



good shepherd  
presbyterian church

## **Gentle Humility**

Matthew 5:1-2,5; 11:28-30; Psalm 37:1-6,11

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How do you get ahead in this world? Be strong, be assertive, be proactive, be strategic... that's one set of common advice. Or it may be even stronger: take advantage of others, be cutthroat, never back down. Others might say, "Make connections, don't burn bridges, work the system."

Jesus, how do you say we get ahead? ... "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." <crickets>

We continue today in our series on being blessed and giving blessing. We are looking at Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5, commonly called the Beatitudes. As a reminder of the context, he had been followed by a crowd, but had withdrawn to teach his followers about God's blessing. It's a physical representation of how God speaks of blessing throughout scripture: the crowd or the world is always the backdrop to blessing. We are blessed in order to then bless the world, the nations, humanity. So Jesus taught the disciples (and teaches us) that we might understand and receive God's blessing and then take it "down the mountain" to the world around us.

Today I want to unpack the two parts of verse 5, to understand "gentle" and "inherit the earth."

## **Blessed are the Gentle**

Our translation used 'gentle' here in verse 5. Other good alternatives are 'humble' and 'meek'. But none of those sound like the take-charge, get ahead, world-beater attributes we often prioritize to get ahead in the world. And that's just the point! If you know anything about Jesus you know that his mission and priority was not getting ahead in the world; it was serving the world. So we shouldn't be surprised to hear him lifting up other traits. I remind you again of that night before the crucifixion when the disciples were arguing about getting ahead and who was the best. Jesus commanded them rather to serve one another through a most humble act: washing their feet. (John 13)

And besides blessing, this is the other reason we should be gentle or humble: it's like Jesus! The same word is used two other times to describe Jesus. In Matthew 11:29 he says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am GENTLE and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." And in Matthew 21:5 at the scene of the Palm Sunday procession Matthew says of the event: "This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet (Zechariah 9:9)... "Behold your King is coming to you, GENTLE, and mounted on a donkey...."

Gentleness or humility is not wimpiness or being a doormat; Jesus demonstrated true humility through his submission and obedience to the will of God. That's what our humility should look like as well. Gentleness or humility asks, "What does God want?" and "What would Jesus do?"

## **For They Shall Inherit the Earth**

Psalm 37, which we heard as our call to worship makes the same connection between humility and inheriting the earth. (cf. v. 11): “But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity (*shalom*).” So what does “inherit the earth” mean? And what is the “abundant prosperity” there in Psalm 37:11? It does not seem like humility (even godly humility) leads to riches or earthly success. Well it doesn’t; that would be super-imposing our definitions onto those of Jesus.

Psalm 37 helps us translate. Jesus is clearly basing his language on that of Psalm 37. But where Jesus says “inherit the earth” the Psalm says “inherit the land.” And ‘land’ should immediately cue us that God is talking about the covenant promises to Abraham. Remember those? God promised Abraham children, land, and blessing: “inherit the land” or “inherit the earth” is shorthand for restoration and redemption of the earth under God’s rule... begun with the promise to Abraham and extended as blessing shared to all who trust in God. Paul explains that succinctly in Romans 4:13 – “For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.”

And “delight... in abundant prosperity” is not riches and fame. ‘Prosperity’ is translating the Hebrew word, *shalom*. *Shalom* is the essence of blessing; it is what it is like to be in God’s will and obeying God’s will. It is what God wants; and what God wants is good even if we don’t always see or understand that.

So again – to be clear – “inheriting the earth” is not ruling the world in a geo-political sense, but God’s restoration of what was ‘lost’ in the Fall. God created the world and it was good, but human sin and disobedience marred that creation. That big story of God that we

talked about all summer was that God was redeeming and restoring what was lost.

And Jesus is saying that those who follow in his steps of humbly serving God and one another will be a part of that restoration and redemption of the earth, the nations, and humanity.

One last reminder of this part of God's plan is the description of that final restoration in Revelation. There, when God sets all things right and Jesus reigns on the throne, there will be a New Heavens and New Earth. Our being a part of that is the ultimate "inheriting the world." We are not just passive tenants of that New Earth, but part of God's family and specifically "heirs" to it. We will continue to serve and steward even as we are called to serve and steward here and now.

So Jesus is saying that if we serve God and others here and now we will experience the blessing – the participation – in God's restoration of creation. And that's a good and desirable thing!

### **Blessing Challenge**

I challenge you again today to identify one of the ways God has blessed you. Write it down or find a description of it in the Bible and mark it. Consider how God blesses and the ways you live or step out of line with that blessing. Perhaps you have chosen humility and service in a situation and seen how that honors God. And then this week look for an opportunity to share that blessing with another person. Commend their choice of gentleness or humility. Or actively choose to serve another person as Jesus served the disciples. I'd love to hear about it or any other way you've taken on the blessing challenge.

May God bless this Word to our hearing and our doing. Amen.