

The King's Sermon

Blessed are the Meek (Matthew 5:5)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on March 19, 2017

Introduction

- ❖ This morning we're continuing in our sermon series through the Sermon on the Mount. We're still in the Beatitudes because we're studying them one by one. We're taking our time because the Beatitudes are key to understanding the rest of the Sermon.
 - ▶ But the problem is that they're often misread. **A common mistake is to read the Beatitudes like it's a checklist for who gets to enter the kingdom of heaven.** If you're meek, if you're merciful, if you have a pure heart and you're a peacemaker, then you're welcomed. But there's no room for the proud, for the vengeful, for the impure and the troublemakers. These verses are treated like a checklist of character traits that people need to attain if they want to enter the kingdom.

- ❖ **But what if we read the Beatitudes – not as a checklist for how to enter the kingdom – but as a guest list for who's been invited.** For who's been brought into the kingdom by grace through faith. That changes how you read this. You're no longer reading the Beatitudes like a list of things you've got to do (or you've got to improve on) if you want to enter the kingdom. **Instead you read them as a description of the kind of person who's already in the kingdom.** These verses are describing kingdom character – the characteristics of a Christian, of a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.
 - ▶ And like I said, that's going to affect the way you read the rest of the Sermon. **People are just as likely to assume that, in this Sermon, Jesus is giving us a new and higher law.** He's taking the Mosaic law and upping the ante. He expects more from us. "You heard that from Moses but I expect this." So it's tempting to read the Sermon on the Mount like it's a new law you have to keep if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven after you die.
 - But if the Beatitudes are more like a guest list – if it's written to those already in God's kingdom – **then you realize that everything in the rest of Sermon is describing the kind of life you should live – not to get saved – but because you are saved.** Because you've been born again, and you have the Holy Spirit living inside you. So not only should you live this way – now you actually can! Do you see how important it is to read the Beatitudes rightly?

- ❖ Well let's look at the third beatitude. "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*" Now that's counterintuitive. I'm sure it confused the crowds that day as much as it confuses us. **If you grow up in public education, you're taught from a young age that life operates according to a primitive, instinctive principle called the survival of the fittest.** The ones who survive and thrive are the strong. The meek are the ones who get culled, who eventually go extinct. The fit will inherit the earth. Not the meek.
 - ▶ That's the basic assumption for how the world works. **You throw a bunch of lions and lambs in a pen together, and no one imagines the lambs coming out on top.** The lions are going to inherit the pen. So this beatitude is counterintuitive. It's not what you would expect. That begs the question of how this could be true. **Does Jesus really know what he's talking about?** Is it just a pithy proverb? Or is there truth to this statement that the meek will inherit the earth?

- ❖ And there's another question. Not only does the world find this statement unbelievable, they find it unattractive. **Meekness is not a desirable attribute.** You won't come across many job profiles listing meekness as a desired quality in new hires. When the interviewer asks you to list your strengths, no one ever says *meekness*. **In fact, I know there are some people who don't even want to become Christians because, in their minds, it carries a connotation of being soft.** Meekness is considered weakness. So if it's taught as a characteristic of all Christians, then it becomes a stumbling block for many. It's unattractive.
 - ▶ So it'll help for us to clear the fog around this beatitude. I'm going to do three things for us. 1) I'm going to try to clear up any misconceptions we have over what it means to be meek. 2) We'll try to identify the source of meekness. How does one become meek? 3) I'll try to help you better appreciate the blessedness of being meek.

Clearing up Misconceptions of Meekness

- ❖ What I want to do here is to first clear up two misconceptions and then offer a definition of biblical meekness. **Let's start by addressing this notion that meekness is a form of weakness.** I don't want this beatitude to be a stumbling block for anyone.
- ❖ I'm a regular listener to sports radio, and I recall this one conversation between the hosts about an NFL quarterback who was known to be a committed Christian. **One of the hosts was brutally honest and said he didn't want a committed Christian for a quarterback. He thought a Christian wouldn't have that killer instinct, that ultra-competitive spirit.** He didn't want a quarterback who can get over a loss by trusting in God. He wants his quarterback to be devastated by a loss. To have a really hard time getting over it. He wants a quarterback who loves winning above all else. But a Christian won't say that. A Christian loves God more than winning. And according to this radio host, that's what makes him soft.
 - ▶ Now I don't think any of you have plans to be a professional football player, so you might think that particular stereotype may not affect you. But it just as well applies to your profession. For example, a lot of you are doctors or you hope to be one day. Just think. **Who are the ones in med school or residency who get the top positions or the most coveted spots? Not the meek.** It's the cutthroat, ultra-competitive ones. That's how it is. In the eyes of the world, meekness is not a highly desirable attribute.
- ❖ **But that just tells me that the world doesn't know what biblical meekness is.** Just consider the characters Scripture who were called meek and you'll get my point. **Moses, we're told in Numbers 12:3, was the meekest man on earth.** In that chapter we're told that Aaron and Miriam spoke out against Moses and challenged his position as God's chosen prophet. But he was so meek that he felt no need to defend himself against the accusations. He let the LORD defend his own choice in choosing Moses. That's being meek.
 - ▶ He was the meekest man on earth. **And yet his meekness was not incompatible with great power.** Moses was invested with immense authority. He was the sole leader over the entire people of Israel. He had tons of power – and yet he was meek.

