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## Matthew 5:5 - 3rd Beatitude



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 5, the third Beatitude states "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." While some translations use "gentle" instead of "meek," this word implies strength and control. It means that rather than pushing forward our own plans and defending our own rights, we should defer to others and leave things in God's hands. The concept of inheriting the earth is often overlooked in favor of going to heaven, but meekness involves deferring to others and ultimately being in charge of the world, making this an attractive proposition.

### Transcript

Today we'll be looking at the third Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount, as found in Matthew 5. These Beatitudes are statements that Jesus makes about the blessedness, or the fortunateness, or the enviable-ness of a certain class of people. And since the people that he describes are those that we would not normally think of as enviable, he always gives a reason why he says they are enviable. Jesus never makes an absurd statement which cannot be made sensible when given the full picture of the context in which he's speaking.

To say blessed are those who mourn sounds absurd in itself. Why would anyone whose mourning be considered happy or enviable? But Jesus gives a reason, because they shall be comforted. And the comfort that comes is something that is a true privilege and a true blessing, and something that those who receive it are enviable.

Likewise, the poor in spirit, he said, they are blessed because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. That certainly is worth having. And therefore, although these people who are described are not the people that we would normally think of as enviable when we look at things in a worldly way, seen in eternity through an eternal lens, an eternal standard, such as Jesus presented for us to view things through, we can see that these people are the ones who really have it made.

These people are the ones who really we should be if we wish to be blessed by God. Now, the third beatitude reads like this. Jesus said, Blessed are the meek, for they shall

inherit the earth.

Blessed are the meek. Some translations say gentle. The Greek word that is used here can be translated gentle or meek, and in some translations it's consistently translated gentle.

Other times it's fairly consistently translated meek, and more often in most translations this word is sometimes in some context translated meek and sometimes gentle. We'll work with the word meek simply because that's the traditional reading from the King James and the New King James, which I'm using. And the word meek is an interesting concept.

Meekness is something that grows out of humility. The first beatitude was those who are beggars in spirit. That means they are people who are spiritually humble.

The second beatitude was those who mourn, presumably who are mourning over their spiritual condition. Now, if a person realizes that he's a spiritual beggar and that he has robbed God of many of the years of his life through sin and mourns over this, it is going to produce in him an attitude of meekness toward others. Now, meekness has to do with relationship with other people.

I should perhaps point out that in these beatitudes, there are eight of them here, four of them have to do with our relationship with people, and four of them have to do with our relationship with God. Now, they're not divided up just like that. You don't get the first four about God and the second four about people.

But as you go through them, you'll see that in four of the beatitudes it is our relationship with God that is a concern. And in four of them, our relationship with our fellow man. Now, being poor or beggars in spirit and mourning over our spiritual condition, those have to do with our relationship directly with God.

But when we come to the subject of being meek, this has to do with relationship with other people, because meekness or gentleness is a relational pattern. It is a relational commitment that some people have in dealing with other people. The word meek is the opposite of the word assertive, especially self-assertive.

There's perhaps nothing wrong with being assertive on behalf of another who is being victimized, but to be self-assertive in the sense that you are going to see to it that your own agenda is going to go through if you have anything to say about it. You're going to use all the influence you have, all the manipulative power, all the money, whatever you've got, all your strength you're going to have to get your way in every situation. A person who is self-assertive is a person who assumes that his agenda, A, is the best agenda, and B, that he has the right to have his way, and therefore everybody else just needs to basically defer to him, because he sees himself as having superior wisdom or

superior plans or just having superior rights.

Now, the meek person is just the opposite of all that. The meek person doesn't consider that he has any rights to defend. He does not consider that he's wiser than all others or that his plans are better or his agendas, somehow he has the right to have his agendas passed.

The meek person is humble, and because he is humble, he relates humbly toward others. He is more likely to defer to others because of his gentle and meek disposition. Now, when we speak of a person that way, being meek and deferring to others almost as a habit of life and as a pattern of relationship, what are we going to think? Well, our conventional wisdom today, even Christians say this frequently, is that, well, this person is going to be a doormat.

