

“The Meek”

Introduction: How do you respond when someone wrongs you? What is your reaction when you are the victim of injustice? When do you find yourself wanting to seek revenge? What would it take for you to “stand down,” to not respond in kind, to put away thoughts of getting even with someone and think instead about reaching out in love? The world around us says, “blessed are the mighty, who take matters into their own hands, for they will get what they want.” By contrast Jesus says, “blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

Remember that as we look at the way Jesus introduces his great body of teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount, he is not, in the opening beatitudes, identifying things we need to do in order to enter the realm, or kingdom of God. Rather, he is identifying characteristics that will begin to emerge in us as the realm of God begins to enter us.

Perhaps, of all these identifying characteristics, this one, meek, is the most difficult for us to understand. I think that’s because the word meek has such weak connotations. We’re inclined to use it to describe someone who is passive or spineless, someone who is a wallflower or wet noodle, someone who has no brawn or backbone. But, as the biblical writers use the word, a truly meek person is described as one who exhibits a great kind of strength, what we might call humble strength. In fact, meek is a word used to describe both Moses and Jesus, neither of whom were lacking in brawn or backbone!

Before we consider how this pair shows us what meekness in action looks like, let’s begin with Psalm 37 which unfolds the character of meekness, and from which Jesus seems to have drawn this particular blessing.

I. Psalm 37

A. The context of the psalm is important. The writer, David, is wrestling with the age-old problem of the apparent success of those who ignore or disobey God. He is wrestling with the reality that in this world, the pushy, grabby, power-wielding, self-asserting types seem always to come out on top. He is wrestling with the sense that the evil often seem to get away with their schemes and that nice guys often finish last. Yet in the face of all this, and contrary to all appearances, the meek will win. It is the meek who will inherit the land. It is the meek who will enjoy peace and prosperity.

B. Who are the meek? The psalm identifies them by way of contrast:

What the meek don’t do is “fret.” Not fretting is mentioned three times in the psalm’s opening eleven verses. They don’t worry about what they cannot control, nor do they respond to difficult people, or circumstances which go against them, with resentment, envy, or anger. This would just be a waste of emotional energy as the days of those people are numbered, like grass that withers.

What the meek do do is “trust in the LORD.” This looks like turning to God for guidance and direction, finding their joy in his love, seeking to do his will, and waiting patiently for him to act, trusting that he will make all things right, in his perfect timing. Instead of seeking revenge when wronged, the meek seek to do good to the struggling, living a life of justice (which v. 28 shows that the LORD loves), caring for the needs of the poor, the immigrants, the widows, and the orphans (cf. Zech. 7:8-10). Overall, we might say that the meek take their eyes off their circumstances and fasten them on God, and their neighbor.

## II. Moses and Jesus

A. What does this look like in practice? Take Moses. Numbers 12:3 identifies him this way: “Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.” This statement was made in the context of Moses’ sister, Miriam, and his brother, Aaron, challenging his position of leadership within the community. They did not approve of the woman he had married (she was black), and they were jealous of the very personal relationship he claimed to have with the LORD. But Moses refused to lash out against them or judge them. Instead, he trusted and waited for God to work things out. (You can read about it in the rest of Numbers 12.) This was in great contrast to an earlier time in his life when Moses saw an Egyptian soldier abusing a Hebrew slave and he killed the Egyptian. He thought he was doing his Hebrew friend a favor, but it turned out not to have endeared him to either his own people or to the Egyptians among whom he was living (Ex. 2:11-15). In fact, he was forced to flee into the wilderness where he ended up spending 40 years caring for the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro. During this time, he was able to make space for the kingdom of God to settle in his soul and exhibit meekness—humble strength—when his sister and brother opposed him.

B. As for Jesus, he uses the word meek to describe himself: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle (meek) and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls . . .” (Ma. 11:28f). In what sense is Jesus meek? In the sense that he never used his authority and power to dominate or push his agenda on others but always had the interests of others in mind.

Paul cites this in his letter to the church in Philippi as he seeks to encourage them to care for one another (Phil. 2:3-8):

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Here is meekness personified. It is humble strength. It surfaces out of his relationship with the Father. Peter comments helpfully here as he reflects on Jesus’ trial and crucifixion not only as leading to the atoning sacrifice for our sin, but also as an example for us to follow:

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Pet. 2:23).

Jesus lived, we might say, a Psalm 37 informed meekness, a Psalm 37 informed humble strength.

C. One more picture of meekness in action comes from the 2009 Kentucky Derby. A horse named “Mine That Bird” was such a bad looking beast that his odds of winning were 50:1 (not very good!). He got such a bad start that he quickly fell 8 lengths behind and by the first ¼ mile fell out of the range of the NBC cameras. But remarkably, in the second greatest upset in Derby history, Mine That bird came back to win. The announcer was so surprised and so shocked when Mine That Bird surged into the lead that he began to giggle. More to the point, when jockey Calvin Borel was asked why he had chosen

to ride Mine That Bird, he responded, “Because that horse has a domesticated spirit.” In other words, the horse was humble enough to entrust itself to the rider who had the reins in his hands.

“Meek” is actually used to describe a horse that has been gentled, a horse that has been domesticated, a horse who hasn’t lost his strength but whose strength has been given in to the hands of, and brought under the control of, the rider. The strength of the psalmist, the strength of Moses, the strength of Jesus, can all be seen to have been brought under the control of, and the trust, in the Father, such that the needs of others, and not revenge, or getting even, was pursued.

### III. Inheriting the Earth

A. The really good news is that to those in whom this humble strength begins to emerge, Jesus promises they will inherit the earth. As the psalmist expresses it, “the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity” (37:11).

Prosperity not in terms of material goods, but in terms of the richness and wealth of the inheritance that is eternal life in the land that will be God’s new creation. As Peter puts it, we have an inheritance kept in heaven for us that will “never perish, spoil, or fade” (1 Pe. 1:4).

And then peace, in the present, in the meantime, which we have as we anticipate living into and enjoying the inheritance that is kept safely for us.

Such an inheritance allows us to put ourselves willingly at the disposal of Jesus, under his control, that we might live for others, instead of ourselves. Let’s go to the table to celebrate the inheritance that is ours through the meekness of our Lord Jesus Christ.