

Sunday, October 11, 2020 | Kingdom Manifesto

### **Matthew 5:5 | Meekness not Mightiness**

We live in a world that incentivizes self-promotion. Social media makes billions every year off the simple reality that human beings love to be validated by other human beings. As of Oct. 8, 2020, Facebook's net worth was \$736 *billion* dollars. Just to put that in perspective, that's more money than Switzerland's entire GDP.<sup>1</sup> All of that simply because we love the clicks, likes, and shares.

Currently, 7 out of 10 Americans use social media with the majority of users being between the ages of 18-29.<sup>2</sup> In December of 2016, FB reported that they had well over 1.2 billion daily active users; which is—relatively speaking—the same number of people as the whole of China!<sup>3</sup> We are living in an age where most people spend a portion of their day in the digital realm.

And while there are undoubtedly good aspects of social media, like all things, it has its downsides. One of the downsides is that it balloons our egos to such an extent that we risk floating away. We've gotten so full of ourselves it's a wonder that anyone could stand to be around us. Yet this glory-seeking is what fuels our society. In fact, a quick glance at the current political climate will show that we tend to vote for the loudest and most aggressive candidates. We like to equate boldness and brashness with leadership and dependability. At its core, the principle of self-promotion is what drives us a species.

This stems from how we are raised. The moment we enter the world we are force-fed philosophies like, "Survival of the fittest.", "It's a dog-eat-dog world.", "Second place is the first-place loser.", "Coffee is for closers.", "You gotta crack a few eggs to make an omelet.", and "Fortune favors the *bold*." Underlying these sayings is the thought, "What's the point of being on top if you can't look down on others...right?" And, as harsh as that may sound, our world believes that. We put such a high premium on success that we justify whatever we want if it means attaining our idea of "success".

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<sup>1</sup> Silver, Caleb, "The Top 20 Economies in the World: Ranking the Richest Countries in the World", March 18, 2020, Investopedia, <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/>, [accessed, October 9, 2020].

<sup>2</sup> General Editors, "Social media Fact Sheet", June 12, 2019, *The Pew Research Center: Internet & Technology*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/>, [accessed, October 9, 2020].

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, Henry, "If social networks were countries, which would they be?", April 28, 2016, *The World Economic Forum*, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/04/facebook-is-bigger-than-the-worlds-largest-country/>, [accessed, October 10, 2020].

But the beatitudes, as you've no doubt noticed by now, paints an entirely different picture of what "success" looks like. It's not the rich who are blessed, but the poor (cf. Mat. 5:3). It's not the laughers who have divine favor, but the mourners (cf. Mat. 5:4). It's not about self-promotion, it's about self-abasement (cf. Mat. 5:5). Brick by brick, Jesus is breaking down our idea of what success is, and, instead, He is teaching us about what it means to be blessed.

We are taught that we should do whatever we have to do in order to get on top. What if I told you the only true way to get on "top" was to go to the "bottom"? We're brainwashed to believe that the only way to get ahead is to push someone else down. But what if I told you the only true way to get ahead was to support one another? We're convinced that we have to fake strength even when we feel weak in order to leave an impact. But what if I told you the only true way to leave an impact is to be weak?

Sounds insane? Well, you're right. It does sound insane. And if you're feeling like I've completely gone off the rails, then your feelings are the same as those who first heard the beatitudes from Jesus. They simply don't make sense. For instance, we're told that might makes right. But is that even right?

Well, let's find out.

**READ: Matthew 5:1-12 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. <sup>2</sup> Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed *are* those who mourn,  
For they shall be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed *are* the meek, [mighty?]  
For they shall inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
For they shall be filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed *are* the merciful,  
For they shall obtain mercy.

<sup>8</sup> Blessed *are* the pure in heart,  
For they shall see God.

<sup>9</sup> Blessed *are* the peacemakers,  
For they shall be called sons of God.

