

# Kingdom Attitudes

## PART 3 • MATTHEW 5:5 • Blessed Are the Gentle

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We'd like to welcome you to the Four Lakes Church of Christ this morning. We are glad that you are here, and if you are visiting with us today, we would invite you to fill out a visitor card online, and we would also give the reminder that the elements for the Lord's Supper are available on the table in the entryway. I hesitate to frame this as good news (since she is still with us this morning), but our daughter is headed back to Tennessee today for her last year at Freed-Hardeman University! She had a good internship at Summit Credit Union's headquarters this summer, and while she was there developed a new process in their accounting department, saving them an hour and a half every single day from here to eternity. She basically took a nearly 2-hour process and cut it down to around 2 minutes. A week or so ago, she got a note and a gift card from the CFO over there, it was a good learning experience, but she is now headed south for what might be her last year of college for a bit. So, that is my bit of good news today.

We had a very good clothing give-away yesterday, with at least 20 of our own people who were able to help out. This year, in addition to giving away clothing, and in addition to the Bible crafts for kids, we also had a table for giving away Bibles (including several in Spanish – one woman was absolutely thrilled to get a Spanish Bible). But what I really loved about the give-away this year is that several days ago, someone took a picture of the sign out in front of our building and shared it in a neighborhood group. That picture and the information with it then got shared to a Dane County "Neighbors Helping Neighbors" group, and there were a number of shares and likes and some very good comments throughout the week. Once again, we had a run-in with our friendly neighborhood atheist. He came over to thank us for doing this, and as usual, he basically said, "I don't believe in Jesus, but if Jesus were real, this is definitely something Jesus would be doing." As some of you know, we had an interesting conversation out here yesterday, but close to a hundred people came through and helped themselves to some clothing. So, thanks Patsy for her work in coordinating this, and thanks to all of you (members and visitors alike) for working so hard to sort clothing, and for putting it out, for cleaning up, for providing food, for providing crafts for the kids, and for everything that was done here yesterday.

As we get started today, we would like to invite you to obey the gospel. The gospel is the good news concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We obey the good news by believing it, repenting of sin, by publicly stating our belief that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. And today, I have struggled to cut it back to just a few examples, starting with an entire family obeying the gospel at the Fishinger Road congregation in Columbus,

Ohio. I believe this may be the church where John Higgins worshiped when he was in the area for work several years ago. My friend, Brandon Edwards, is one of their ministers now, and he says, “We rejoice with Tamara, John, and Alexis in their decision to be baptized Into Christ this afternoon! Would you mind doing us the pleasure of praying for these new Christians as they begin their walk in Christ? God is truly good!” Awesome news from Ohio!

Another example comes to us through Jeff Abrams, a fellow Freed-Hardeman graduate. He says, “Today Vitaliy was baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27). He is from the occupied Luhansk Region of Ukraine, and Christ found him in Warsaw Poland. Slava Boga!!” I looked up “Slava Boga,” and it means “Glory to God!” Absolutely! Slava Boga!

I then scrolled down Jeff’s page and came to another post from the Tuscumbia, Alabama, congregation where he is a member, and he says, “A happy night—and a happy huddle—at Tuscumbia this evening as Ellie Bradford, Will Looser, Parker Enchiff, and Lincoln Puckett proudly confessed their belief in Jesus and were immersed in Him for the forgiveness of sins. Well done my young friends...very well done. Thank you God for this gift...for being so good.” Awesome!

And the last example comes to us from Albania (directly northwest of Greece). Before her baptism, Selina Dragoti said, “I am only few moments away from my baptism, and I’m counting the seconds as if they are long days. I’m about to become the daughter of the Most High. Today, I’m only a step away from his glorious throne.” We are thrilled to have a new sister this morning, and if you are thinking about doing what she has done, we would encourage you to get in touch. The contact information for all three of our elders is on the front of the bulletin. You can either call or text me on the church phone at 608-224-0274, or you can pull me aside after worship this morning. We would love to study God’s word with you.

This morning, I would invite you to be turning with me again to Matthew 5 as we return to our series of lessons on the “Beatitudes” or “Kingdom Attitudes,” as found in the Sermon on the Mount. In context, Jesus has just started preaching that **“the kingdom of heaven is at hand,”** large crowds are gathering, and he sits down to teach on the side of a mountain near the Sea of Galilee. He starts with a series of eight statements where he uses a word that we translate into English as **“blessed”** or **“happy.”** These eight blessings are easy to memorize (I hope you are still working on that). At first, these statements seem to be contradictions, until we understand what he is really saying.