This person is going to walk all over him. You know, people say you've got to look out for yourself, because if you don't look out for yourself, no one else is going to look out for you. And this is, of course, the apologetic for self-assertiveness.

However, it's not exactly true. If you don't look out for yourself, if you are meek, if you are harmless, if you do defer to others out of love for them, there is one who will stand up for you. Those who say you need to stand up for yourself because if you don't, no one else will, are not taking into consideration what the Scripture actually says on this subject, because in the book of Isaiah, chapter 11, we have a prophecy about Jesus Christ.

And in verse 4, it says about him, with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and judge should be translated adjudicate. That means he will hear their cause and pass judgment, no doubt in this case to vindicate them. And it says he will do this, and he will decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

Now, equity means justice. So Jesus, it is said, will decide with justice on behalf of the meek of the earth. Those who do not assert themselves, he will judge in their favor.

He will vindicate them. Now, this means we have a couple of choices, really. I mean, in terms of our relationship with other people, in our plans and our preferences, our agendas, we can either push them forward ourselves and defend our own right to do so, and defend our own plans and take on all comers and force others to defer to us, or we can do the opposite.

We can be like Jesus, really. We can defer to others. We can allow ourselves to be disappointed so others can have their way.

And it's not as if we will never be defended. We will be defended, but we'll be defended by none other than Jesus Christ. Now, the advantage of this, over defending ourselves, is simply this.

Jesus never makes any mistakes in who should be defended. If we are inclined to defend ourselves and to assert our own way, we are already prejudged that we are right. And therefore, we are likely to be on our own side, even when we're not right.

But if we simply defer and leave things in God's hands, then we leave it up to God to decide who's right and who needs to be vindicated. I think in this sense of David, when he was king of Judah and Israel, and one of his sons, Absalom, rebelled against him and got most of Israel on his side and had the armies at his command, and David realized that his son would come to Jerusalem and kill him and take his throne. So David and the few that were loyal to him fled from the city on foot.

And as David fled from the city, there was a man named Shimei who was cursing David and throwing rocks and dirt at David and saying, You're a bloody man, David, and God's made this happen to you because of all the evil things you did to the house of Saul, and so forth. Now, none of those accusations were really true, and David knew they weren't true, I suspect. But one of David's commanders, one still loyal to him, said, David, why should this dead dog curse the king? Shall I go over and take his head off for you? And David rebuked his loyalist and said, Oh, you know, how long will I bear with you? He says, No one's going to be put to death here for what this man is saying.

He said, If God has sent him to curse David, let him curse. If God is on my side, then he will vindicate me. I'm paraphrasing what David said.

But essentially, David had the power to assert his own vindication against this scoundrel who was hurling insults at him and dirt, too. But David would not do it. He said, Listen, I'll leave this in God's hands.

Let God take care of this. This was, of course, David's general attitude in many ways. Because once when Saul, who was also trying to kill him, came into a cave where David was hiding and didn't know that David was there, and David was in the position in the darkness to reach out and kill Saul and rid himself of this enemy, David refused to do so.

He said, I'll let God do that. David would leave his case in the hands of God, not take it into his own hands. This is what meekness means.

Now, David, as an example of meekness, instructs us tremendously on the subject, because David was not in any way a weakling. David was not a man who was effeminate in any sense. He was a commander of the armies.

Not only had he killed Goliath when he was a boy, he went out and led the armies of Israel and destroyed thousands of enemies of Israel, usually Philistines. And this man was a mighty man of valor. He was a strong man.

He was a talented man. He was an intelligent man. He was a musical man.

He was a Renaissance man. He wrote poetry and music. And here's a man who was ruling a nation, a commander of armies, a man who had lived in hardship for years before he became king.

Saul had chased him through the wilderness, and David and his men had to live in hard conditions, living in caves and so forth. David was not a soft man. David was not a weak man, but he was a meek man.

