

Matthew
The Gentle
Matthew 5:5
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It was in August of the year 2023 that a man named David Brooks wrote an article for the *Atlantic Magazine*, an article entitled, “How America Got Mean.” Brooks writes this:

Why have Americans become so mean? I was recently talking with a restaurant owner who said that he has to eject a customer from his restaurant for rude or cruel behavior once a week, something that never used to happen. A head nurse at a hospital told me that many on her staff are leaving the profession because patients have become so abusive. The most important story about why Americans have become rude, I believe, is also the simplest. We inhabit a society in which people are no longer trained in how to treat others with kindness and consideration. Our society has become one in which people feel licensed to give their selfishness free reign. (Brooks concludes his article with this proposed solution to the problem of America's meanness. He says.) We have to build moral communities, because on our own, we are all selfish and flawed. Moral formation is best when it's humble. It means giving people the skills and habits that will help them be considerate to others in the complex situations of life. It means helping people behave in ways that make other people feel included, seen, and respected. (And then he ends the article with these haunting words.) That's very different from how we treat people now.

Brooks is right in principle. But if you read the rest of the article, what he's really arguing for, as the solution, is nothing more than a kind of moral reformation, a kind of behavior modification. But in “The Sermon on The Mount,” and in the passage that we come to this morning, Jesus

teaches us that ultimately, people will only be kind and consistently gentle with others because they have a changed heart. That's the only reason that it will happen as a pattern of life.

Just to give you context, to remind you of where we are, Jesus begins this famous sermon with “Eight Qualities That Define the Character of Those Who Belong to His Spiritual Kingdom.” In other words, these eight qualities that we call “The Beatitudes,” describe all of those who are truly Christian. Luke tells us that, at the same time, in the same sermon, Jesus also pronounced a series of “Eight Woes on the Opposite Qualities.” In other words, the opposite of each Beatitude defines the character, not of believers, but of unbelievers, those who still belong to Satan's kingdom. Now, if you're in Matthew 5, you'll notice immediately, at the beginning of that chapter, that Jesus begins each Beatitude with the word “Blessed.” We've already examined this word. Jesus uses this word to “Describe a desirable life of spiritual prosperity that is also marked by internal happiness and joy.” And both our circumstances outwardly and our joy inwardly all result from God's favor or blessing in our lives, His grace in our lives. That's “Blessed.”

Now, so far, we've examined the first two of these Beatitudes. Look at verse 3, Here's number one, “Blessed are the poor in spirit (the beggars in spirit), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Every true Christian has an awareness of his own personal spiritual poverty before God, every believer. And out of that spiritual poverty, that true believer has already begged God to extend him grace in response to his bankruptcy. Such a person, Jesus says, is “Blessed.” Why? Because that kind of person, the person who recognizes his spiritual bankruptcy, truly belongs to Jesus' spiritual kingdom— “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

The second Beatitude is in verse 4, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Every true Christian mourns his own sin and the presence and power of sin throughout this fallen

world. And such a person is blessed because the person who mourns over sin will be comforted. Not only, brothers and sisters, do we enjoy the past comfort of salvation and the present comfort of God's ongoing forgiveness, but, and this is Jesus' main point here, we also anticipate the future comfort of an eternity of joy in the Lord's presence—we will be comforted forever.

Today, we come to the third Beatitude. Read it with me in verse 5, Jesus says, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.” Now, this Beatitude is actually taken from an Old Testament passage, from Psalm 37, verse 11, where we read, “But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.” Now, we'll go to Psalm 37 and see this in its context in a little bit, but let me begin by reminding you that all of the Beatitudes, including this third one, really are ultimately rooted in the first one. In the first Beatitude, we learn that Christians have an awareness of our spiritual poverty, our bankruptcy before God. The second speaks of our emotional response to that poverty. We mourn over it. But now, the third Beatitude, we come to today, describes the relational effects of our intimate knowledge of our spiritual bankruptcy. In other words, because we know about our bankruptcy, spiritually before God, because we mourn over our sin, we are drawn and driven to gentleness because of what we understand about ourselves.

