

The Meek Shall Inherit The Land

- Who are the Meek?
- What is Inheriting the Earth
- Contemporary Application, Meekness a Core Xtian Teaching

Interpretation Principles

- Analogy of Faith: while we do not believe in a capital T tradition like Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy, we are not so arrogant to think we cannot learn from those who came before us, preachers and teachers throughout church history.
- We attempt to determine what it meant then to understand what it means for us today by consulting the best scholarship with regards to lexicons and commentaries which in turn explore ancient literature of Greco-Roman, Jewish, and early Christian thought.

Who are the Meek?

Let's read a couple lexicon definitions.

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed.

- *Πραῦς* : *to not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, gentle, humble, considerate, meek*

The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology and Exegesis: *gentle, humble, considerate, meek*. Relevant excerpts from the fuller treatment of the term: Jesus refers to himself as gentle and humble: *Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls*. He instructs his disciples to bring him a donkey to ride on into Jerusalem, a fulfillment of Zech 9:9. In contrast to the representatives of a political messianism, Jesus repudiated the use of force to bring about the rule of God. It should be noted that the focus of Matt 11:29 is not peace vs. war, but rather the gentleness vs. the oppressive yoke of the law.

The words therefore express also the attitude demanded of the Christian. It states the rule for the way in which Christians and non-Christians should live together, how to deal with Christians who have committed sins, and how to live in the midst of enmity and persecution.

With regards to the 3rd beatitude, the meek are the same as the poor of the 1st beatitude. The reference to possessing the land of Israel in the OT are represented here as the possession or inheritance of the new promised land. Just as obedience and righteousness are conditions for entering the promised land in the OT, humble obedience to the teachings contained in the Beatitudes is the condition of entering the new land of God's kingdom.

We should note finally that when the NT advocates gentleness, it does not imply an attitude dependent solely on the human will. It is a sign of salvation, calling, and election. True gentleness is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, a possibility of life and action given by God. It is not an aspect of human temperament; rather, it comes about when a person is linked to Christ and is conforming to his image.

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament argues that the term is related to Christ's voluntary condescension to take the form of a man born of a woman, hence indicating lowliness and weakness. *His life is not a life at court; it characterises Him as the lowly in heart, i.e., the One who is fixed wholly on God).*²⁵ *But for that very reason He can invite with full authority and fulfil the promise contained in the invitation. In Mt. 21:5, with the help of the fulfilled prophecy of Zech. 9:9, the entry of Jesus is depicted as that of a non-violent, non-warlike king of salvation and peace. In this respect Jesus stands radically opposed to the Zealots and to all the champions of a political Messianism.*

In the beatitude in Mt. 5:26 we read of the πραῖς who on the basis of their oppressed situation acknowledge not their own will but the great and gracious will of God. To them Jesus promises the inheritance of the coming aeon, which includes secure dwelling in their own land.²⁷ In contrast to the first beatitude (Mt. 5:3), which mentions the related → πτωχοί, the emphasis in the third beatitude is on the future promise: Those who are now oppressed and bowed down will be rulers of the world in the eschaton.

The formulation of the beatitude is an adaptation from Psalm 37

Psa 37:11 But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

- The Hebrew term for meek is *anawim*, translated as *praeis* in the LXX

Psalm 36:11 οἱ δὲ πραεῖς κληρονομήσουσιν γῆν

Who are those designated as “the meek” from a Jewish context?

- In the context of the SM the meek is a variation on the notion of “poor in spirit” of v. 3
- This connection explains why meekness is not simply a given but an ethical attitude to be acquired
- Meekness is an attitude that fits the human condition, that is the proper response to the human condition, but should not be taken as commonplace

Literary parallels show that Jewish piety highly valued meekness, where there is a synonym for “humility”

- The meaning of the terminology differs depending on the context in wisdom literature, whether Qumran texts, apocalyptic, or later rabbinical literature
- **Meekness is the general characteristic of the sage, the righteous person, and the ruler**, with Moses and others serving as paradigms

For the Romans, *clementia* (clemency) became the preferred virtue of a good ruler, a tradition that has its roots in Greek and Near Eastern traditions

For the Greeks, *praotes* (mildness, gentleness, meekness) was a virtue closely associated with philanthropy

- Theologically, it was associated with the justice of Zeus, but there were numerous manifestations of divine gentleness in the Greek religions
- As a virtue, meekness was a mark of the true philosopher, foremost Socrates

The opposite of meekness in thought were *argiotes* (brutality) and *orgilotes* (untamed anger)

- Hence the SM joins with the Hellenistic world in general when it single out meekness as a fundamental ethical standard

The 3rd beatitude played a major role in early Xtian ethics

- The early Christian catechetical document the Didache (ca. 70 AD) has a slightly different version:

Didache 3:7 *Be then meek, since the meek will inherit the earth*

- Closely related is Didache 3:8

Didache 3:8 *Be patient and merciful and free of evil and quiet and good and trembling with regard to the worlds always that you have heard*