Meekness, we could say, would be strength under control. You see, if you are really weak and have no power and no hope of getting your own way by asserting yourself, then the fact that you defer to others is not meekness. There's no virtue in giving up your own way when you had no choice in the matter.

But when you are disposed, even in situations where you could force the issue and get your own way, but you're still disposed to let another have their way instead, that is strength under control. You see, the most natural thing that every person would do is use all the strength that they have at their disposal to push through their own agenda. However, the Scripture says that he that can rule his own spirit is greater than a man who can conquer a city.

It says that in Proverbs. And ruling the spirit, keeping that strength under control so that you, instead of lashing out on your own behalf, you commit yourself into hands of God. This is what meekness is.

This is what Jesus did. When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter took a sword and tried to defend him. And Jesus said, Peter, put away your sword.

He said, don't you know that if I wished I could call twelve legions of angels and they would come and defend me? And when Jesus was in the position to defend himself, as he could have done, he would not. And it says of him in 1 Peter 2, that when he was accused and threatened, he did not retaliate. When he was reviled, he did not revile back.

When he was mistreated, he did not threaten. He simply, it says, committed himself into the hands of God, who judges righteously. And, of course, by leaving himself in the hands of God, what happened to him? He got killed.

But because he left himself in the hands of God, he also got raised from the dead. You see, if you commit yourself into the hands of God, that doesn't mean you're not going to get hurt. But it does mean that you'll be in the will of God, that whatever happens to you is what God will want to happen to you, what God will bring about.

There's no place safer to be than in the hand of God, in the perfect will of God. And so Jesus, when he was in a position to defend himself, would not do it. This is meekness.

It is strength under control. Now, Jesus said, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Now, this idea was not original with Jesus.

At least, he was not the first to say it. It actually is just a rephrasing of a statement from Psalm 37 and verse 11. Psalm 37 and verse 11 simply says, The meek shall inherit the earth.

And so when Jesus said, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, he was just rephrasing the same truth, saying how fortunate it is to be one of them, then, if they will inherit the earth. Now, inheriting the earth, that's an interesting concept, because, for one thing, Christians usually think in terms of inheriting heaven or going to heaven. But the Bible says, Jesus said, and the psalmist said, that the meek will inherit the earth.

This is the earth where we live now. The earth will eventually be ruled by those who are Christ's followers, who have not asserted themselves, but have meekly deferred and surrendered to his will in their lives, and, in many cases, have suffered a great deal for doing so, because they would not defend themselves, but who will eventually be vindicated, and the earth will be ruled by them, according to Jesus and according to the psalm. Now, the ruling of the earth is something that many men in the world today hope to do.

We have many men in high political positions who dream of ruling the earth. It's always been that way. There were the Caesars, of course, in the Roman period, and there have been lesser kings and so forth throughout history, Napoleon, Hitler, the Communists, have all thought that they would rule the earth, and some of them came closer than others to really doing so.

At this present time, there are people in high positions who hope that the earth will be one government, and that perhaps they or their friends will be the ones in charge. Being in charge of the world is kind of an attractive proposition, being the one in charge, being the one ruling the earth. Well, inheriting the earth, Jesus said, it's already been determined who's going to inherit it, the heirs.

You see, who owns the earth? Well, it says in Psalm 24, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. So, who's going to be the heir? Who's going to inherit the earth? Well, the person who inherits something is the son, the son of the owner. And therefore, if we are children of God, then we will inherit that which is his.

Paul says the same thing over in Romans chapter 8. He says, if we are children, then we're heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. So, we are going to inherit the world along with Christ because we are the children of God who owns it. Now, it's really ironic when you think about it this way because the conventional wisdom of the world is you will get what you can get for yourself.

You will get and you will have what you can negotiate for yourself or what you can manipulate for yourself, what you can force for yourself. And that's what you're going to get and you'll get nothing more than that. And if you make yourself a doormat, people will just walk over you and you'll never get what you have coming and so on and so forth.

