

Happy are the Helpless

Matthew 5:5

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In Matthew 5, Jesus Christ is in the process of giving believers the formula for happiness.

So far we've discovered that it's an upside down formula. It defies conventional thinking.

In fact, throughout his sermon on the Mount, Jesus will reverse the wisdom of the world.

- Those who come in last are first;
- Giving is really receiving;
- Dying is really living;
- Losing is finding;
- The least is the greatest;
- Being poor is becoming rich;
- Weakness is strength;
- Serving is actually ruling.¹

“Blessed are they,” Christ will say 9 times as his radical sermon begins . . . and we've learned that the word blessed, from the Greek word,

makarios, can be translated “supremely happy”.

The Lord begins His sermon Matthew 5 by effectively saying, Happy are the beggars. Literally, happy are those who recognize they are completely bankrupt in spirit. Why? Because they are the ones who are admitted into the kingdom of God.

Then the Lord goes even further in turning over the apple cart of conventional wisdom as He says in verse 4, Blessed are the brokenhearted.

In other words, blessed are those who mourn over their desperate condition for they are the ones Christ will comfort.

Now our Lord delivers another surprising step toward true happiness:

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5)

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Crossway Books, 2001), p. 33

Again, Jesus, you must be kidding. The meek get buried into the earth; they don't inherit the earth. Doormats are there to be stepped on.



What comes to mind when you think of a meek person? What is he/she like? Is it generally a positive or negative quality?

Matthew Henry, the Puritan pastor of the late 1600's wrote that modern audiences recoil at this path to happiness. He writes,

“Common sense dictates that people who are meek will suffer insult and abuse, unable even to find some small corner where they can draw their breath—they are lambs among a pack of wolves; we know by nature that we must hunt with the hounds, because to be a sheep is to risk becoming someone else's dinner.”²

Most modern dictionaries will define the English word “meekness” along the lines of ‘deficient in courage;’ or ‘one who lacks spirit and backbone.’

² Matthew Henry, *The Quest for Meekness and Quietness of Spirit* (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996; originally publication, 1698), p. 34

My online dictionary defined it with words like, “docile, overly submissive, spiritless.”

It's like the kid who finally got fed up with having his lunch money taken away from him on the bus by the neighborhood bully. Every day, the bully demanded this kid's dollar bill – which amounted to \$5.00 dollars a week.

But then, this boy saw an ad for Karate lessons and got so excited until he found out the lessons cost \$5.00 a week . . . so he just went back to paying the bully.

It's easier to just pay up.

I read just the other day about the opposite response from a kid of a different stripe. A 15 year old was almost robbed in New York City. He was walking from the bus depot to his father's apartment in upper Manhattan when he was flanked by two young thugs. They pulled a gun on him and demanded that he hand over his wallet. He said no!

They threatened him, “Listen, we've got a gun pointed at you, now give us your wallet.” And he said, “No way.”

They tackled him and went for his back pocket but he hung on hollering and fighting back until some people came to help and the thugs ran away.

One of his rescuers said – “They had a gun . . . why didn't you just give them

your wallet?” And he said, “No way, my learner’s permit is in there!”³

I’d rather die than not be able to drive!

Look, the meek don’t inherit the earth – they get ground into the earth.

The meek lose their lunch money and their driver’s permit; and their place in line and their advantage for a promotion. In this world, you need to step up and show your stuff!

You would expect the Lord to say, “You want to be happy and on top of the world? Well, then you need to know that the powerful and well connected to inherit the earth!”

But instead, He says, “Blessed are the meek.”

But . . . meekness is weakness!⁴

Ah, beloved, nothing could be further from the truth.

The Greeks used this word *‘praus’*, translated “meek” in a number of interesting ways, which sheds light on what Christ is talking about.

It was used for a comforting fire

A cozy fire in a fireplace. When controlled, the fire brings warmth; out of control, fire brings destruction.

³ Michael Hodgkin, 1001 Humorous Illustrations (Zondervan Publishing, 1994), p. 96

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, Live Like A King (Moody Press, 1976), p. 63

It was used for a gentle breeze.

Just the right amount of wind could sail your boat or cool down a hot afternoon; too much wind and we call it names like Hurricane Katrina – bringing death and destruction and loss.

