

Sermon Series: The Beatitudes  
Matthew 5:1-12  
Psalm 37:1-11

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### *The Power of Gentleness*

Matthew 5:1-12:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

**‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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I see many of you are wearing red today in celebration of Pentecost – that’s fantastic! Pentecost was one of the 3 major Jewish festivals, also known as the Feast of Weeks. It was held 7 weeks – or 50 days (pente-koste in Greek) – after Passover. It was a celebration of the early harvest of wheat or barley and, in later times for the Jews, a commemoration of the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai. We heard again the passage from

Acts 2 describing the new thing God did on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection: winds blowing, tongues of fire dancing in the air, strange languages, and the outpouring of God's Spirit on all believers prophesied years before by Joel. God's revelation was now received in its fullness by God's people. And we are the beneficiaries yet today!

Our consideration of the Beatitudes fits well with our celebration of Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit. From the start we have affirmed the Beatitudes are not natural talents or even things we are called to do as believers. These are the characteristics produced in the lives of Jesus' followers by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we grow in faith. So what better day to consider them than the day we remember the gift of God's Spirit in our lives. But today's Beatitude: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" is probably the most misunderstood characteristic of them all. The dictionary defines meek as "deficient in spirit or courage, mild in temper." Most often when we hear the word meek we think of a word which rhymes with meek – weak! We think of someone feeble or wishy-washy, lacking strength or courage or purpose, someone who is a doormat or a pushover to others. Christians are sometimes seen in these ways – some coaches in sports don't even want Christian athletes on their teams because of a perception they will not be tough, driven to excel, seeking the right mentality of a winner. Is this the kind of Kingdom Jesus truly wants – composed of those who are poor in spirit, brokenhearted, and now meek? Will these be the ones who will inherit the earth, be the recipients of the kingdom of heaven? Can Jesus really be serious here?

Of course our culture doesn't see gentleness or meekness as a quality to be desired. In our culture those who inherit the earth are the bold, the bright, the beautiful: the Donald Trump's and Sarah Jessica Parker's and Muhammad Ali's of the world. Even many Christians are drawn into the mindset of succeed and achieve – live your best life now they say! This mindset is not far from that expressed by German philosopher and

renowned atheist Frederich Nietzsche famous for proclaiming that “God is dead.” He said “Assert yourself. Care for nothing except yourself. The only vice is weakness and the only virtue is strength. Be strong. Be a superman. The world is yours if you work hard enough for it.” A pretty strong and clear statement, but one very different from Jesus’ point of view.

It makes sense that the One who created the earth and redeemed it from sin would know best what is needed to inherit the earth. When we believe in him, according to Peter’s Pentecost sermon in Jerusalem that first Pentecost day, we are saved and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And when we receive the Holy Spirit we receive the living presence of God himself abiding in our minds and hearts forever. That same Holy Spirit begins the work of shaping our lives as disciple followers of Jesus according to the description Jesus gave in the Beatitudes. As we are filled more and more with God’s Holy Spirit in our lives, we become more aware of our sinful nature as Jesus taught in the first beatitude. The Spirit shines the light of God’s love in our lives and reveals all the ways we transgress against that love before God and before others. The Spirit convicts us of our sin and guides us in learning to put sin aside in our faith journey. It’s a lifelong process of course, we succeed and we fall short, but the work is underway as soon as we turn our hearts over to Christ. We see ourselves as we truly are in the eyes of God.

The Spirit also begins to work on the second beatitude in our lives. We see the reality of our sin and we are led to mourn over our own personal sin and over the brokenness of a world fractured by sin. God’s spirit sensitizes our hearts to all that is less than God’s best in our lives and our world and then comforts us with the offer of forgiveness and new life in Christ. As these two realities begin to sink in more deeply in our minds and hearts we begin to realize the truth of the third beatitude, the true meaning of meekness. For the Holy Spirit will lead us to realize in our poverty of spirit that we have no claim on God’s

love and grace in our lives. God owes us nothing. When we see ourselves as we truly are before God we are humbled and led to our knees. God graciously meets us at the point of our need and offers amazing grace and forgiveness to sinners deserving only judgment. And when we mourn over our sin and the fractured world around us we realize we have no advantage or rights to claim over others around us. We are all noble and flawed human beings, unique and different each one to be sure, but all in need of God's grace and forgiveness nonetheless. As someone said, all ground is level at the Cross and we are all beggars looking for God's grace. We are no better or no worse than anyone else when we see ourselves from God's perspective and we therefore have no reason either for pride or for self-condemnation.

This is the definition of meekness – the humility and gentleness produced by God's Spirit when we see ourselves as we truly are before God and before others. More of God's Spirit in our lives will produce more of a willingness to surrender our will and claim to anything of ourselves as we turn our minds and hearts more fully over to Jesus Christ. He is one of the few biblical illustrations of meekness. In Matthew 11:28 he offered the invitation "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden. 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." Jesus' will was fully surrendered to the Father. He prayed in the Garden "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not my will but thine be done." This is not the prayer of a weakling, a pushover. This is the prayer of someone with great strength and awareness submitting that strength to the will of his master, his father. Strength under control serving the purposes of God – that is the meekness Jesus is speaking of here. These are the ones who will succeed and prosper in God's earth.

Anyone allowing the Spirit to produce this characteristic in their lives will truly have the world at their fingers. With God's help and wisdom and strength alive in and through

them, there is no limit to what God will provide for them – they have inherited the earth! They have received the blessing of knowing who they are in God and who they are called to be in the world and can live their lives fully surrendered to God’s plan and purpose for them at all times! But how does it happen? What is the path to seeing this fruit grow in our lives of faith as disciple followers of Jesus Christ? Our earlier reading in Psalm 37 offers the clues we need. In the face of evildoers, in the face of the reality of sin and evil in the world, the Psalmist offers several succinct commands for the person of faith: Trust in the Lord, Delight yourself in the Lord, Commit your way to the Lord, Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. These are the attitudes which cultivate the Beatitude of meekness in the life of a disciple. We recognize our sin and put our faith and trust not in our own efforts but in the one who has lived and died for us. We learn to delight in his presence in our lives through worship and prayer and reading his word and receiving his love. We abide in the joy of knowing we are made new through Christ our redeemer. Then we commit our way to him – we acknowledge our need for God’s wisdom and guidance to show us the right path to follow each and every day. We pray for God’s blessing in all we say and do recognizing any good that comes is God’s blessing and not our human accomplishment. And then we remain still in mind and heart before the Lord, waiting patiently to see the results of his work in our lives and our relationships and our work and our worship and our service in Christ’s name. We will not see immediate results each and every time or day or situation. But in surrendering our lives and will to the work of the Creator, we will one day inherit all the blessing he desires to pour out on those who know, love, and serve him. We will be meek as Jesus Christ was meek

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. What an amazing promise. On Pentecost, we trust God’s Spirit to do the work in our lives to see the fruit of meekness, the power of gentleness, be seen in us and among us. Make it so, Lord Jesus! Amen.