Two weeks ago, we started with the first statement (in Matthew 5:3), where Jesus says, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** We learned that those who are willing to recognize their spiritual poverty before the Lord are those who will be given the kingdom of heaven. Like the tax collector in Luke 18:13, our prayer should be, **“God, be merciful to me, the sinner!”**

Last week, we moved along to Matthew 5:4, where Jesus says, **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”** Once again, we don’t usually think of weeping as being a blessing, but we noted that there are some benefits to weeping over our own sins, weeping over the sins of others, weeping with those who weep, and then we have the added bonus that when we weep we identify with Jesus, described by Isaiah as **“a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”** (Isaiah 53:3). And then, the ultimate blessing comes when we realize that Jesus came to this earth to **“comfort,”** to stand beside us in our pain; he is the **“God of all comfort”** (1 Corinthians 1:3), and there is a time coming when he will **“wipe away every tear from our eyes”** (Revelation 21:4).

This morning, we return to Matthew 5, and we come to verse 5, where Jesus says, ***“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”*** Again, this one is also very easy to memorize, ***“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”*** And as our custom has been, I’d like for us to note the blessing itself, and then we will close by taking a look at the reward.

I. **First of all, then, let’s focus in on the BLESSING itself, as Jesus says, “BLESSED ARE THE GENTLE.”**

Some of the older translations might say, ***“Blessed are the meek.”*** And once again, this doesn’t really sound right, does it? Often, we associate meekness with weakness. To be gentle is to be soft. We might even think of gentle as being the opposite of strong. In fact, I clicked on the word ***“meek”*** in Microsoft Word, and the thesaurus gave the synonyms of ***“meek”*** as being “humble, timid, submissive, docile, mild, compliant, quiet, and lowly.” I looked up the word in several on-line dictionaries, and they defined the word as being “deficient in spirit and courage; submissive; not strong.” We might think of a meek person, then, as being a doormat, allowing himself to be trampled on or taken advantage of by others. If I’m applying for a job, I probably won’t describe myself as being meek or gentle. We just survived a partisan primary here in Wisconsin, and in all of the junk mail I got leading up to this past Tuesday’s election, not one candidate ever said, “Vote for me: I am the meek candidate! I am the gentle choice!” These are probably not qualities we expect in a leader.

However, we need to understand that we have absolutely lost something in the translation of this word through the years. Biblically, the word we translate here as ***“gentle”*** or ***“meek”*** goes back to a word that may be defined as “power under control.” That’s pretty different from the way we often think of this word, isn’t it! Power under control! And when we think of it that way, I want my candidate to have power under control. I want the CEO of a company to have his or her power under control. We think of the power of fire. Fire can do some amazing things. Most of us got here this morning in cars powered by fire in some form or another. And yet, when fire gets out of control, terrible things can happen. To be useful, the power of fire must be controlled. We think of the power of wind. Wind can also do some amazing things. Some of our electricity here in south-central Wisconsin is generated by wind. But again, wind out of control can do tremendous damage. Biblically speaking, the word Jesus uses here describes power under control. In the ancient world, this word was sometimes used to describe a powerful horse that had been “broken.” Running around wild on the plains of Montana, a horse may be beautiful but not very useful. Once trained, though, horses can do some amazing things. The Madison Police Department uses several horses to patrol big events here in the city. We might say the same thing about dogs. Once trained, dogs can do some amazing things. Several weeks ago, on our trip down to Florida, we stopped in to visit the National Police Memorial and Museum in Titusville, and we also stopped to visit the Navy Seal Memorial and Museum down near Fort Pierce. Both of these places honored the dogs that have served heroically through the years. Highly trained! Power under control.

Or, we might think of a car. A car might have a powerful engine, but if that power cannot be controlled, that power is useless. Most of you know that I often camp in my car, and you also know that several years ago I went down to Freed-Hardeman University for their lectures, and while I was out with my daughter, my car’s throw-out bearing went out. As I understand it, the throw-out bearing is the last link between the clutch pedal and the clutch itself. Basically, I pushed the clutch and heard a really bad whirring sound, and a short time later, no clutch! The engine was fine, but there was no control. I had to get towed, and that’s when I ended up camping in the back of a U-Haul during a tornado warning. But it started with the failure of one tiny (but critical) part. Nothing that \$1,200 couldn’t fix, but the point is: Power is useless if it is not under control.