<sup>10</sup> Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus says, "Blessed *are* the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

There are three things I want you to know about meekness:

i. Meekness is not weakness.

Jesus is not telling us to be like dogs who roll over on their backs when they're confronted. Jesus isn't advocating for us to be quiet little pushovers. No. Being meek does *NOT* mean we are overly submissive and downright unassertive. In fact, the Scriptures call us to be both vocal and self-assured from time to time (cf. Ac. 4:13, 31; 28:31; Eph. 6:19-20; Phil 1:14; 2 Tim 1:6-7). D. L. Moody famously said, "'When we find a man meditating on the words of God, my friends, that man is full of boldness and is successful.'"

So yes, the Christian is to be bold but meek as well. In fact, Proverbs 28:1 says the righteous are as bold as lions! This is especially the cases where the vulnerable are being oppressed. We are told throughout the Bible that it is our duty to speak up and protect those less fortunate than ourselves. The Christian is to defend the defenseless (cf. Isa. 1:17; Jer. 22:3; Pro. 14:31).

The prime example of this comes in the last chapter of Proverbs.

**READ:** Proverbs 31:8-9 (NKJV)

<sup>8</sup> Open your mouth for the speechless [can't speak for themselves], in the cause of all *who are* appointed to die [destitute]. <sup>9</sup> Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

So, if meekness is not weakness, what is it?

ii. Meekness is power under control.

Or, as R. T. France put it, the meek is the kind of individual who doesn't "...throw their weight around."<sup>4</sup> In this way, I feel as if "gentleness" would be a far better word than "meekness" (cf. Mat. 11:29).<sup>5</sup>

**EXAMPLE:** For instance, we would not mock the way an adult holds a new born child. We'd mortified if we saw an adult being rough with an infant. The child is precious and fragile so we restrain our strength when we hold them. This is meekness. It is power under control. It means you do not lash out when you could. You do not assert yourself at the expense of another; even though many might prod, poke, and goad you into doing so.

The problem with this is that even though we know to be careful when holding a newborn child, in almost every other scenario, meekness is not our default...might is. We are far more prone to violence than gentleness. In all my years of living I have never regretted being too patient and compassionate. But the number of times I have been too brutal, boorish, and brash could fill a dam to bursting.

In fact, our default for violence has been a problem since Cain killed Able in Gen. 4. Since then it has been one long murderous account after another. And Christians are no better. We have always struggled against the urge to pick up the sword. We need only look to the Crusades in the second century or to the modern era where physical violence against abortion clinics and doctors are spearheaded by *professed* Christians.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, for a religion that touts love, mercy, and forgiveness for our enemies, history has shown that we have defaulted to brutality a disturbing amount of times (cf. Mat. 5:44). We would rather spread the gospel of hate with our fists than the gospel of love with our lips.

In fact, we don't need to go too far in the NT to find a prime example of this:

**READ:** Matthew 26:47-53 (NKJV)

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<sup>4</sup> France, R.T., *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2007), p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> Carson, D.A., *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew and Mark, Volume 9, Revised Edition, General Editors Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2010), p. 163.

<sup>6</sup> Shields, Jon A., "Abortion Violence and American Democracy: The ironic relationship between the pro-life movement and its radical fringe." June 3, 2009, The Christianity Today Magazine, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/juneweb-only/122-32.0.html>, see also Frame, Randy, "Violence against Abortion Clinics Escalates despite the Opposition of Pro-life Leaders", February 1, 1985, The Christianity Today Magazine, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1985/february-1/violence-against-abortion-clinics-escalates-despite.html>, [accessed, October 10, 2020].

<sup>47</sup> And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people.

<sup>48</sup> Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.” <sup>49</sup> Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed Him. <sup>50</sup> But Jesus said to him, “Friend, why have you come?”

Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. <sup>51</sup> And suddenly, one of those *who were* with Jesus stretched out *his* hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

<sup>52</sup> But Jesus said to him, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. <sup>53</sup> Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?

