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“STRUGGLING WITH MEEKNESS”

Matthew 5:5

What is your favorite Bible verse, and why do you love it?

What about Matthew 5:5? Is that anyone’s favorite verse? I didn’t think so!

▣ **Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”**

I suppose that someone, somewhere, especially loves this Beatitude. Most of us struggle with it.

We struggle to make sense of it. We struggle to believe it. We struggle to embrace it.

◆ We struggle to *make sense* of “**Blessed are the meek,**” in part because of the language barrier.

Jesus was at least tri-lingual. Growing up Jewish in Galilee he spoke contemporary Aramaic, biblical Hebrew, and κοινή [koinē] Greek.

He probably preached in Aramaic. Next, Matthew recorded the sermon in Greek for his Gentile audience. Since then scholars have translated Matthew’s κοινή text into dozens of modern languages.

It is not easy to produce an accurate, readable text. There is not always a precise, one-to-one correspondence between two languages. Some κοινή words don’t have exact counterparts in English.

When that happens, translators strive to select the nearest equivalent. We pray that they are guided by the

Holy Spirit; but they are also influenced by cultural forces, historical precedent, and personal preference. The word they choose might be very close to the original – or not.

Many people do not realize this. They read their favorite translation as though it was the original manuscript, and in the process they unwittingly impose their meaning on God’s Word.

📖 {McKnight} Take the word “**blessed.**” Many people think it is simply the religious version of *happy*. The research shows that most of us think of happiness as a subjective “**good feeling about oneself, one’s life, and one’s situation.**” And so Matthew 5:5 becomes “Happy are the meek.”

📖 But Jesus is not a twenty-first century English speaker. When he says “**blessed**” he does not mean that “**the meek**” are subjectively happy, he is saying that they are favored by God.

📖 Likewise, Jesus is not a prosperity theologian. When he says “**the meek**” are favored by God, he does not mean his Father is showering them with non-stop physical health, material wealth, and earthly success; he is saying that God is enabling them to see the Son, as he is, share his life, and participate in his mission. That is the greatest blessing!

■ “**Blessed are the meek.**” God favors the meek. They see the Son, share his life, and participate in his mission.

📖 Now, about our word “**meek**”: it has definitions ranging from “**humbly patient**” to “**deficient in spirit and courage.**” A few of its synonyms come across as

neutral or positive; the majority of them have pejorative undertones, at least when they are applied to people: “passive,” “docile,” “timid,” “spineless,” “weak.”

📖 Yet “meek” is an English word, and Messiah never said it. What we read as “meek” is a form of the Greek adjective *πραυς* [praoos]. It does not insinuate that a person is “deficient in spirit,” “passive” or “spineless”; rather, it describes one whose words and actions are distinguished by humble gentleness.

{Col 3:8, 12-13, TNIV/NLT} The *πραυς* are kind and considerate. When they get frustrated or irritated they keep a tight rein on their tongues and fists, intentionally putting off “rage, malice, slander, and filthy language,” and “[clothing]” themselves “with tenderhearted mercy, kindness... and patience.”

Their gentleness is reinforced by humility.

They are conscious that God created them in his image and loves them enough to give his only Son for them – and they are confident beyond question that each and every other human being is equally precious to him!

{1 P 1:2} They know they are “chosen according to the foreknowledge of...the Father, through the... work of [his] Spirit...sprinkled with [the] blood” of Jesus – and they are convicted that all of this is an act of sheer, undeserved mercy and kindness on God’s part!

They see others, not as superiors and inferiors, but as full equals. They take into account the interests of those others, and bear in mind their concerns.

■ “Blessed are the *πραυς*.” God favors the ones whose words and actions are distinguished by humble

gentleness. They see the Son, share his life, and participate in his mission.

We can break through the language barrier and make sense of Matthew 5:5.

◆ Understanding is a great first step, but it is not enough. We also struggle to *believe* “Blessed are the meek,” in part because the promised outcome is so far-removed from our experience.