Gentleness, then (or meekness), is power under control. By the way, did you know that this word is used to describe only two people anywhere in scripture? You know who they are? Moses and Jesus. Were they wimpy people? Far from it! Several weeks ago, we studied the passage where Moses is described as being ***“...very***

**humble** [or gentle], **more than any man who was on the face of the earth.**" Remember the context? His sister and brother (Miriam and Aaron) basically rebel against his authority, and Moses says nothing. He restrains himself, and he lets God handle it. Power under control! Moses was in the process of leading the most significant slave revolt in world history, standing boldly before the king of Egypt and eventually leading 2-3 million people to freedom. Power under control!

And then we have Jesus use this word to describe himself in Matthew 11:28-30, where he gives the invitation, **"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am GENTLE and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."** Was Jesus describing himself as weak? Absolutely not! The word is also used to describe Jesus at his triumphal entry in Matthew 21:5, as Matthew quotes the prophet Zechariah. He says that **"This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, 'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'"** Was Jesus being wimpy by coming into Jerusalem on a donkey? Far from it! Power under control. In fact, just a few days later, as Peter tries to defend the Lord with a sword, Jesus allows himself to be arrested, and he says (in Matthew 26:53), **"Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"** A legion was composed of 6000 Roman soldiers. I believe that 12 x 6000 is 72,000. We sing, "He could have called 10,000 angels," and I suppose it sounds a bit better than, "He could have called 72,000 angels," but the point is: Jesus had the power to defend himself, he had the power to lash out in anger, but he controlled his power. As Isaiah predicted, **"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth"** (Isaiah 53:7). That is a choice that he made. Power under control!

And Jesus is our example. Moses and Jesus may be the only ones described as being **"gentle,"** but gentleness is a goal for all of us. Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (according to Galatians 5:23). Paul tells us to walk in **"gentleness"** (in Ephesians 4:2). Gospel preachers are to correct others in **"gentleness"** (2 Timothy 2:25). All of us are to receive the word of God with **"humility"** (the same word, in James 1:21). Those who are wise and understanding are to show their good behavior **"in the gentleness of wisdom"** (James 3:13). If someone is caught in sin, those who are spiritual must restore the fallen **"in a spirit of gentleness"** (Galatians 6:1). Peter tells us to defend our faith with **"gentleness and reverence"** (1 Peter 3:15). First of all, then, Jesus teaches that there is a blessing on those who are **"gentle,"** a blessing on those who are strong but manage to control their strength. Power under control!

## II. This leads us to the **REWARD**, **"Blessed are the gentle, FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH."**

If you have this figured out, I would love to hear from you! What in the world does Jesus mean when he refers to the **"earth"** in this passage? I will admit that I had a hard time with this. So, I'd like to mention several possibilities and make a few observations along the way.

First of all, is Jesus saying that those who are gentle will literally inherit **THIS EARTH**, this physical planet, for all of eternity? Is the reference here to dirt, and rocks, and oceans? Some have suggested this, this would be the most straightforward and the most simple of all the possibilities, but don't we have an issue here? I'm thinking of 2 Peter 3:10, where Peter refers to the **"day of the Lord"** and says that the time is coming when **"...the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up."** It's a bit weird, then, for Jesus to promise this literal earth as a reward if the earth itself will be burned up before we ever have a chance to really enjoy it. That's like promising my kid a toy and

then lighting it on fire. That's messed up. There may be some way of reasoning around this, but I'm thinking there might be some better possibilities here.

The second possibility is that Jesus is referring to literal, physical wealth. If you are gentle, I will give you lots and lots of **STUFF!** If you are gentle, I will give you gold, and silver, and a huge house, and a nice car, and a cabin in Montana. And I know, God can do just about anything. God could certainly bless us with physical possessions. He already has! In the big picture, most of us here today are among the wealthiest people in the whole world. We have homes in which to live, we have food, we turn on a faucet and we have virtually unlimited hot water (what an amazing blessing)! But is Jesus really promising wealth in exchange for gentleness? Again, that just doesn't seem right. That doesn't really seem to fit with all of those other passages warning about the danger and deceitfulness of wealth. This doesn't fit with the fact that very few Christians are truly wealthy (in a worldly sense). Yes, there are some rich Christians these days, but they are the exception, not the rule. We think of Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 1, where he points out that among God's people we don't have too many who are considered wise, or noble, or wealthy according to worldly standards. So, the reference here probably isn't to wealth.

