lives like it.
 - 2. Knowing you will inherit the earth produces joyful contentment now.

Make It Personal: Let’s affirm what Jesus said about who we are.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 37:1-11

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” Those are the words of the German pastor who was executed by the Nazis in 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which he expressed in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. In the book Bonhoeffer is doing what we are doing, reflecting on the significance of Jesus’ sermon on the mount. Interestingly, the original German title was *Nachfolge*, which means “following,” or “the act of following.”

A Christian, by definition, is a follower. Not a maverick. Not an innovator. Not a self-made person, but simply a follower of Jesus.

Of course, we don’t make ourselves a Christian by following Jesus. We follow Jesus because of the redeeming work He has done in us. He calls us. We die to ourselves. He makes us alive. We respond by putting our total trust in Him and following Him.

But this isn’t a leap into the dark. The One we’re following tells us right up front where He’s going to take us, what He wants us to be, and what He wants us to do. He also reveals what will happen to us along the way, and what makes the journey possible. He tells us all this, and more, in His kingdom manifesto, the sermon on the mount.

Jesus has two groups in mind as He speaks the words recorded in Mathew 5-7. First, He sees the crowds who are following Him in verse 1. They started following Him in 4:25 because they were fascinated by His preaching, and even more so, His miracle-working power. They are following Him, but they’re not really His followers, not yet. He permits them to eavesdrop on this sermon and learn what could be theirs if they would truly come to know, believe, and follow Him.

^{**} Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the series preached at WBC in 1988.

Then there are the disciples, also mentioned in verse 1. While Jesus saw the crowds, the text specifies that His *disciples came to Him*, and they are the ones Jesus began to teach. The King wants His followers to know what following Him is all about. This is Kingdom Living 101. He begins by going to the heart of the matter in what we call the beatitudes.

I. The Beatitudes (3-8)

Blessed are. Blessed are. Blessed are. Eight times. He's identifying the blessed person, the God-approved person. Such a person exemplifies eight characteristics, thus eight beatitudes.

A. The first four pertain to our relationship with God. Verses 3-6, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

B. The last four pertain to our relationships with our fellow human beings. Verses 7-10, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

C. All eight point us to Christ. In a couple of ways. First, Christ exemplifies what He describes. He mourns. He is merciful. He certainly will be persecuted for righteousness sake. If you want to see the beatitudes, look at Jesus.

Furthermore, if you want to experience the beatitudes, look *to* Jesus. We cannot make ourselves poor in spirit, and pure in heart, and the rest. When we see what He commends, we must acknowledge we lack it, we can't produce it, we need it. It's like looking at the ten commandments. When we look at God's law, we see that we have fallen short, that we are not what we ought to be.

But this is actually a good thing, for it puts us in a necessary position. To be saved, we must admit we are lost. Now we're ready for a Savior, the One who concludes this sermon with the invitation, "Ask, and you will receive."

To do: I'd like to extend a challenge. Let's memorize the beatitudes together.

The beatitudes are a package deal. They build on each other. One leads to the next, to the next. We'll be looking at the third in a moment, but let's follow the progression.

Jesus begins His message in verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This is where following Jesus begins. We don't come to Him with our credentials and merit. What He requires is the admission of our spiritual poverty, our bankruptcy before God. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven, He says.

So to go to heaven you must admit that you don't deserve to be there. Yet it's not just the admission of that fact, as in, "Oh, sure, I'm a sinner. Who isn't?" Something else happens for the true Jesus-follower, something down deep.

Verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." So it's not just that I agree that I'm a sinner. I *mourn* over it.

What does it mean to mourn? First, on the negative side, it's not something I do in order to earn God's attention, as if God is stingy with His heaven and requires that I prove my worthiness by crying and debasing myself and mourning.

Nor is mourning the same thing as moping. Always being sad and downcast and looking like you're carrying the weight of the world all the time.

Nor does Jesus say "Blessed are those who mourn," as a past tense activity. This is present tense. The blessed continue to mourn. Why would that be the case?

Pastor Martyn Lloyd Jones preached a series of messages in London in the mid-1900s that became a classic book, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*. The "Good Doctor", as this physician turned preacher was known, offered this insight:

"To 'mourn' is something that follows of necessity from being 'poor in spirit.' It is quite inevitable. As I confront God and His holiness, and contemplate the life that I am meant to live, I see myself, my utter helplessness and hopelessness. I discover my quality of spirit and immediately that makes me mourn. I must mourn about the fact that I am like that."²

What does this mourning look like? To put it simply, *it looks like Jesus*. He is the man of sorrows. We see Him weeping over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41 because of their rejection of Him, and the impending destruction. We see Him weeping as He approaches the tomb of Lazarus.