James makes meekness part of the description of the Xtian sage

Jas 3:13 Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

A cluster of sayings from early church father Clement in 1 Clement 13:1-3 combines passages from the OT with sayings of Jesus which perhaps come from the SM, concluding with a citation from Isa 66:2:

*1 Clement 13:1 Let us therefore, brethren, be of humble mind, laying aside all haughtiness, and pride, and foolishness, and angry feelings; and let us act according to that which is written (for the Holy Spirit saith, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, neither let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in the Lord, in diligently seeking Him, and doing judgment and righteousness), being especially mindful of the words of the Lord Jesus which He spake, teaching us meekness and long-suffering. :2 For thus He spoke: Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven to you; as ye do, so shall it be done unto you; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged; as ye are kind, so shall kindness be shown to you; with what measure ye mete, with the same it shall be measured to you. 1 Clement 13:3 By this precept and by these rules let us stablish ourselves, that we walk with all humility in obedience to His holy words. **For the holy word saith, 4 On whom shall I look, but on him that is meek and peaceable, and that trembleth at My words?***

- The relationship between the passage Didache 3:8 and 1 Clement 13:1-4 is apparent
- Textually they both probably draw from wisdom sources
- The 3rd beatitude may draw from these wisdom sources more than Psalm 37 given that the meekness is found in the SM throughout

Meekness is an ethical value that underlies many other SM passages even if not stated

Matthew 5:21-26 *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. 23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. 25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. 26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*

Mat 5:38-42 *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. 41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. 42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*

Matthew 6:12 *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

Matthew 6:14 *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

In the larger context of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is not only teaching meekness, but practicing it

- Jesus' meekness became an important part of Matthew's Christology

Other Xtian writings contain continuous references to meekness as an imitation of Christ
1 Peter 3:13 And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? 14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: 16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

Early Church Father Ignatius of Antioch in his Letter to the Ephesians

And pray ye without ceasing in behalf of other men; for there is hope of the repentance, that they may attain to God. For "cannot he that falls arise again, and he that goes astray return?" Permit them, then, to be instructed by you. Be ye therefore the ministers of God, and the mouth of Christ. For thus saith the Lord, "If ye take forth the precious from the vile, ye shall be as my mouth." 2 Be ye humble in response to their wrath; oppose to their blasphemies your earnest prayers; while they go astray, stand ye steadfast in the faith. Conquer ye their harsh temper by gentleness, their passion by meekness. For "blessed are the meek;" and Moses was meek above all men; and David was exceeding meek. Wherefore Paul exhorts as follows: "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle towards all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves."

Do not seek to avenge ourselves on those that injure you, for says [the Scripture], "If I have returned evil to those who returned evil to me." 3 Let us make them brethren by our kindness. For say ye to those that hate you, Ye are our brethren, that the name of the Lord may be glorified. And let us imitate the Lord, "who, when He was reviled, reviled not again;" when He was crucified, He answered not; "when He suffered, He threatened not;" but prayed for His enemies, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." If any one, the more he is injured, displays the more patience, blessed is he. If any one is defrauded, if any one is despised, for the name of the Lord, he truly is the servant of Christ. Take heed that no plant of the devil be found among you, for such a plant is bitter and salt. "Watch ye, and be ye sober," in Christ Jesus.

What is Inheriting the earth?

Recall last week's beatitude: *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

- The reason for the blessed state in our beatitude, 5:5a: "*Blessed are the meek*" is given in 5:5b: "*for they shall inherit the earth*" is analogous to 5:4b *for they shall be comforted* as an eschatological promise.
- The promise relates to a tradition of promising dominion over the world to the righteous
- Like other promises refers also to an episode in the new age, when God hands over the earth to his faithful. This does raise some questions.

What does the earth refer to exactly?

- Is it "this earth" as a whole, or "the land" of Israel, or the kingdom of God, or a "new earth" after Christ's Second coming?
- These positions have all been argued for at one time or another

SM mentions "the earth" several times in juxtaposition to "the sky", cf. 5:13, 18, 35; 6:10, 19

- It's most likely that 5:5 does not have the kingdom of God as the object in mind, although the eschatological event of handing over the earth will occur in the kingdom of God.
- The land of Israel cannot be meant either, at least not exclusively; it would be included in any understanding of the earth as a whole.

The Qumran community revered Ps 37 and saw themselves as those about to experience the vindication that would come with messianic fulfillment (4QpPs 37).

- The “earth” (τὴν γῆν) originally referred to the land of Israel, i.e., what was promised to the Jews beginning with the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gen 13:15).
- But in the present context of messianic fulfillment it connotes the regenerated earth

Matthew 19:28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

cf. Rom 4:13, *For the promise, that he should be the **heir of the world**, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.*

- where κόσμος, “world,” replaces γῆ), promised by the eschatological passages in the prophets (e.g., Isa 65–66).

