

# Blessed Are the Meek

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



## Prayer of Illumination

Gracious God, give us humble,  
teachable, and obedient hearts,  
that we may receive what you have revealed,  
and do what you have commanded.  
Amen.

## Scripture: Matthew 5:5 (NRSVue)

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – Blessed Are the Meek

Martin of Gaul was a new kind of hero: he was a Christian one. Martin's followers admired him because he was so different from all other leaders. He entirely rejected the worldly norms of leadership. Although from the wealthy upper class, Martin didn't strut around like a peacock in gold and silk like his peers, but instead wore a coarse robe. He spurned palaces and servants.

There's a famous story of him when he was in the military. It was the dead of winter and he came upon a beggar shivering in the cold while he was riding upon his horse. Everyone in the town ignored the poor man. But not Martin. He got down from his horse, cut his heavy military cloak in half, and gave it to the beggar. The soldiers were stunned by his sacrificial kindness.

When Martin completed his military service, he said to Emperor Julian, "Until now it is you I have served; from this moment on I am a servant of Christ." He became a monk and founded several monasteries, distinguished not so much for his scholarship, but for his humble acts of service and simple living.



In 371 Martin was elected Bishop of Tours in France. Everyone was shocked at the news, most especially Martin. Crowds ambushed Martin celebrating his elevation. What did Martin do? He ran and hid in a barn, until his cover was blown by a flock of geese. That's why in the art depicting Martin of Tours you'll often see him surrounded by a goose or two. Martin was elevated to power precisely because he didn't want power. Martin used his power as Bishop to bless. He influenced countless numbers with his compassion, healing, and humility. Martin was meek.

It's important these days to clarify what meekness isn't:

- Meekness isn't weakness.
- Meekness isn't wimpishness.
- Nor is it passivity or timidity.
- It isn't niceness or being spineless or a softy.
- The meek aren't wallflowers, doormats, or benchwarmers.

It wasn't until the 18th century that people began to see meekness as weakness. Before meekness had always been understood as a strength, a controlled, disciplined, and quiet grace, like a wild horse that's been gentled—as the bulletin picture and poem describe.

Meekness is the opposite of hardness. It's a close cousin to tenderness and kindness, but the meek are both tough and tender. They have gravitas and authority, but they don't throw their weight around. They are lighthearted. They wait upon the Lord rather than clawing their way up or stepping on others.

*"Whoever becomes humble like this child," says Jesus, "will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

The meek, like Christ, are servant leaders.

Meekness is the opposite of rigidity. The meek are flexible and they don't get bent out of shape easily. Flexible, but not flimsy, they stand up to the bullies and stand behind the underdogs. The meek don't cave in under pressure. They listen, they share, they give and most importantly, they have the courage to receive.

The meek respect others...and themselves, but they're not full of themselves. The meek know the subtle art of indifference. They're indifferent to ego, pride, or status. They know they're not above it all, yet they deeply care about the right things, even if they won't be liked for it. The meek take a stand, but they never take vengeance or cheap shots. The meek leave their ego at the door. They have the guts to die to their self-importance. They know it's not about them.

Why are the meek blessed and such a blessing? They have all the best traits of both the masculine and the feminine. The meek are true gentlemen and gentlewomen. We like being around them. We miss them when they're not around. They help hold things together.

With a deep trust in God, the meek know: the first will be last, the proud will be humbled, and those who look out for #1 will lose it all.

It takes divine strength to be meek. Thankfully we get some help. Meekness is allowing the Spirit of Christ to live through us. The meek yield themselves to Christ. The meek are also blessed because they understand and express their emotions appropriately. Their feathers don't get ruffled so easily. The meek "avoid the sensitivities of the insensitive." They make us feel at home, that everything will be okay.

So, here's the thing: one of the defining characteristics of the meek is their relationship to anger. Anger is a natural and important emotion. Anger gets things done. Anger acts against injustice. We need anger. Anger that is unacknowledged, unexpressed, and suppressed is toxic—for you and for others. The meek get angry, but they don't lose their temper.

The meek are like a powerful horse that's been gentled. The Spirit has whispered in the meek's ear—and they follow the guidance of their rider—Christ Jesus. If Jesus were the Lone Ranger, the meek would be Silver. But the meek also know this, their anger is usually not "righteous indignation." Anger often involves our reptilian brains—when angry we bare our teeth and swipe our claws. We're aggressive, territorial, defensive, petty, and selfish. Anger happens when we take too seriously small things, most especially ourselves.