- ❖ Or just think about the **Apostle Paul**. I don't think those who are familiar with the book of Acts or his letters would call him a pushover. I doubt anyone would describe him as soft. He had no trouble exercising his apostolic authority to confront heresy and heretics. Paul is no softie. He's quite firm in his convictions.
 - ▶ And yet he can write in 2 Corinthians 10:1, that he appeals to the Corinthians "*by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*". So Paul had more than one gear. He wasn't always firm to everyone. He could be meek when he needed to be meek. **Meekness and firmness are totally compatible**. So that's the first misconception of meekness.

- ❖ **Another misconception we need to clear up is the idea that biblical meekness is simply niceness.** A meek person is considered a nice person. But that's simplifying it way too much. **Dogs are nice. They're extremely nice, but they're not meek.** We're not dealing with a natural disposition. We're dealing with a fruit of the Spirit. Most English translations have the word "gentleness" listed as one of the fruit of the Spirit. It's the same Greek word for meekness. **That means meekness is not a natural quality. It's a work of the Spirit in you.**
 - ▶ Think back to Moses, the meekest man on earth. He's the same man who killed an Egyptian in the heat of the moment. So temperamentally he wasn't meek. That wasn't his natural bent. But God changed Moses, and he became the meekest man on earth.
 - **So whatever biblical meekness is – it isn't a natural quality.** There are plenty of naturally nice people who don't know Jesus, who have not been born again, who are still outside the kingdom. They're nice but not meek. And on the flip side, there are plenty of naturally aggressive or stubborn people who are transformed by the grace of God to become meek. Bottom line, no one is born with the biblical meekness. It's a fruit of the Spirit working in you.

- ❖ ***So if it's not a form of weakness and it's not the same as natural niceness, then what is meekness?*** Here's my definition. I'd put it this way: **Meekness is great power blanketed in greater humility.** The best example of this kind of meekness would be Jesus himself. He is God Incarnate with all authority in heaven and on earth, and yet he humbled himself to such a degree that nobody recognized his majesty.
 - ▶ Scripture says, "*he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him...and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*" (Isa. 53:2-3) That's being meek.
 - I find it amazing, in the book of Revelation, how John is told to behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah – this conquering messianic figure – and when he looks up, all he sees is a Lamb that looks as though it had been slain (cf. Rev. 4:5-6). Great power blanketed in greater humility. That's biblical meekness.

- ❖ **The meek of the earth are not necessarily weaklings, and they're not just nice, polite people. No, they're inheritors of the earth.** They will one day reign with Christ. They are in-dwelt with all the power of the Spirit of God. Yet with all that going for them, the meek are extremely humble. They're self-effacing. Always willing to let others take the spotlight. They're endowed with great power on high yet blanketed in greater humility.

Identifying the Source of Meekness

- ❖ So how do you get this way? How does one become meek? I'm sure many of you desire to be meek, and many of you who were initially skeptical of meekness may now see its beauty and glory. So how do we become meek? This is our second point. We'll try to identify the source of meekness.
- ❖ Let me come right out and say it: **You can't make yourself meek. You can't will yourself to be a meeker person.** Meekness is extremely hard. Maybe you didn't think being meek was all that difficult, but just consider how hard it already is to be poor in spirit (to admit your spiritual bankruptcy) or to mourn your sinful state. Those are direct challenge to the ego.
 - ▶ And now Jesus is saying his followers, the citizens of the kingdom of heaven, are to be meek, which is even harder than being spiritually poor. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes this insightful point. **He says admitting to God that you're a poor, wretched sinner is one thing. But letting someone else call you that is entirely another.** I don't have a problem confessing to God that I've been a selfish jerk to my wife, but if she said I was being a selfish jerk then all the sudden I'm quick to defend myself. I'll try to justify my words or actions.
- ❖ **But the meek man feels no compulsion to defend his name or reputation because he has a true view of himself.** He knows he's a wretched sinner capable of the most notorious of sins – if not for the grace of God. So he's under no presumption that he deserves anyone's respect. He won't demand others to treat him in a certain way.
 - ▶ The meek woman is so keenly aware of her spiritual poverty – she so mourns over her sinfulness – that she refuses to boast in herself. She won't toot her own horn. That's the kind of behavior you can expect from the meek. **The meek are so attuned to their sinful hearts that they're simply amazed that God could love them at all or that anyone would speak highly of them.**
- ❖ I'll be the first to admit that, left to myself, I am not going to react in that way. **Everything in me works against this kind of meekness. And everything in you!** Our sinful flesh is inclined to self-promotion. Our inflated egos are prone to self-justification.
 - ▶ That's why you can't make yourself meek. **Nothing but the Spirit of God can do this. Only he can humble you.** Only he can convince you that you're poor in spirit. Only he can make you mourn. **Only he can grant you a true view of yourself and a clear view of God in the gospel.**
- ❖ And that's how we become meek. It's a work of the Spirit as he confronts us with the gospel. When we look at the cross of Christ, we learn two important truths. **First, we're confronted with the ugliness of the cross, and we realize that God must be utterly holy and we must be utterly sinful if it required the Son of God to undergo such a gruesome death to secure our forgiveness.** If there was a less costly way, the Father would've chosen it. But if that was the only way, then we're just *that* sinful.