Now, to fully understand this Beatitude, we really need to answer three key questions that our Lord raises in the statement He makes here. “Three Key Questions.” Let's look at them together. Here's how we can get to the full understanding of our Lord's meaning. The first key question is this, and it's the obvious one, “What is the Meaning of Gentleness?” What is the meaning of gentleness? Jesus says all those in His spiritual kingdom, notice verse 5, are “the gentle.” Now, that's how the *New American Standard Version*, that we use here, translates the word. John Wycliffe, the very first to translate the Bible into English in the late 1300s, translated it like this.

“Blessed be mild men.” The *Legacy Standard Bible*, if you have that one, has the word “lowly.” But most modern translations use the word “meek.” Now, the problem with the word “meek” is, first of all, it's not a word we commonly use today. But secondly, it carries some baggage that can give us a wrong understanding of the word Jesus uses.

So let me start, as I often like to do, making sure we understand “What Jesus Did Not Mean” when He said, “Blessed are the gentle (or the meek).” To be gentle or meek, first of all, is not “A lack of conviction,” or we could say just “cowardice,” somebody who just goes along. Secondly, it is not “The pursuit of peace at any cost.” We're not talking about somebody who so lacks the desire for confrontation that they're willing to sacrifice the truth in order to keep peace. Thirdly, we're not talking about “A weak character.” Unfortunately, the word “meek” in our common usage can kind of imply that. But this isn't what this word means. How do I know that? Because in Numbers, chapter 12, verse 3, we're told that Moses, in his day, was marked more by this virtue “than any man who was on the face of the earth (this planet).” But let me tell you something, “Moses was not weak.” I mean, think about it, for forty years, he led two-million Jewish people across the desert. Fourthly, it's not “A shy or introverted personality.” There are some people that are just prone to be quiet. This word doesn't mean you're a ‘wallflower.’ Number five, it is not “Mere human niceness.” You know, there are some people that are just born nice; that's just who they are, even though they're unbelievers. They are just nice people. It's not what we're talking about. In fact, Lloyd-Jones puts it well. He says:

There are people who seem to be born naturally nice. That is not what the Lord means when He says, “Blessed are the meek.” That is something purely biological, the kind of thing you get in animals. One dog is nicer than another. One cat is nicer than another. That's not meekness.

So, it's none of those things. So, what is this quality then that our Lord pronounces as blessed? Let's consider then "What Jesus Meant." Now, the problem is that the Greek word behind our translation 'gentle' is nearly impossible to accurately translate with a single English word. We run into this occasionally in the New Testament where there's a word that has no immediate parallel, and it's so full of richness and meaning that one word doesn't really capture it in English. Here is a definition from the leading Greek lexicon defining this word. Listen to the nuances, 'Not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance.' 'gentle,' 'humble,' 'considerate,' 'meek.' Now, let's take that word 'meek' for a moment. As I said, it's not a word we use often, but let me define it for you because I'm going to use it occasionally. When I use the word 'meek' today, I mean what the shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines it as, it is 'humble,' 'not proud or self-willed,' 'submissive,' 'gentle in nature.'

Now what's interesting about that definition is it really does capture the Greek word well. You'll notice that in our English translation, the *New American Standard*, if you have a version of the *New American Standard* that has marginal notes, you'll notice that the word 'gentle' is footnoted. In the margin, the translator suggests two other translations for the Greek word. Notice 'humble' and 'meek.' Now that means you have three English words to sort of try to capture this one Greek word: 'Humble,' 'Meek' and 'Gentle.'

Why is that? Because the Greek word includes all three of those concepts. So, when we see this word 'gentle,' this is what Jesus means. He means, first of all, we are "Humble in heart." Secondly, we are 'meek,' and, in this use, it means "Submissive to God and to human authorities," and finally, we are "Gentle in our manner to everyone." "Humble in heart," "Submissive to God and the rightful human authorities" He's placed in our lives, and we are "Gentle in our manner toward everyone." So, the person then who demonstrates this quality is

humble, not proud; submissive, not self-willed; and patient and gentle, not angry or harsh. This word was used in secular Greek of a wild animal that had been tamed and domesticated.