It is the earth, not only the land of Israel, that belongs to the meek, for the traditional promise of land had long since been transposed into the cosmic realm:

Isaiah 60:21 Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.

- This does not include the other-worldly beyond, the promise of the earth makes clear that the kingdom of heaven includes a new this-worldly earth
- The promise is strongly focused on those who are pronounced **blessed**: those who use force will not possess the earth.

What is the meaning of the term inherit? *Psa 37:11 But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.*

- Psa 37:11 already expresses an ancient doctrine concerning the proper relationship between man and the earth, that man is part of creation, but not the owners of creation
- Dominion over the earth is deferred to the eschaton, meaning end of the world

This implies that at present, the faithful do not possess or have dominion over the earth, but they have reason to hope that God will had it over to them in the end.

- While this inheritance is a matter of the eschatological future, later Xtian interpretations of the promise that it is not limited to a mere future promise, but includes application to the Christian world mission.
- The evangelist Matthew would have held this interpretation. While the SM itself has no concept of mission, passages such as 5:13-16 were used to justify Xtian world mission

Matthew 5:13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. 14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

This mission development can be observed in the Didache as well

- While Didache 3:7 *Be then meek, since the meek will inherit the earth* does not refer to the mission field, Didache 9:4 does contain the promise that the church members will be gathered *“from the ends of the earth into your kingdom”*
- This implies that the earth is the mission field.

Matthew’s reading would be similar to Matt 28:18-20

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

- Matthew’s reading also includes his entire interpretation of God’s promises to Abraham
- See (3:9*; 4:13–16*; 8:11–12*; 9:35*; 10:18*; 21:43*; 24:14*; 25:32*; cf. Rom 4:13*)

Matthew 3:9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Matthew 4:13-16 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: 14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, 15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; 16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

Matthew 8:11-12 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 21:43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

Matthew 25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

Finally, to dispel bizarre new interpretations from the mid-19C that try to create a church-Israel dichotomy:

Romans 4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Galatians 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

- Xtian Zionists have been using the term as “replacement” theology as a pejorative against covenant theology.
- Proper interpretation of the relationship of the church and Israel is found in Romans 11
- Graft in theology, that is, the olive tree of God, of which Abraham is the root consists of the natural branches representing believing Jews and graft in branches representing Gentiles, the universal people of God referred to as the Israel of God: Gal 6:16

For the SM, the present situation is the opposite of the promise

- The earth is under the dominion of worldly potentates
- While the SM on the whole abstains from political commentary, the implication is clear
- The earth is at present not in the possession of the righteous, yet this fact is a matter of injustice that will be corrected in the coming Kingdom, not the voting booth and so-called revivals as is currently being promoted by American evangelicals.

Instead the current situation calls for the petition in the Lord’s Prayer

Matthew 6:10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

- This petition in the Lord’s prayer is itself a perfect description of what meekness means

Contemporary Application, Meekness a Core Xtian Teaching

Meekness: something that is apparently lost to Xtians today

- As politicians have successfully pandered to Christians, polarizing them along political lines, divide and conquer
- Many Xtians do not realize that politicians are mere puppets who are controlled by the wicked higher powers and principalities of this evil age

No, In contrast with the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek

- Those who patiently wait upon the Lord, who put their trust in his kingdom alone
- Far too many Xtians are putting their hopes in politics

No, In contrast with the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek

- Those who patiently wait upon the Lord, who put their trust in his kingdom alone

No, In contrast with the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek

- Those who patiently wait upon the Lord, who put their trust in his kingdom alone
- Instead return evil with evil, injustice with injustice, ruining their witness, fanning the flames of hate

Politicians have successfully pandered to Christians of all stripes

- stirring them up to participate in political strife
- Xtians are now engaged in the nasty practice of political polemics, that anathematize and dehumanize their opponents

Xtians need stop praying for carnally motivated revival, instead pray for God's will

Matthew 6:10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Xtians who think that the Covid virus and all the political upheaval is God doing a work are correct, but they have the wrong interpretation

- God is chastening Xtianity for idolatry, political and religious idolatry
- Many will awaken to the conclusion that the political powers that they have hoped in have betrayed them as described in Revelation 9.
- Xtians need to wake up that both parties are controlled by Babylon antichrist powers

Revelation 18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

- Stop trying to correct the world, instead come out of the world
- Detach from the media driven brainwashing

Xtians need to get back to the first works, stop trying to control others

- Instead take care of themselves, Xtians have become dysfunctional
- Love God, honor his law and his created order, love your fellow man, love your enemies
- Do good to those who hate you, pray for them, be kind to them in word and deed, promote their well being
- rather than dehumanize them, dignify them as created in God's image

Remembering that to love thy neighbor as thyself presupposes love for oneself

- You cannot love your fellow man without loving yourself
- You cannot love your fellow man or yourself without loving God
- Our love for our fellow man flows from our love of God

We will close with several verses that depict meekness in various contexts.