It's significant that *we don't see Jesus laughing in the Scriptures*. There is no record in the Bible that Jesus ever laughed. We read that He was angry. We read that His soul was overwhelmed unto death. We're told that He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We don't see laughter, but we do see mourning.

I'm sure He did laugh, heartily at times. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A merry heart does good, like medicine," a text Jesus fulfilled, as He did every Old Testament text. Ecclesiastes 3:4 says plainly, "There is a time to laugh." But it says that right after it says, "There is a time to weep." And Jesus did a lot of that.

What the Son of God faced when He took on human flesh was not a laughing matter. He who knew no sin saw the horrid effects of sin up close, and when He did He mourned.

Now He says to His followers, "Blessed are those who do what I do." This flies in the face of the prosperity gospel that is deceiving millions worldwide. "Come to Jesus, and He will make you healthy, wealthy, and wise."

That's not what Jesus said, not even close. And the message Jesus preached is consistent with the message of the whole Bible, which makes it clear that the activity of mourning is dear to the heart of God. God actually gave His people a book to show them how to do mourn, called Lamentations. And He gave them many psalms, called psalms of lament, to do the same (like Psalm 13, 77, 86, 88, etc).³

But the mourning won't last forever. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." So the One who says we are to mourn also says that another experience is coming. Comfort. God is going to comfort His people. That's why He sent Jesus to the world, to deal with the problem that caused the mourning in the first place. "He did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many," says Matthew 20:28, the theme verse of this gospel.

Do you desire the comfort that Jesus alone can give, my friend? He says we must mourn, mourn over our sin, then we'll be comforted. He Himself provides the comfort.

"So everybody who mourns goes to heaven?" you ask.

² MLJ, p. 58

³ These show there's a difference between the way God's people mourn, and the way the world mourns.

No. There is a difference between worldly mourning and godly mourning. According 2 Corinthians 7:10, worldly sorrow brings death, but godly sorrow “*brings repentance that leads to salvation.*”

So worldly sorrow produces tears, and perhaps regret and remorse. Godly sorrow produces tears, remorse, and regret as well, but something else too. Repentance that leads to visible, Christ-empowered change, as verse 11 explains, “See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.”

So the one who mourns God’s way will repent and turn to Christ. And that person will then will experience the comfort of Christ.

Let me say it again. A person cannot get saved until they are grieved over the fact that they are lost. Not just struggling in life. Not just unfulfilled. But *lost*. Spiritually bankrupt. So poor in spirit that the result is a deep sense of mourning. That’s the person, says Jesus, who will be comforted. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

I mentioned there’s a progression in the beatitudes. They work together. One leads to another, which leads to another. The blessed person is first of all *poor in spirit*, who secondly *mourns* over this fact. But this then leads to something else.

Meekness. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

II. The Meek (5)

God approves the person who is *meek*. Let’s probe this with three questions.

A. What does it mean?

Years ago when I was a resident director I used to see them all the time when the new freshman would come onto campus in the fall. The opposite of meek. Haughty. Cocky. Proud. Self-absorbed.

We often equate meekness with weakness. But a meek person is not a weak person. To the contrary...

1. *It is the opposite of a weak person.* Meekness involves humility and gentleness. But in light of our inborn tendency to be proud and self-absorbed, we know firsthand that this takes power. Power to break the pride that is so natural to us. This is what meekness is.

2. *It is power under control.* In classical Greek literature the word was used of a spirited stallion that was responsive and obedient to its rider’s slightest touch. The animal’s tremendous power was under control. It’s like the master who places food in front of a dog, telling the dog, "Not yet," and the dog waits, though it wants the food, it does not move until the master gives the go ahead.

That’s what this word, by definition, means. Power under control.

It takes a ton of power to seek first the kingdom of God when you’re natural tendency is to seek first your own kingdom. But that’s what a meek person possesses (power), and that’s what a meek person does (humbly puts God’s kingdom agenda first in all situations).

Thus, a meek person is someone who doesn't throw his weight around, is gentle and patient, particularly with other people's shortcomings because he realizes his own. The fact that he’s poor in spirit and mourning over his sin produces this meekness.

B. What does it look like?

Let's go to the Scriptures and consider three portraits of meekness. The first is Moses. Numbers 12:3 says, "Now Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth." Moses was no milktoast character, no spineless creature. He could be blazingly angry. But his anger was on a leash, only to be released when the time was right. Proverbs 16:32 describes this quality, "He that rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city."