Tied to this, though, I'm wondering whether Jesus is perhaps somehow referring to the concept of **CONTENTMENT**. If we bring our strength under control, isn't this a part of it? If I can somehow control my strong desire for getting more and more, isn't this a reward in itself? Maybe. We think of Paul in Philippians 4:11-12, ***"...I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need."*** This might be a part of it. And this applies to other areas. I am content, because I know that having Jesus is enough. I don't have to rule and dominate this world; I am calm and in control as it is. The world does not dominate me. I am at peace. Somebody described it in this way: If you are competing in the Olympics and you are going last in an event like gymnastics, imagine the score lining up in such a way that you could totally blow your routine and still come out on top with the gold. It is mathematically impossible for you not to get the gold no matter how you do. Would you be nervous and afraid, or would you go all out and take some risks? I'm thinking: Option B! That would be a great situation. And in a sense, that is our situation right now: As God's people, we are guaranteed a "win," so to speak. And in that sense, this world is ours. We are content – not just financially, but in every way. It's the confidence of Peter and John in Acts 4:29, when they say, ***"We must obey God rather than men."*** That right there is the reward of gentleness or power under control.

Somewhat tied to this, perhaps Jesus is referring to pretty much **EVERYTHING**. In a sense, this earth is his, and we are his children; therefore, the earth is ours right now. And there is a sense in which this is true. I like this one, mainly because of how Jesus uses the word ***"inherit."*** Normally, an inheritance is passed down from parents to their children, and those who are gentle are truly children of God. Everything that God owns is ours. And we know from Psalm 24:1 that this world belongs to God, ***"The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."*** And what is his is ours. If I need a post hole digger, and if I know that my parents have a post hole digger at their house, I know I basically have a post hole digger! In the same way, what is God's is ours. One author compared it to bees in a field of clover. Do they own the field? Not really, but they use it as if they do. It is theirs. In the same way, this earth is ours. I'm thinking of 1 Corinthians 3:21-23, where Paul speaks of the church and he says, ***"So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God."*** In this sense, this earth truly belongs to those who are gentle.

The last one up here is similar to the first, but is a reference to the **NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH**. Perhaps Jesus is referring not to this earth, but to our eternal home (described in great detail in Revelation 21-22), a city, New Jerusalem, where there will no longer be any crying, or mourning, or pain, and so on. Or, as Peter puts it in 2 Peter 3:13, ***“But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”*** In this way, the gentle will inherit the earth – not this earth, but the new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

I hope some of these comments have been helpful in some way. Again, I don’t know if I can nail down exactly what Jesus is promising here. I think I can pretty safely eliminate one or two of these, and I like one or two more than the others. But what is the point? Whatever ***“earth”*** Jesus is referring to here, can’t we agree that it’s a good thing? Whatever the reward is, it is a reward! And so, the point is: Be gentle! We are aiming for self-control here: Power under control. Trust God.

I haven’t mentioned this yet, but what Jesus says here (in verse 5) is pretty much a direct quote from Psalm 37. We don’t have time to really look at Psalm 37, but trusting God and doing good is the point David was making way back in Psalm 37,

***Do not fret because of evildoers,  
Be not envious toward wrongdoers.  
For they will wither quickly like the grass  
And fade like the green herb.  
Trust in the LORD and do good;***

***Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.  
Delight yourself in the LORD;  
And He will give you the desires of your heart.  
Commit your way to the LORD,  
Trust also in Him, and He will do it.***

And then David says (in verse 11), ***“...but the humble will inherit the land.”*** That word, ***“humble,”*** is translated into Greek with the same word we have here (in English) as ***“meek”*** or ***“gentle.”*** The gentle will inherit the earth. And that’s the point of Psalm 37: The loud and boisterous, the takers and grabbers, the greedy and manipulators - they may get their way here and now, but they will not inherit the earth. However, those who submit to God, those who leave houses brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands in this life for the Lord’s sake will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life (as Jesus says in Matthew 19:29). ***“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”*** (Matthew 6:33).

### **Conclusion:**

So, as we try to summarize what we’ve learned here, it seems we have a reminder from Jesus to be ***“gentle.”*** With God as our Father, we don’t always have to answer every argument. I hope you will note the article in today’s bulletin. We don’t always have to be sure to defend ourselves from every possible injustice. With God as our Father, this world is ours. And like Jesus, there’s a lot we can put up with; there’s a lot we can endure without always needing to snap back over every little thing, and that seems to be the point, ***“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”***

Before we continue with the Lord’s Supper, let’s close our study by going to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for allowing us to learn from your Son this morning, and thank you for describing the blessing of gentleness. There are times when we are so tempted to quickly lash out or retaliate, and so we ask for wisdom to know when to make a defense and when to patiently endure. Your

Son is truly the author and perfecter of our faith, and so we pray that our eyes would always be focused on him. Help us, Father, to be more like your Son.

Bless those who are traveling today. Bless Carson. Bless Abe as he faces surgery this week.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. In Jesus we pray, AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)