Similarly, it describes “a person who's under control,” who isn't responding in anger and harshness to all the people around him, but he or she is under control. “Poor in spirit” has to do with how we think about ourselves before God. “Gentle” has to do with how we think about God and others and how we treat them in response.

Literally, look at verse 5 again. Jesus says, “Blessed are the gentle ones.” He's not describing, so much, our outward actions as the internal reality. You see, we only treat others with gentleness if we are gentle. This must first be an internal quality to be consistently reflected in our behavior.

Where does this quality come from? Well, the sort of secular quality that this word describes, the Greek philosophers taught that a person was either born with, or it was self-made, self-generated. But the biblical quality, the one Jesus describes here, is neither a natural quality we're born with nor is it one that we develop on our own. How do I know that? Galatians, chapter 5 says this quality is a “fruit of the Spirit.” In other words, “gentleness, biblical gentleness,” can only grow out of a renewed nature. The quality Jesus is talking about is something only believers can manifest.

But let's be more specific about what it means to be gentle. Let's come to a second key question, and that is “What are the Expressions of Gentleness?” We've seen the meaning of the word, but let's consider the expressions of gentleness. This Greek word demonstrates itself in our relationship with God on the one hand, but also in our relationship with others. So, let's take it in those two different applications. First of all, “Toward God,” this word ‘gentle’ really is speaking primarily of “Submission,” submission. It's meekness toward God. It's a humble heart that is meek or submissive toward God. First of all, “Submissive to His will,” to His sovereign plans for

my life and the world's history. It's joyfully accepting our circumstances as from God for our good and refusing to complain or to argue with Him about them. Vincent defines it this way—“toward God, meekness accepts His dealings without murmur or resistance as absolutely good and wise.”

If you want an example of this, think about Eli's response in 1 Samuel 3, verse 18, “Samuel told him (Eli) everything (that had happened, he) hid nothing from him.” And here's Eli's response, and this really epitomizes this submissive response to God's will. Eli says, “It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him.” “It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him.” That's the spirit toward God. But this is really the essence of the Psalm Jesus quotes. Turn back with me now to Psalm 37. I wish I had time to walk you through the entire psalm, and we'll come back, so kind of keep your finger here or put a placeholder. But let me just show you one paragraph, one stanza. Psalm 37, verse 7, notice the Psalmist's, David here response to the circumstances of his life and the circumstances in the world. It's an attitude of submission. Verse 7:

Rest in the LORD (Yahweh) and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. Cease from anger and forsake wrath; do not fret, *it leads* only to evildoing. For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD [(Yahweh) that is, who wait for him to act], they will inherit the land. Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be *there*. (And here's what Jesus quotes in the Beatitude.) But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

You see what's going on here is David is saying, "Listen, the humble person, the gentle person, the person who's submissive toward God, that person looks at his own circumstances or the circumstances of the world and doesn't live in anger and wrath and fear, but rather trusts in the LORD, rather accepts, submits to God's sovereign plans for his or her life as well as His plans for human history. So, "Toward God: It's Submission;" first of all to "His Sovereign Will," His plans for your life, but secondly, it's submission "To His Word."

Turn over to James, chapter 1. There's a paragraph in James, one that is, I think, frequently misunderstood. James, chapter 1, verses 19-25 is one paragraph, and everything in this paragraph is about the believer's response to the Bible. Look at verse 19, "*This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear." This isn't like a general proverb. In the paragraph he's talking about our response to the Bible. "Be quick to hear" God's Word, (be) slow to speak *and* slow to anger." In other words, don't talk back to God; don't study His Word and go, "Well, I don't agree with that." And don't get angry because of what God says, instead, here's your response, verse 21, "Therefore, putting aside *all* filthiness and all that remains of wickedness." In other words, when you come to the Bible, have a heart that's confessing your sin and that's pursuing holiness, and then and here's our word, "in humility (in gentleness) receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." In other words, come with a heart of submission, of meekness to God's Word, saying, "God, whatever you say, that's what I want to do, that's what I want to be!" It's submission to His Word. So, toward God then, this word translated 'gentleness' is primarily 'submission;' submission to His sovereign will and plans for my life, the circumstances in which I find myself, and to His revealed Word.