- ❖ But if we keep looking at the same cross, we learn a second truth. **On the cross we see the loveliness and graciousness of Christ, who willingly took the place of poor, wretched sinners like us.** While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. He died not for the perfect and pious but for the ungodly – that he might bring us to God reconciled and redeemed.
 - ▶ So the ugliness of the cross is a reflection of the ugliness of our sin. But the glory of what the cross accomplished is a reflection of the glorious grace of the gospel.

- ❖ Friends, you have to work these truths deep into your heart, and then what the Holy Spirit produces is meekness. **Meekness comes from receiving a true view of your sinfulness and a clear view of God's holiness – coupled with a personal and intimate view of Jesus's gracious love for you.**
 - ▶ Now if you tell me you already believe these things but you still struggle to manifest meekness, then **my assumption is that there are probably depths of your sinfulness that you've yet to encounter or there are heights of God's attributes that you have yet to explore.** It doesn't matter how long we've been believers, we can't stop learning. Many, I fear, have grown stagnant in the pursuit of knowing God and knowing ourselves. Perhaps that explains why you're not growing in meekness.

- ❖ **Or maybe meekness doesn't describe you at all is because you still haven't entered the kingdom of heaven.** Remember, these are kingdom characteristics of kingdom dwellers. Perhaps you've never truly experienced the gracious love of Christ in the gospel.
 - ▶ Jesus told us to come to him, all who labor and are heavy laden, and he will give us rest. He says to take up his yoke and learn from him, for he is *meek* and lowly in heart (cf. Mt. 11:28-29). Some of you need to come to him – come to the perfectly Meek One – and find in him your rest and redemption.

Appreciating the Blessedness of Meekness

- ❖ So we've cleared up some misconceptions of meekness and I offered a definition – that it's essentially great power blanketed in greater humility – and we've seen that the source of this meekness is the work of the Spirit as he opens our eyes to a truer view of ourselves and a clearer view of God. Now let's consider our last point. I want to help you appreciate the blessedness of being meek.
 - ▶ Remember, Jesus calls the meek blessed for (because) they shall inherit the earth. But in what sense are they inheritors? What does that mean and how would it make you blessed? There are three ways I want to answer that question.

- ❖ **First, the meek are blessed with a secure future.** I do believe there is a literal sense in which the meek (which is every Christian) will inherit the earth when Jesus returns to establish a new Heaven and a new Earth.
 - ▶ We're promised in Scripture that since we are sinners who have been mercifully adopted into the family of God, since we are his children, then we are his heirs – *"heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."* (Rom. 8:17)

- ❖ Think about how amazing this is. Most royal disputes are about siblings fighting over their inheritance. And the only one really blessed is the firstborn. The firstborn gets the best inheritance. **But the meek in Christ are blessed because Christ is the kind of firstborn sibling who loves to share his inheritance with all of his adopted brothers and sisters.**
 - ▶ No other Elder Brother is going to share his reign with you, but Jesus is more than willing. In fact he laid down his own life to secure your co-reign with him (2 Tim. 2:12). You're blessed with a secure future with a secure position in the kingdom of God when it comes on the earth in all its fullness.
 - And the thing about the meek is that they know this is coming true. **They know they will one day reign with Christ over all the earth. And yet none of that authority gets to their heads.** All that great power is wrapped in greater humility because they know where they come from. They know how big of a debtor they are to the grace of God. That's what makes them meek.