But the meek are a breath of fresh air. They can laugh at themselves. They aren't controlled by their anger—they control it. They listen to their anger and use their anger. Aristotle described meekness as that golden mean between wrath and sloth. The meek person is—

*"angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought."*

When you're meek you don't get angry too often, too much, or for too long. You don't sweat the small stuff. You use your power, not to harm but to help. You know when to yield and when to fight. Proverbs 16:32 describes the meek this way:

*"One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city."*

The meek refuse to be their own worst enemy, but they love their enemies. The meek also know who they are and are open to feedback, teachable. They're perpetual learners, aware of their ignorance, attuned to their need, and acknowledging their weaknesses. The meek know they're a work in progress. They haven't arrived. So they are Spirit-led and self-controlled—but not wound too tight. They understand the spirit of the law. They're comfortable in their own skin. The meek know they aren't God, but they are godly. They know their place and their boundaries. They're not full of themselves, but they are full of Jesus. The meek are...Jesusy. They're also wise. There is a power in meekness, an interior strength.

If you are meek, you are no pushover. You're steady. You're able to resist evil and withstand pressure with the strength of goodness and patience. You accomplish things the right way—even if it takes a little longer. You know the end doesn't justify the means.

The meek have an inner peace, but they aren't afraid to disturb the peace when things aren't right. They are peaceful and confident in the face of rancor. Think Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr. They have a disciplined strength that draws in others, opens hearts, and inspires action.

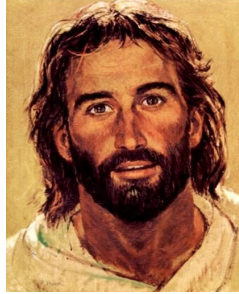
The earth is crying out for meek men and meek women. They're a dying breed in a brash age. Strong men and fierce women are a dime a dozen in our culture of self-promotion and entitlement. But the meek stick out like sore thumbs. Imagine a world where the meek ruled? Imagine if we applied meekness to our driving in Tucson? If our social media posts were more meek? If we valued most meekness in our political debates and leadership styles? The world would rejoice.

Are you willing to be meek? Meekness is a divine character trait. Surprisingly, one of God's attributes is meekness. Merciful, gracious, good, great in kindness, slow to anger all are descriptions of meekness...and God. Meekness also describes the activity of the Holy Spirit. It's one of the fruits of the Spirit: gentleness.

Jesus is described as meek in Scripture: saying he's *"gentle and humble in heart."* In Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, he comes *"humble and mounted on a donkey."* Paul said to the Corinthians, *"I Paul entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ."* But the meek Jesus

also turned over tables in the temple. He went off on the legalists and disdainful people. He got himself into trouble—and on a cross.

So probably the best definition of meek is... Jesus.



Meekness is a presence and a poise that leads without grasping, exploiting, or controlling. You live sacrificially and humbly and joyfully—like Jesus.

The meek don't live by the rules of the jungle. They seek to be calibrated to God and God's will. There's a willingness and not a willfulness. John Calvin put it this way:

The meek are *"not easily provoked by wrongs"* and do not *"sulk over offenses."*

The meek get into the flow, they don't force things. They yield, but don't appease. The meek engage in, not the art of war, but the art of woo. They win our hearts through example and humility. They are gentle with others and gentle with themselves.

The meek *"will inherit the earth."*

What does that mean?

Is it a literal, physical earth?

A spiritual reality?

Is it present or future?

I don't know exactly. But maybe yes to all. This is one of the most mysterious and fascinating phrases in all of Scripture. First, notice the meek *"inherit the earth."* The meek don't conquer, steal, or strip the earth, they inherit it. They receive it as a gift to be tended, enjoyed, and shared. Not hoarded. Something to be entrusted with. It's a responsibility. We pass it on to the next generation better than how we got it.

Luther took this Beatitude quite literally—

*if you live life meekly, you will be in good relationship with others, and you'll be able to keep your property. But the blustery and boisterous people will end up losing not only friends, but their property.*

Another wrote that—

*if we're not meek, there may not be an earth at all—pride and violence will lead to nuclear destruction.*

John Calvin understood “inheriting the earth” as being secure under God’s protection and enjoying God’s grace on earth. Another way to understand “*inherit the earth*” is to refer to a spiritual reality—namely to “inherit the kingdom of heaven” here on earth. It’s the meek, those like Christ, that receive this kingdom. It also can refer to “*the new heaven and the new earth*”—that the meek will inherit life everlasting in heaven.

One of my favorite characters in all of literature is the wise monk Father Zosima in Dostoevsky’s “*Brothers Karamazov*.” He says this in response to whether we should use force or respond in humble love:

*Always decide to use humble love.  
If you resolve on that once for all,  
you may subdue the whole world.  
Loving humility is marvelously strong,  
the strongest of all things,  
and there is nothing else like it.*

I think there’s truth in all of these interpretations. Either way, Immanuel, let’s always seek to be meek and we will be a blessed people, a church that will bless our community and the world.

Amen.

Featured image: Photograph by Jim Urquhart, Reuters

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