There's a second way it expresses itself. Not only toward God, but this quality expresses itself "Toward Others," toward the people around me. And in that case, "It is a Humble, Gracious,

Gentle Spirit,” even when I am wronged. Vincent, again, defines it like this. He says, “Toward man, it accepts opposition, insult, and provocation as God's permitted ministers.” Gentleness is to temper all of our human relationships. First of all, “Toward all believers generally.” Paul uses this word in a couple of passages that say, “This is how you ought to be toward everybody, every believer in your life.” Ephesians 4:2, after saying, “walk in a manner worthy of your calling,” he says, “with all humility and gentleness...being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” So, be marked in all of your relationships with gentleness. In Colossians, chapter 3, verse 12, he says, “As those who've been chosen of God, holy and beloved” (We talked about that last week in 2 Thessalonians 2, God set His love on you in eternity past, He made you His child, you're His son or His daughter in light of His choice, in light of His love, how do you respond?), put on a heart of ...gentleness.” This is how you ought to respond.

It's also how you ought to respond, “Toward believers who have sinned,” either in their own lives or even against you. Galatians, chapter 6, verse 1, talks about restoring believers who've sinned, and it says, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of (What?) gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”

But we're also supposed to demonstrate this quality, this virtue of gentleness, and this may be the hardest of all, “Toward all the unbelievers” in our life. The people at your school, the people you work with, if there are unbelievers in your home, neighbors, this is how you ought to respond.

Turn over to Titus, chapter 3, verse 2. Paul is talking about how we ought to respond to all unbelievers and he says don't malign anyone, instead, “be peaceable, (be) gentle, showing every consideration for all men.” Why? Well, remember who you used to be, verse 3. “For we also

once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved.” We were just like them, so be gentle with them.

Now, there are several biblical examples of gentleness; I don't have time to deal with all of them, let me just give you two that stand out. One in the Old Testament, this is how Moses responded to the attack against his authority by his sister, Miriam, and his brother, Aaron. In Numbers, chapter 12, verse 3, in the context of their rebellion, it says, “(Now the man Moses was very humble (The Septuagint uses our word ‘gentle.’), more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)” This was Moses. But more importantly, this was our Lord Jesus Christ; He perfectly displayed this quality. In 2 Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 1, Paul speaks of the “gentleness of Jesus Christ.” It's how He responded to sinners. Look at 1 Peter, chapter 2, you remember when He was unfairly attacked and even executed, how did He respond? Well, He responded, verse 22, He “COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats,” but He trusted God in His circumstances, He “kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously.” This is how Jesus responded to sinners.

But here's something even more encouraging to us who are already His followers. This is how Jesus responds to every one of His disciples. Matthew, chapter 11, verse 28, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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.” Christian, this is how Jesus treats everyone; it's how he treats you. So, the person who is humble, submissive, and gentle remains calm and under control regardless of how he's provoked.

On the other hand, the opposite of gentle and meek is a refusal to submit to God's will in your circumstances, to chafe, to complain, to argue with God, not submitting to God's Word in how you live, arguing with God's Word, coming up with your own ideas, and always demanding your perceived rights, and then responding in anger and harshness when those perceived rights are violated by others. When I was growing up through my entire childhood, we had a series of dogs, and they were always boxer bulldogs; I loved my dogs. By nature, boxer bulldogs are incredibly strong, incredibly defensive of their territory and those who they perceive to be part of their pack. One of our boxer bulldogs had a litter of puppies, and I remember watching one of those puppies terrorize his mother. He bit her, clawed her, scratched her, nipped at her, and in spite of all of that amazing power and strength, this dog could have crushed that puppy in a moment; instead, the mother just lay there and took it, responding to that puppy only with gentleness. Beloved, that's how we're supposed to be with people, even when people nip and scratch and bite, and they do! We're to treat them with gentleness. A person who is gentle doesn't insist on his rights and respond in anger when those perceived rights are violated. He doesn't harbor bitterness and seek revenge for every personal insult, every injury, but rather is quick to forgive others. He doesn't treat others harshly, but rather with gentleness. Here is Matthew Henry's excellent summary of the meaning of this word. He writes:

The meek are those who quietly submit themselves to God, to His Word, and to His rod; who follow His directions and comply with His designs, and are gentle towards all men. They bear provocation without being inflamed by it. They can be cool when others are hot, and in their patience, keep possession of their own souls. They are meek who are rarely and only with difficulty provoked, but quickly and easily pacified, and who would rather forgive twenty injuries than avenge one, having the rule of their own spirits.

Beloved, let me ask you a question. I don't mean this as a rhetorical question. I mean for you to truly answer this question in your heart. This is our Lord speaking here, so, let me ask you this morning, “Are you humble in your heart or is your inward thinking and **are your** attitudes marked constantly by unrelenting pride? Are you submissive toward God and the other human authorities He's placed in your life? Are you self-willed, always thinking you know best? Are you gentle in your manner toward others? Are you harsh, angry, always blowing up? How do you respond to God when your circumstances are hard? Do you believe that He's sovereign over everything that happens in your life, and He's also good and wise? Do you joyfully accept your circumstances as from Him for your good? And how do you respond to the people in your life? Are you known for a humble, gentle spirit? Is that how those who know you best think about you? Is it how you talk? Is it how you treat others? Is it how you're known in your home; how you're known at work; how you're known in the church? Are you known as a person who is gentle in how you treat others?” Let's talk about your online presence. “Are your social media posts and your comments on various internet sites known to be and marked by gentleness?”

So far, we've considered “The Meaning of Gentleness,” and we've considered “The Expressions of Gentleness.” That brings us to a third key question, and that is “What Is Jesus' Promise to the Gentle?” What is His promise to the gentle? It's a twofold promise. First of all, he tells us “They Are Blessed.” Verse 5, “Blessed are the gentle.” Now, we already looked at this word, but when Jesus says this, He is saying that those who are gentle are ‘*makarios*.’ It means three things. It means, first of all, that they are in an incredibly desirable circumstance. “They already belong to His spiritual kingdom.” It means, secondly, that therefore, “They are inwardly happy and joyful,” and that because of the fact they belong His kingdom, they have joy. Both of those ultimately are the result, not of their own doing, but of “God's unique favor and grace in their lives.” So, Jesus

says those who are gentle are truly happy now because they belong to His kingdom, and they have come to enjoy God's grace in their lives.

But Jesus' second promise points to the future. It's that "They Will Inherit the Earth," they will inherit the earth. This is the heart of verse 5, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." "For," because here's why they're blessed, "They," and in Greek, the pronoun is emphatic, "They and they alone shall." It looks forward to the future; this is a promise about their future, "They shall inherit, they shall come to possess as their own, the earth." Now, what does Jesus mean by 'the earth?' Well, there are two possible meanings. The first one is very unlikely, but the Greek word for 'earth' can also mean 'land,' and so Jesus could have meant that "the gentle will continue to dwell in the land of Israel," those listening to Him would continue to dwell in the land of Israel during their lives and during human history. That's very unlikely. The second meaning is much more likely, and that is He's talking here about "The Future New Earth." That meaning best fits the context of the Beatitudes. The promise in the second Beatitude is going to be fulfilled primarily in the future kingdom of God; that's when we will be comforted, so it's logical to assume, then, that the promise in the third is also about that future kingdom.