The second is David who illustrated meekness in his relationships. Think of how he treated his hostile father-in-law, Saul, and how he refused to kill him even though he had the chances, and though Saul would not have hesitated to kill him. Think also of his treatment of his wayward, shameful, even hostile son, Absalom. He never gave up on him. He never rejected him.

And then, of course, there's Jesus Himself. Powerful? Yes. None more so. But always under control. When attacked, He does not retaliate. When misrepresented, He does not defend Himself. How often we hear Him saying, "I have come to do the Father's will."

Let's talk about a couple of implications regarding meekness.

1. *It is not natural, but supernatural.* No one is born meek, not as the Bible defines it. This is not a natural trait for those who have inherited a sin nature from Adam. Sin is going astray, the tendency to go one's own way. That's what comes natural to us. But to deny that bent, to put God and others ahead of ourselves, that's not natural. When that happens, it's God-produced, it's supernatural.

Which means it comes through Jesus, for all demonstrations of God's grace gifts come to sinners through Jesus Christ. So to exhibit meekness, I must receive it from Jesus Himself.

2. *It must be received from Jesus, then shared with others.* This is the gospel reality. When I bring my brokenness to Jesus, He mends my brokenness. When I acknowledge my weakness, He gives His power. By His grace I begin to demonstrate power under control for all to see.

And others do see it. They can't help but see it. Meekness shows up in the way I treat them. When the waitress makes a mistake on my order, she sees meekness, when I'm living under Jesus' control. When my pro-choice neighbor ridicules my pro-life convictions, he sees power under control, as Jesus makes Himself known through me.

"Meekness," says Lloyd-Jones, "is essentially a true view of oneself, expressing itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others."⁴

That's it. *A true view of oneself.* I'm a sinner, that's the truth. But not just a sinner, a saint too, because of what God did for me that I didn't deserve. That's how I see myself, as unworthy yet secure in the love of the One who gave His Son to die for me.

And this true view of oneself now *expresses itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others.* I can be poor in spirit in my prayer closet. I can mourn in my prayer closet. But meekness moves out of the prayer closet. When I am meek, my wife sees it. My neighbor sees it. My enemy sees it. This is a highly relational virtue. People see it. And specifically, they see it when their sinfulness bumps into mine.

Listen to Lloyd-Jones again:

⁴ MLJ, p. 68

“To be truly meek means we no longer protect ourselves, because we see there is nothing worth defending. So we are not on the defensive; all that is gone. The man who is truly meek never pities himself, he is never sorry for himself. He never talks to himself and says, ‘You are having a hard time, how unkind these people are not to understand you.’... To be meek, in other words, means that you have finished with yourself altogether, and you have come to see that you have no rights or deserts at all. You come to realize that nobody can harm you. John Bunyan puts it perfectly, ‘He that is down need fear no fall.’... The man who is truly meek is the one who is amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do.”⁵

As I read that, I am convicted. Every time I become defensive with people, it’s an evidence of my lack of meekness. When I feel sorry for myself, when I get upset because I don’t feel appreciated, this is what’s missing.

John Stott is another British pastor who wrote a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. I found it interesting that he quoted Lloyd-Jones in his explanation of meekness. Listen to Stott’s helpful insight:

“I believe Dr Lloyd-Jones is right to emphasize that this meekness denotes a humble and gentle attitude to others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves. He points out that it is comparatively easy to be honest with ourselves before God and acknowledge ourselves to be sinners in his sight. He goes on: ‘But how much more difficult it is to allow *other people* to say things like that about me! I instinctively resent it. We all of us prefer to condemn ourselves than to allow somebody else to condemn us.’

For example, if I may apply this principle to everyday ecclesiastical practice: I myself am quite happy to recite the General Confession in church and call myself a ‘miserable sinner’. It causes me no great problem. I can take it in my stride. But let somebody else come up to me after church and call me a miserable sinner, and I want to punch him on the nose! In other words, I am not prepared to allow other people to think or speak of me what I have just acknowledged before God that I am. There is a basic hypocrisy here; there always is when meekness is absent.”⁶

What does meekness look like? Let me give you a couple of examples that illustrate what meekness looks like in its absence. Two Alex’s. One from history, the other from television.

The first Alex, Alexander the Great, was a tremendous leader and world conqueror. But it was actually the lack of meekness that destroyed him. In a fit of uncontrolled anger, and while in the middle of a drunken dispute, Alexander hurled a spear at his best friend, and killed him. He was a powerful man, but that power was not under control. Alexander lacked meekness.