Jesus’ words no doubt shocked all who were on the right and left. Just as quickly as that moment of violence erupted in sword and blood, it was immediately stopped. Peter, no doubt with good intentions, was trying to defend Jesus. We can hardly fault him for this. However, Jesus was no mere man in need of a defense, was he? He was the Son of God. He had more than a simple sword to defend himself. In fact, his defenseless posture throughout the crucifixion is one of the most astounding turn of events in the whole thing (cf. Isa. 53:7).

Jesus was reminding Peter of this. “You defend me with a sword? My Father would send seventy-two thousand angels should I call for it.<sup>7</sup> But I haven’t Peter. So do not presume to defend me when I am fully capable of defending myself.” You see, Jesus had a whole heavenly host at his disposal. He had power without end and no one was mightier than he. Yet Jesus *restrained* his power. He was teaching Peter that in his kingdom, might doesn’t make right, but being *meek* does. Meekness is greater than mightiness.

Now, what does this practically mean for us? What does meekness for a Christian look like?

Whatever strength, intellect, or wit the meek possess, it is strictly governed by a humility that is rooted in their dependence upon God. One commentator called meekness a synonym for self-effacement.<sup>8</sup> Meaning, when we are meek, we are *purposefully* reducing or thinning our very own personality so as to minimize any and all harm that our presence may produce. As such, the meek are wary of power and

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<sup>7</sup> Turner, David L., *Matthew*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 637.

<sup>8</sup> Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1992), p. 98.

authority. They do not yearn for control over others. Moreover, the meek refuse to advance any self-assertive goals. They're moved by service for others and not motivated by self-service.

This is what Paul was talking about when he said,

**READ:** Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

The meek refuse to advance any self-assertive goals, they will not engage in a venture that will promote themselves. They will instead look to the interests of others. They will serve with humility considering that someone else is more important. They do a good thing simply because it is a good thing to do.

Now it is at this point that you've probably guessed the big problem with this particular beatitude. While we've established that scripturally speaking, meekness isn't weakness, weakness is often the characteristic that comes to mind when the world views meekness. Meaning, those who are meek are more likely to be perceived as weak. And no one wants that.

**EXAMPLE:** For instance, the Greeks considered meekness to be a deplorable temperament because it was closely associated with subservience and an excessive desire to please others.<sup>9</sup> They thought it was the characteristics of the slave-class. Furthermore, in a culture that prized debate and discussion, the last thing a person would ever want to be was agreeable. Which, if we're honest, sounds eerily similar to the world we live in today.

This is why I must confess that, out of all the beatitudes, I find this one to be the hardest to wrap my head around. Why would Jesus promote a thing that is *almost* always going to be misunderstood for something else? **Because following Jesus means living a life that is going to be misunderstood (cf. Jn. 15:18-25).**

In fact, this may very be the point that Jesus is trying to make here with this beatitude. If He is King, He would prize those who are quick to obey, quick to serve, and are quick to please Him. The world does not care about doing this because they do not believe God exist. And so, *every* principle Jesus teaches cannot be grasped by the world. In light of this, we must constantly remind ourselves that even though the world views gentleness,

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<sup>9</sup>

Carson (2010), p. 163.

meekness, and submissiveness as *cursed* characteristics, God views them all as *blessed* attributes.

And not just a little blessed either...

iii. Meekness is given an inheritance.

They are so blessed that, in God's eyes, they are the only ones who know the true shape of the world. And as such, they are the only ones who are *worthy* of leadership on the earth. This is why Jesus says that the meek will *inherit* the earth. The irony of course is that, in this life, the gentle usually has their stuff taken away. They very rarely own anything let alone something like the earth itself. But in the Kingdom of Heaven, the meek are given absolute dominion over the entire world! How does that even make sense?!