In addition, "inheriting the new earth" also best fits the context of Psalm 37, where Jesus borrows this from. Now, go back to Psalm 37, let me show you this. In Psalm 37, David repeatedly refers to two different eternal destinies that will be the destinies of every person. Throughout the Psalm, David refers to two groups. The first group is those who will be "cut off." In biblical terms, to "be cut off" refers to the divine act of judgment by which God removes a person from among His people forever. We're talking about eternal judgment. The second group is referred to as those "who will inherit the land or the earth." Let me show you this. Psalm 37, look at verse 9, "For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit

the earth.” Look at verse 11; here you have just the one side and this is what Jesus quotes. “The humble will inherit the land (or the earth) and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.” Verse 18, also talking about the one group, “The LORD knows the days of the blameless, and their inheritance (Notice this.) will be (What?) forever.” We're talking about eternal destinies here. Look at verse 22, we come back now to both of these groups, “For those blessed by Him will inherit the land, but those cursed by Him will be cut off.” Verse 28, “For the Lord loves justice and does not forsake His godly ones; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked will be cut off. The righteous will inherit the land (earth) and will dwell in it forever (forever).” Verse 34, “Wait for the LORD (Yahweh) and keep His way, and He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it.”

Now, with that understanding, go back to Matthew 5. When we apply what we just learned in Psalm 37 to the third Beatitude, we discover that Jesus' point was that the gentle already belong to His spiritual kingdom right now. They are blessed and, someday, they will inherit a place in His future physical kingdom in the new earth forever. That's Jesus' promise. If you are His and if you're His, you're marked by gentleness, you will inherit the new earth forever—it's yours. That's Jesus' promise to the humble in heart, the submissive to God and to the rightful human authorities in their lives, and those who exhibit gentleness toward everyone in their lives.

Now, you remember in this sermon, Jesus also pronounced a series of woes, judgment on those who demonstrate the opposite of these qualities. Luke records four Beatitudes and the four woes that correspond. He doesn't include this one on gentleness, however, based on the pattern of the others that we see in Luke, that day, Jesus said something like this, the corresponding woe, “Woe to those who refuse to submit to God's will and Word; Woe to those who are always defending their personal rights in anger, for they will not inherit the new heavens and the new earth; they

will inherit eternal hell.” That’s what Paul says explicitly in Galatians, chapter 5. Turn there with me. Galatians, chapter 5, we always refer to verse 22 and following, the fruit of the Spirit, but verse 19 and following is the fruit of the flesh—it’s what unbelievers are like. Verse 19, “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident.” He talks about ‘sexual sin,’ other sins, but notice ‘the relational sins,’—enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions.” He mentioned some other sins, and then look at verse 21, “And things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things.” Now, believers commit these sins; he’s talking not about those who occasionally commit these sins, but whose lives are marked by, characterized by these sins, who live like this, this is who they are—“Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” No, these things are the character and patterns of unbelievers.

You see, gentleness always marks the person who truly belongs to Jesus’ spiritual kingdom. You say, “Wow, Tom! That’s pretty important, this quality. How can I know if I exhibit this quality?” I don’t think I can improve on Martin Lloyd-Jones’ explanation. He says this, “The man who is truly meek is the man who is amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do.” That’s exactly right. The person who’s humble in heart, submissive to God, who’s gentle with others, that person is amazed that God and others treat him as well as they do because he knows what he deserves. And he responds to God and to others in light of that amazement. Amazing Beatitude! What do we do with this?

Well, there are three ways directly to apply this beatitude to our lives. First of all, it’s a test. “This Beatitude is a test of whether you’re in Jesus’ spiritual kingdom.” You see, if you have come to realize that you are a beggar in spirit and you mourn over your sin, then guess what happens? If those are true, then as a pattern of life, you’re not going to become consistently angry or bitter at

God for your circumstances. You'll trust His wisdom; you'll trust His goodness. Why? Because you know that you deserve nothing but hell. Whatever circumstances you're in, it's better than you deserve. And so, you're not going to get angry with Him; you're not going to argue with Him; you recognize you have no rights. And if you're a beggar in spirit and you mourn over your sin, then something else is going to be true. As a pattern of life, you're not going to become angry or bitter at the people who wrong you. Why? Because you know that apart from God's grace, you would be just like them, and **you** were just like them. If you display humility of heart, submission to God and to the authorities in your life, and gentleness toward all, beloved, you can know that God has changed your heart. Why? Because this isn't natural. This isn't how unbelievers are. It's not how you were by nature. And the only way you've come to manifest this quality in any way is because God has changed your heart. His spirit has produced this fruit in your life. You've been transformed by His grace. Be encouraged!