Since when do the “meek inherit” much of anything, least of all “the earth”?

Consider Israel’s conquest of Canaan. In Genesis chapter 12 God promises the land to Abram’s offspring. Six hundred fifty years later they receive their inheritance by means of divine intervention in combination with stunning violence. The slaughter of every man, woman, and child in a whole series of cities is not meekness in action. Israel does not inherit the land through humble gentleness.

Consider our history. Many assume that either the living God or impersonal Providence ordained the United States to inherit the continent. This “bequest” came at great cost. The cultural eradication, forced relocation, and extermination of Indians were hardly humble and gentle. “The meek” did not inherit the land, our ancestors did!

Our history is no worse than most, and it is better than many. Even so, we have a checkered past. Why wouldn’t we? Arrogant aggression is Standard Operating Procedure in the kingdom of the world – and make no mistake, our republic is a province of that kingdom.

Though we live in the land of opportunity, we have not seen **“the meek... inherit the earth.”** But we will!

■ **“They will inherit the earth”** is in the future tense – and what a great future it will be!

{2 P 3:10, 13} On the day of the Lord **“the heavens will disappear with a roar...and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.”** It will be a terrifying end and a glorious beginning, for **“in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth.”**

{Rev 21:1-4} Almighty God will integrate the spiritual heavens and material earth when **“the new Jerusalem, [comes] down out of heaven”** and a **“voice from [God’s] throne”** will announce that his **“dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.”**

And who will inherit this new earth? **“The meek,”** God’s people who are distinguished by humble gentleness!

{Heb 11:1} This has not happened *yet*. But **“faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”** By the grace of God we can believe that this will come to pass.

◆ Knowledge and belief are essential, but even with them we might continue to struggle to *embrace* **“Blessed are the meek.”**

{Ro 7:21, 15} In this we are like Paul, who wrote in anguish: **“though I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”** Our old nature resists the call to humble gentleness. It is **“waging war against”** the new attitude **“of [our] mind.”** **“What [the new man or woman wants] to do [we] do not do, but what [we] hate to do”!**

? *How can we embrace humble gentleness?*

We find the answer in a series of Gospel texts.

In Matthew 11:29 the Lord urges, **“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle”** (πραυσ) **“and humble in heart.”**

A yoke is a wooden bar by which two oxen or other draft animals are joined at the necks or heads. Joined together like this, they are empowered to pull an enormous load that would otherwise be impossibly heavy for them.

For Christ Followers, our yokemate is Messiah himself! Being yoked to Jesus is walking side-by-side in the same direction, following his lead (in a yoked pair one leads and one follows), cooperating with him even as we allow him to do the heavy lifting for us.

{Gal 5:22-23} In John 15:5 Jesus declares: **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.”** This **“fruit”** includes **“love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness”** (πραυτησ [prautēs], the nominal form of πραυσ) **“and self-control.”**

Discipleship necessarily involves intellectual belief, verbal confession, and intentional obedience – but more than that it is a profound, life-giving connection with Jesus by which his life flows into us and we bear fruit to the glory of his Father.

{Mt 21:5} When Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey it fulfills Old Testament prophecy: **“your king comes to you, πραυσ and riding on a donkey.”**

That sets the tone for his actions during Holy Week as he responds to betrayal, arrest, false accusation, mocking, physical torture, and crucifixion.

{Mt 16:23; 1 P 2:21} To be a disciple is to “**deny** [oneself] **and take up** [one’s] **cross and follow**” our Master. Whatever else cross-carrying involves, it includes being humbly gentle like Jesus as we participate in his mission.

✎ By the grace of God we can embrace humble gentleness by pressing into Jesus in worship, prayer, obedience, study, Christian fellowship, and service.

{2 Co 10:1; Php 4:5} Matthew 5:5 might never be our favorite verse. That is OK! Still, “**By the meekness**” (πραυτητος [prautētos]) “**and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you...**” “**Let your** [humble gentleness] **be evident to all.**”

▣ “**Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**”