**Beatitudes 3  
Humble and blessed**

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Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 6:20-26

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

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We are trying to learn these sayings together:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are they that mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.

Last week, I said these blessings are somewhat a kind of acknowledgement of the people to whom he was speaking. Rather than saying, “Ladies and gentlemen,” he was saying, “the poor,” “the mournful,” and now “the meek,” or humble.

We might say that Jesus is practicing a bit of identity politics. He is describing whole classes of people who are blessed. But the identities he chooses are not the identities that we usually choose. Jesus does not speak of Republicans, Democrats, or Independents. Jesus does not speak of women and men. Jesus does not speak of gay vs straight. Jesus does not speak of Latinos or Blacks, of Whites. He does not speak of American or Arab or Guatemalan. That is, Jesus here doesn’t not center identify in political party, or gender, or sexuality, or culture, or nation.

I don’t think that Jesus thinks these are irrelevant, but he is helping us form a new identify.

Jesus centers identity in poverty of spirit, in mournfulness, in humility. Jesus here centers identity on high and low.

Especially I want you to notice how close the third beatitude is to the first beatitude:

Blessed are – the poor – for theirs – is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are – the humble – for they – will inherit the earth.

There are the rich and “high” people. But Jesus is talking to the “low” people: to the poor and the humble. To the impoverished and to the humbled.

We can ask the obvious question about how the identities that Jesus is concerned with maps to the identities our culture is so concerned about. And I think the answer is somewhat simply answered if we can answer the question, who are really the low in our society and culture? Who are the ones who are left out?

To the poor in spirit, Jesus promises God’s kingdom. A kingdom is, of course, a land. To the humble and meek, Jesus promises the land, the earth. (The word in Greek or Hebrew are interchangeable).

Maybe you are one of those people who are left out. To you, Jesus promises the entire earth!

Maybe you are not one of those people who are left out. There is no promise for you. So perhaps it would be good to humble yourselves before God and before other people.

I think it is interesting that Jesus says the humble will “inherit” the earth.

It’s a bit like he is giving a writing prompt for a certain kind of story or novel.

In our story, the hero’s parents have a nice piece of land. This is my novel, so the nice piece of land is a quiet ten acres in the woods, looking down on a small burbling river, a creek, really. It’s a place of quiet and rest. With a log cabin. The river flows into a small lake.

The main conflict in the novel is that the hero’s parents have promised the land to their children: the hero, Pat, and the evil Alex. Alex not so secretly wishes the parents would die, so Alex can pay off some gambling debts. Alex is always trying to exploit the land, overfishing the river and lake, hosting paintball battles on the back five acres.

But our hero is patient. Our hero is humble. Our hero tries to nurture the land, in the way Pat’s parents do. The parents do die, eventually, and when the will is read, there is a surprise: the humble Pat inherits the land, and the evil Alex is left out completely.

Here’s what Augustine had to say:

Mark what follows: Blessed, says he, are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. You wish to possess the earth now; take heed lest you be possessed by it. If you be meek, you will possess it; if ungentle, you will be possessed by it. And when you hear of the proposed reward, do not, in order that you may possess the earth, unfold the lap of covetousness, whereby you would at present possess the earth, to the exclusion even of your neighbor by whatever means; let no such imagination deceive you. Then will you truly possess the earth, when you cleave to him who made heaven and earth. For this is to be meek, not to resist your God, that in that you do well he may be well-pleasing to you, not you to yourself; and in that you suffer ill justly, he may not be unpleasing to you, but you to yourself. For no small matter is it that you shall be well-pleasing to Him, when you are displeased with yourself; whereas if you are well-pleased with your own self, you will be displeasing to him[[1]](#endnote-1).

“You wish to possess the earth now; take heed lest you be possessed by it.”

We are to receive the land as a gift, not as a resource which we exploit.

This may have political implications for American Christians. This week, our president has decided to pull out of the Paris climate change agreements. As flawed as those agreements are, it’s better that they are in place than not. And so, over the next four years, we’ll have to do what we can as citizens to do something about seeing that reversed. So many people, including many American Christians, are somehow convinced that global climate change is not happening.

I believe the humble will inherit the earth; I do worry about the state of the earth the humble might inherit.

By the way, before we think that “meek” or “humble” necessarily means we are to be doormats that anyone can walk on, remember that the Bible says Moses was the meekest man in the world, and that Jesus said he was meek and lowly of heart. Aristotle said meekness was “the laudable mean between the extremes of anger and indifference[[2]](#endnote-2).”

I want to finish with a reading of the first part of Psalm 37. I would recommend the whole psalm for your study this week.

It’ll be clear to you that Jesus is quoting Psalm 37 when he says, “blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Do not fret because of the wicked;  
    do not be envious of wrongdoers,  
**2**for they will soon fade like the grass,  
    and wither like the green herb.

**3**Trust in the Lord, and do good;  
    so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.  
**4**Take delight in the Lord,  
    and he will give you the desires of your heart.

**5**Commit your way to the Lord;  
    trust in him, and he will act.  
**6**He will make your vindication shine like the light,  
    and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

**7**Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;  
    do not fret over those who prosper in their way,  
    over those who carry out evil devices.

**8**Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.  
    Do not fret—it leads only to evil.  
**9**For the wicked shall be cut off,  
    but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

**10**Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;  
    though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.  
**11**But the meek shall inherit the land,  
    and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

Do not fret because of the wicked, but live a life of humble gratefulness. Because the land, the earth belongs to such as you. Welcome to the kingdom.

1. Augustine, Sermon 3 on the New Testament. http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/160303.htm Accessed, May 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Aristotle, quoted in Hauck, F., & Schulz, S. (1964–). πραΰς, πραΰτης. G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, & G. Friedrich (Eds.), Theological dictionary of the New Testament (electronic ed., Vol. 6, p. 646). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)