- ❖ **So there is definitely a future blessedness in mind with this beatitude, but there is also a present sense of blessedness in which the meek have already inherited the earth.** In 2 Corinthians 6, Paul recounts his suffering for the sake of Christ and mentions how he and his co-laborers are treated as having nothing and yet they possess everything (cf. 2 Cor. 6:10). **So in some sense, everything already belongs to the Christian.**
 - ▶ And in 1 Corinthians 3 he explains how that can be. He tells the believers in Corinth that all things are yours – as you are Christ's. In other words, all things belong to you because you belong to Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:21).
 - **So the meek are blessed because whatever belongs to Christ right now belongs to them.** And that translates into a profound sense of contentedness. This is the second way to answer our question. How are the meek blessed? First, we said the meek are blessed with a secure future.

- ❖ **Second, the meek are blessed with true contentment in the present.** It takes a great amount of strength to be content with your life and not to chase after every fleeting desire. **The meek definitely have an inner strength missing in most people. And that strength comes from truly knowing that, in Christ, all things belong to them.** That's why they don't fret. That's what enables them to they trust in the LORD and delight themselves in him.
 - ▶ It's been noted that here in v5 Jesus is citing a psalm. He's referencing **Psalm 37** where it says starting in v10, *"¹⁰In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. ¹¹But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace."* (Ps. 37:10-11)

- ❖ The psalm begins with King David exhorting us to *"fret not yourself because of evildoers."* (Ps. 37:1). In the psalm, he's wrestling with the apparent success and prosperity of the wicked. **The selfish, the self-promoting, the self-justify seem to always come out on top. But David has to remind himself that the meek shall inherit the earth.** So don't fret. Don't worry. All things belong to the meek.

- ❖ Think back to when Prince William served in the Royal Air Force. I'd imagine if he ever fretted about getting passed up for a higher rank or a better mission by a colleague who cheated or weaseled his way up to the top. I'd think one of his friends would grab him by the shoulders and tell him to stop worrying. "Why do you fret? Why do you care where that guy is ranked? Why do you bother competing and comparing with others? You're the Prince of England! One day you'll be King and you'll inherit all things."
- ❖ The same could be said of you, Christian. **Why do you fret over what others are gaining or achieving ahead of you?** Why do you bother to play that game of comparison? **You're a prince/princess in the kingdom of heaven!** One day you'll receive a crown and reign with Christ on a new Earth for all eternity.
 - ▶ **The meek of the earth recognize this and that frees them to be contented people who are truly happy for the achievements of others.** The meek can rejoice when others win even if it means they lost. That's the blessedness of true contentment, of inheriting the earth, of being meek.
- ❖ **The last thing I could say about the blessedness of the meek is that they're blessed with really thick skin.** I'd argue that the opposite of being meek is being thin skinned. **The non-meek are easily offended.** They're very defensive and quick to justify themselves. And that's because their self-worth is wrapped up in the opinion of others. **How they think of themselves depends on how you think of them.**
 - ▶ But the meek are quite the opposite. If you've already come to grips with a true view of yourself – that you're nothing but a poor, wretched sinner in and of yourself – and yet you receive the acceptance and love of the King of kings who has given you not only the kingdom but the entire earth – **then you can bear any offense or insult that comes your way while in service of your King.**
 - That's the connection to the last beatitude. Notice how v11 says blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Christ. The meek can handle reviling.
- ❖ **That's why, in my opinion, the best kind of press secretaries are the meek kind.** There's been a lot of talk about press secretaries in the news lately (and I don't mean to make any kind of political statement here), but **it got me thinking that it takes a great amount of inner strength to be a good press secretary.** Which I'd argue is a meek secretary – one who is thick skinned and not easily offended. The press secretary has the extremely difficult and stressful job of facing the press to speak on behalf of the president. The president doesn't directly get the tough questions or the biting criticism. His press secretary does.
 - ▶ How in the world can you stay meek in such high pressure situations with getting defensive? **I'd say the meekness comes from knowing your president's words so carefully and leaning on the great authority that he's delegated directly to you.** Then you can face the wolves and speak your message boldly without getting offended, without taking the insults personally. That's the only way you can possess such great authority and still be blanketed by greater humility.

- ❖ **Christian, you're essentially a press secretary for the King of kings.** You're responsible to speak his words, to pass on his message. And just know that you'll face plenty of biting criticism if you're good at your job. So you'll need the thick skin that comes with meekness. **Learn the King's message. Know it by heart. Stick to it and lean on the authority that's been delegated directly to you.**
 - ▶ The meek of the earth may not be powerful or strong according to worldly standards, but they certainly carry a Spirit-wrought boldness on the inside that gives them thick skin on the outside. That's a blessed thing to have.

- ❖ So how thick is your skin? How content are you with your life? How secure is your future? If you're not experiencing the blessedness that comes with meekness, then come to Jesus. Take up his yoke. His yoke is easy and his burden is light; for he is meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. (cf. Mt. 11:29-30).