This ironic turn of events, of the meek being favored over the mighty, is at the heart of Psalm 37. Jesus very well could've been summing up this entire Psalm in the words, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth."<sup>10</sup> We're about to read this whole psalm because it is the best way to illustrate the point of this message. Bear in mind that the whole focus of it is not on some material blessing in the here and now, but a spiritual inheritance in the later and after.

**READ:** Psalm 37 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup> Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. <sup>2</sup> For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. <sup>3</sup> Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. <sup>4</sup> Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. <sup>5</sup> Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring *it* to pass. <sup>6</sup> He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. <sup>7</sup> Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. <sup>8</sup> Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—*it* only *causes* harm.

<sup>9</sup> For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. <sup>10</sup> For yet a little while and the wicked *shall be no more*; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it *shall be no more*. <sup>11</sup> But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

<sup>12</sup> The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth. <sup>13</sup> The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day is coming. <sup>14</sup> The wicked have drawn the sword and have

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<sup>10</sup> France (2007), p. 166.

bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, to slay those who are of upright conduct. <sup>15</sup> Their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.

<sup>16</sup> A little that a righteous man has *is* better than the riches of many wicked. <sup>17</sup> For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous.

<sup>18</sup> The Lord knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever. <sup>19</sup> They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

<sup>20</sup> But the wicked shall perish; and the enemies of the Lord, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away. <sup>21</sup> The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives. <sup>22</sup> For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, but *those* cursed by Him shall be cut off.

<sup>23</sup> The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way.

<sup>24</sup> Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds *him with* His hand. <sup>25</sup> I have been young, and *now* am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. <sup>26</sup> *He is* ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants *are* blessed.

<sup>27</sup> Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell forevermore. <sup>28</sup> For the Lord loves justice, And does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off. <sup>29</sup> The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it forever.

<sup>30</sup> The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice. <sup>31</sup> The law of his God *is* in his heart; none of his steps shall slide. <sup>32</sup> The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him. <sup>33</sup> The Lord will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.

<sup>34</sup> Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see *it*. <sup>35</sup> I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree. <sup>36</sup> Yet he passed away, and behold, he *was* no *more*; indeed, I sought him, but he could not be found. <sup>37</sup> Mark the blameless *man*, and observe the upright; for the future of *that* man *is* peace. <sup>38</sup> But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; the future of the wicked shall be cut off.

<sup>39</sup> But the salvation of the righteous *is* from the Lord; *He is* their strength in the time of trouble. <sup>40</sup> And the Lord shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, Because they trust in Him.



Just as Jesus' beatitudes were a reworking of our moral priorities, this psalm envisages a reversal of earthly fortunes.<sup>11</sup> Though the wicked prosper in this life, they will pay dearly for their lack of meekness in the next. And though the meek suffer in this life, they will be rewarded for their gentleness in the next. God will not allow the wicked to go scot-free, nor will He allow the righteous to go unrewarded (cf. Pro. 11:21). He is as faithful to his *promises* as he is to his *punishments*.

And do not think that the meek will inherit a specific land either. No. They will inherit all the lands.<sup>12</sup> As in, the entire earth will be given over to those who are meek and not to those who are mighty. This is the point of the very first verse of Revelation 21.

**READ:** Revelation 21:1, 5-8 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup> Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

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<sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

<sup>6</sup> He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup> Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. <sup>8</sup> But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

The mighty will lose everything. They will inherit a fiery lake of burning sulfur where they will be for all eternity. But the meek will not only inherit all the lands the wicked had before, they will inherit renewed lands. Ones that are free from the fall and totally reborn.

**So, what's the takeaway?**

**Meekness makes right, not might.** God prizes meekness over mightiness...every...single...time.

We need only to look back on all of world history to see how the mighty have ruled the earth. Someday, in the not too distant future, it'll be high time for the meek to rule.

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<sup>11</sup> France (2007), p. 166.

<sup>12</sup> Carson (2010), p. 164.