Well, that's the world's way of thinking. But the Bible says that's not so. You see, by the world's way of thinking, if anyone ever does inherit the earth, if ever there is a world government and someone rules it, the person who rules it is going to be the one who played the political game well or who had the strongest armies on his side.

It might even be through a military coup, someone who's really got force on his side, someone who's self-assertive, someone who's got a plan and an ambition. That person, if anyone does, will someday control the earth. It is thought.

And that is why people who have this as their ambition do so through these means. They seek to get the military on their side or they rise through the political hoops. And this is how they hope to gain mastery over others and over the world.

And they're mistaken. Now, some people who do such things do obtain temporary mastery. We cannot deny this.

And partial mastery. But ultimate mastery is going to go to those who are not of this type. The meek, the gentle, the ones who are not asserting their own selves.

These are the ones that Jesus said are going to inherit the earth. What an astonishing paradox that is. Because there are so many who actually desire to inherit the earth who are anything but meek.

Now, I need to comment about this one other thing, about meekness. Because I have said that meekness involves deferring to others. And it's the opposite of self-assertiveness.

It should not be thought that a person who is meek doesn't ever speak out in protest about anything. It should not be thought that the person who is meek does not actively work for what's right and what's good. Meekness has to do with the person's attitude toward his own rights and his own agendas.

But when it comes to God's rights and the rights of other innocent people, the meek man can be a tiger. I mean, again, thinking of David. David was a meek man.

When it came to standing up for his own rights, he simply wouldn't do it. But when it came to standing up for God's glory, the man was ferocious. And likewise, Jesus.

We have Jesus as the example of the ultimate meek man. In Matthew chapter 11, Jesus

said, I am gentle and meek, and if you take my yoke upon you and learn from me, you will find rest to your souls. Jesus described himself as meek.

And yet, he drove money changers out of the temple because his father's glory was being impugned. His father's glory was being compromised there in his father's house. Jesus could be sharp-tongued at times.

He spoke out very harshly against the scribes and the Pharisees. In Matthew chapter 23, he said such scathing things about them, in fact, that you almost get embarrassed if you can picture yourself there listening to these things being said publicly to the face of the religious leaders. There'd certainly be an awkwardness about hearing it because Jesus was so strong in his rebukes.

And yet, he's a meek man. But when Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees, he didn't say, you know, woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, because you treat me badly. He didn't make any reference to that.

He said, woe unto you because you soak widows of their pensions, and then you fake like you're very religious and say long prayers so people admire your spirituality. And he said other things like that. Basically, what they were doing that were injustices to people and affronts to God were the things that he angrily spoke out against.

So here we have a very meek man, Jesus, and another meek man, David, who were able, when it was not their own agenda that was at stake, when it was not them simply getting their due and having their rights observed and honored, but when it had to do with basic justice, when it had to do with basic honoring God, these men could be ferocious, as it were. I mean, Moses, it says in the book of Numbers, Moses was the meekest man on the face of the earth, and yet he had some strong words, he had some strong actions at times, he threw the stone tablets down and broke them and commanded the Levites to come over and go out and slay those who were worshiping the golden calf. This is a meek man? Yes, the meekest of the whole earth, it says in the book of Numbers.

But meekness has to do with the way we relate to others when our own rights, our own wishes are at stake. The meek person defers to others out of love for the others and for Christ's sake. The self-assertive man does not.

But when it comes to the need to be strong, the need to be heroic, the need to speak out in the favor of justice and to do so strongly, the meek man is able to rise to that, because that has nothing to do with defending his own rights, that has to do with defending the honor of God and the right of the innocent. Therefore, we should not think that meekness is to be confused either with weakness, nor with simply passivity. The meek man has learned to keep his strength under control when his own agendas are being thwarted.



But he also controls it in the sense of using that strength on behalf of righteousness when it's not simply a matter of his own wishes or of his own needs. Well, we're about out of time for today, and so we'll come back to these Beatitudes next time. We'll take the fourth Beatitude when we come back next time.

I hope you'll be able to join us for that session tomorrow.