But if those who know you best would never say that your life is marked by humble, submissive gentleness, then what Jesus would say to you today, what He said on that day when this was preached is, "You do not belong to His spiritual kingdom." I don't care what experience you had when you were younger; don't care what prayer you might've prayed; what, you know, how many aisles you've walked in a church that has invitations. It doesn't matter whether you've thrown a stick in the fire at Christian camp—none of that matters. Jesus says, "If you aren't marked by gentleness, then you are not Mine." Instead, you are under God's curse, and you need to respond to the Gospel that promises a changed heart; a change so radical that Jesus says, "It's like being born all over again." That's what you need. It's what all of us needed and many of us in this room have experienced and it's all grace. What you need to do is you need to cry out like

the man in Jesus' story, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner. Change me, forgive me, make me a new person. Give me a new heart." That's what you need to do today.

There's a second implication from this Beatitude and that is, "It is a call to cultivate and grow in this virtue." While the Spirit produces this in us, we can actually cultivate its growth and development. How? Well, let me give you a few practical ideas. I don't have time to develop them. I'll list them and you can think about them later. First of all, "Ask the Spirit to increase this quality in your life." If you're a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. He produces this fruit. Plead with Him to produce more gentleness in your life. "Live daily in the awareness of your spiritual poverty." You see, the more you understand your own bankruptcy, the more submissive you're going to be to God, the more humble you're going to be in your heart and the more gentle you're going to be with others. Thirdly, "Regularly mourn over your sin." Why? Because when you understand your sin and you cry out for confession and you mourn over it, it gives you a lot more patience and gentleness with others who sin against you. Number four, "Contemplate the perfect way Jesus displayed this virtue." What I mean is read the Gospels, look at the life of Jesus, think about Him, think about how He responded to those who wronged Him and sinned against Him and harmed Him. And number five, "Develop a deep trust in God's sovereign power." This really is Psalm 37. You read Psalm 37, and what he tells us there is "Trust, trust, trust!" If you want to cultivate humble, submissive gentleness in your own heart, you need to develop a growing sense of and trust in God's sovereign power and His sovereign plan.

A third implication of our text is that it's a reminder, "It's a reminder of why all of us so desperately need the Gospel." Because you see, without Jesus Christ and His Gospel, we could never get into His kingdom. Why? Because we miserably fail in and of ourselves to display any of these qualities, including this one. And even with Christ, we display it so imperfectly. But

Christian, here's the beauty of the Gospel. The moment you repented of your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ; God credited the righteousness of Jesus Christ into your account, and today, He treats you as if you had lived Jesus' perfect life. Let me make it very personal; God sees you, Christian, today as if you had perfectly displayed the humble, submissive gentleness of Jesus every moment of your life. That's how God sees you and it's all grace; "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the (new) earth."

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for our Lord, for His powerful teaching that changes our thinking about so many things. Thank You for the reminder today of what true citizens of His kingdom are like; not because we've worked this up, but because the Holy Spirit You've given to us produces this quality in us. Father, for those of us who pass the test, and while we don't see this in us perfectly, we see it in us, Lord, help us to cultivate and grow this virtue in our lives. Forgive us for being swept along by the sinful culture, by the unbelievers around us, and acting like they act rather than the way our Lord acts.

And Father, for those who are here this morning who fail the test, Lord, help them to see themselves clearly and truly; help them to see that their anger and harshness, their pride, is all an expression of a fallen, unredeemed heart. And may You bring them to that poverty of spirit that mourns their sin and cries out with the tax collector, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner," because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Bring them to know You today, change their hearts as You have changed so many of us here. Lord, it's all grace, and we acknowledge that. We thank You that because of grace, for those of us in Christ, You see us today as if we had reflected the gentleness of Christ every moment of our lives. Thank You that by grace, we will "inherit the new earth." We thank You and praise You in the name of our Lord Jesus, the only Savior, the only truly gentle One. Amen.