The second Alex sort of dates me. He was a popular television personality back in the late 80s who exemplified the world’s attitudes towards success. Alex Keaton. In the show *Family Ties* this Alex (played by Michael J. Fox) claims rather vociferously to

⁵ MLJ, p. 69

⁶ Stott, J. R. W., & Stott, J. R. W. (1985). *The message of the Sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian counter-culture* (p. 43). Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

have no faults. And if a fault happens to surface in his life, he never admits it. He hides it. He excuses it. When it comes to success, it's up to Alex to promote himself, and other people are merely a means to help him get there. Alex, like Alexander, lacked meekness.

To reiterate, meekness is not natural. The bumper sticker says, "Avenge yourself. Live long enough to be a problem to your kids." That's natural.

Meekness is supernatural. In fact, according to Galatians 5:23, it's a fruit of the Spirit. We don't look inside ourselves for it. We hunger for it (that's the next beatitude, "Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness, for they will be filled") and receive it from another, from Christ Himself.

And what we receive, we share. Like Paul did when he wrote a letter to deal with some problem-people, and said to them, "By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you (2 Cor 10:1)."

C. What is the result?

This is. Something absolutely incredible. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Consider that word "inherit." What would you consider to be a big inheritance? A million dollars? Ten million? A mansion on a hundred acre spread? Friends, that's nothing compared to this.

The earth. Jesus says the meek will inherit *the earth*. He seems to be quoting Psalm 37:9, 11, 29. To the Alex's of the world it doesn't make sense, but it's true. It won't be the strong, the aggressive, and certainly not the tyrannical which will inherit the earth. Who will it be? The meek.

The hope of the Jews in the OT was the promised land. But later the prophets expanded that hope. Isaiah anticipated the "new heavens and the new earth" (Isa 66:22). It is this hope to which Jesus is referring in Matt 5:5.

In fact, the Bible ends with this hope in view. In Revelation 21 we're told that a new earth is coming, and a new heaven, prepared by God as a dwelling place for His people, which they will enjoy together forever and ever. There will be no tears, no mourning there.

And who will benefit from God's inheritance in that day? "Blessed are the meek, the little people, for they will inherit the earth."

Does that word "earth" surprise you? God's kingdom is very earthy. We're not going to spend eternity floating on clouds. Look at Adam and Eve in the garden paradise. What they lost is what God is going to give us, only bigger and better. A new, sinless earth in which to work and play and enjoy Him and each other forever and ever.

Let's talk about implications again. Here are two.

1. *The meek person knows what is coming and lives like it.* Knowing what's coming enables a person to endure present challenges differently, even joyfully. A person who is going through major surgery knows this. Yes, there's pain now, but I'll go through it because the doctor says the outcome will be better.

So why don't many Christians have joy? One factor is this. We don't think about what's coming as much as we ought. We for sure don't sing about it as much as we ought.

Last week I heard Mark Dever make the comment about the songs churches sing. He said that the typical hymnal in the 19th century had 100 to 200 songs on the afterlife

out of a total of 700 songs in the book. The typical 20th century hymnal had 12-15 hymns out of 600 hymns on the afterlife.⁷

Here's an example. In 1837 Robert Murray McCheyne, a man in his 20s wrote this hymn that the church began to sing. It gives you a good idea of what he spent his time thinking about.

*1 When this passing world is done,
when has sunk yon glaring sun,
when we stand with Christ on high
looking o'er life's history,
then, Lord, shall I fully know,
not till then, how much I owe.*

*2 When I hear the wicked call
on the rocks and hills to fall,
when I see them start and shrink
on the fiery deluge brink,
then, Lord, shall I fully know,
not till then, how much I owe.*

*3 When I stand before the throne,
dressed in beauty not my own,
when I see thee as thou art,
love thee with unsinning heart,
then, Lord, shall I fully know,
not till then, how much I owe.*

*4 When the praise of heav'n I hear,
loud as thunders to the ear,
loud as many waters' noise,
sweet as harp's melodious voice,
then, Lord, shall I fully know,
not till then, how much I owe.*

*5 Chosen not for good in me,
wakened up from wrath to flee,
hidden in the Savior's side,
by the Spirit sanctified,
teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
by my love, how much I owe.*

McCheyne knew what was coming and lived like it, though his days were few, from our perspective. He died in an epidemic of typhus at the age of 29.

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2. *Knowing you will inherit the earth produces joyful contentment now.* Not living to make a big name for oneself. The meek will inherit the earth. And therefore the meek have the capacity to experience joyful contentment now.

Make It Personal: Let's affirm what Jesus said about who we are. The poor in spirit, the mourners, and the meek. Those are God's kind of people.

⁷ 9Marks Pastors Talk, Episode 85: On What Can Miserable Christians Sing (with Carl Trueman and Matt Merker)