It was used for healing medicine.

A patient struggling with a fever could be given medicine that was *‘praus’* that is, capable of relieving the burning fever and allowing the patient to sleep.⁵

What do all these things have in common? They are things that can be comforting and helpful if they are contained and experienced in the right amount. But too much, and they become deadly.

The biblical concept for this word meekness isn’t powerlessness, but power under control. It is strength under control.

It’s the ability to strike back but refuse to get even.



How does this definition of meekness being “power under control” change your perception of what it means to be meek?

⁵ Adapted from Wiersbe, p. 64

It is the power of Jesus Christ cleansing the temple with a whip, to defend the honor of His father. It is the silence of Christ before Pilate, unwilling to defend Himself.

It's not being defiant about me. It's not standing up for me. It's not defending me.

One author wrote that meekness is being finished with me.

Meekness is dying to me. This is replacing the spirit of me-attitudes with the principle of beatitudes.

By the way, would you notice the promise:

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5)

The word, "inherit" is a future tense verb. You are going to rule the planet one day.

You might not inherit the earth at the moment you display meekness. In fact, the earth might reject you and you might suffer for your faith and unwillingness to stand up for yourself and demand your rights.

But Jesus says that the meek inherit the earth.

Keep in mind that you don't receive an inheritance until somebody dies? In this case, the person dying is you. You die

to self; to your demands, to your rights, to your way, to your will.

In dying to self, you find true happiness. As long as you are living for yourself, you never find happiness.

But when you are finished with yourself, you then are actually free to revel in the truth that one day we you fully share in the inheritance of Jesus Christ.

This is the promise of Paul to the Corinthians when he wrote that all things belong to you – whether it's the world or the things of the future – in Christ everything is yours (1 Corinthians 3:22).



How does knowing your future inheritance give you confidence to live in meekness today?

Happiness can become your spirit even when you've been stepped on and mistreated and abused and ignored. How? By recognizing that since you belong to Christ, one day through Christ you will inherit a new heaven and a new earth and an everlasting kingdom.

Imagine that – the downtrodden, abused, mistreated, marginalized, martyred slaves of Christ will one day rule the world.

Evidently Paul thought that was a pretty exciting prospect.

So how do we know if we're dying to self and developing meekness?

Let me give you a pop quiz.

We'll call this a meekness examination, involving three questions:



Question #1: How do you respond when confronted with the truth?

The word "meek" appears in James 1:21, which reads

Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word. (James 1:21)

In other words, when confronted by the word of God, the response of the weak is to not defend themselves, but submit themselves to the truth.



Question #2: How do you respond when another Christian falls into sin?

Does your phone bill go up?

Are you leading the pack outside the city walls to gather stones for throwing?

Are you writing out your notes for the speech of your life?

Paul told us how to respond in Galatians 6:1:

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual, restore him in the spirit of meekness/gentleness. (Galatians 6:1)



Question #3: How do you respond when challenged about your faith?

Peter wrote,

Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with meekness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:15-16)

Here again is that nuance of dying to self rather than defiantly standing up for self. It appears as voluntary

helplessness in the face of those who might grind us into the dirt.

Get a load of who wrote this – the Apostle Peter.

- Out of control, sword swinging, ear chopping off, Peter.
- Talk first think last, Peter.
- Emotion under control? What fun is that, Peter.

Which should give us all hope . . . not only in the principle of meekness but in the person who wrote the principle – Peter.

Evidently Peter grew in meekness over the years which means we can too.

Your Turn



How do you respond when confronted with the truth?

How do you respond when another Christian falls into sin?

How do you respond when challenged about your faith?

Like a gentle breeze . . . a comforting fire for a cold heart? Just the right dose of medicine for the one sick with sin or guilt?

Perhaps you're thinking, I'm not doing very well. How can I develop more meekness?

Know that meekness is a fruit of the Spirit – translated gentleness.

You don't drum it up: you don't create it; the Holy Spirit develops it – over a life-time.

Maybe after enough lessons learned the wrong way, we'll become a little more like Peter the Apostle; we'll swing the sword less and surrender to the Holy Spirit more.

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