

The Sooners vs. the Soft

The Beatitudes part 6
Matthew 5:5 12-6-09

This passage describes one of the virtues of Jesus that he explicitly drew attention to because of how important it is, and yet it's one of the least desired virtues even among Christians. This message reveals the meaning of meekness, and how to become more meek.

Excerpt:

Meekness comes from entrusting your cares to God. You say, "I have tried casting my cares on God, but afterward I am still just as anxious as ever. Why isn't it working? Usually when it is not working it is because we do not trust Him to handle them in the best way. Have you ever had someone supposedly turn something over to you but then constantly keeps supervising the way you are doing it? A woman says to her husband – "I have had it with this situation. I'm turning it over to you – you handle it." He says, "OK," and then the next day she is asking him, "Did you talk to him? Did you make the phone call? Did you do this? Did you do that? When are you going to send the letter? Have you called him? Did you set up a meeting? ..." Obviously she has not really turned it over to him. She has not entrusted it to him – she just assigned it to him. She wants him to carry out her wishes for her. Casting your cares on God means trusting him to handle them his way and being confident that his way is better than your way.

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Matthew 5:1-12 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you

Introduction

Jesus preached this sermon to His disciples in the hearing of a large crowd. I wonder how many people in that crowd already started walking away or at least losing interest by the time Jesus hit this

third beatitude. Those people had been praying all their lives for God to send a military Messiah – not a meek Messiah. In their minds lowliness and neediness and poverty and mourning and grieving were the problem, not the solution. “Blessed are the bottom feeders” is not a popular message – then or now. In fact, I don’t know how many preachers I have heard define meekness as power under control. They say, “This word was used to describe a wild animal that has been tamed. Therefore it means power under control. It is not weakness – it is power!”

The word does not mean power under control. I will explain in a minute what it does mean, but for now I just think it is interesting that there is a desire to somehow make Jesus say, “Blessed are the powerful.” That is the message we want to hear. It is not the message Jesus preached.

Importance

What He said was...

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

How many righteous character qualities did Jesus have when He lived on earth? All of them! All of the fruit of the Spirit, and every other virtue a man could possibly have. But even though Jesus had all those characteristics, it was not often that He mentioned them directly. You do not see a lot of statements where Jesus said, “I am wise” or “I am faithful,” or “I have self-control.” But there is one virtue that He did point out.

Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble in heart

Of all the hundreds of virtues Jesus could have pointed out in His character the one He really wanted to state directly was His meekness.

Meekness is an especially delightful virtue in the eyes of God. 1 Peter 3:4 says it is **of great worth in God’s sight**. God loves all the virtues, but He does not say that about all of them. This one He especially loves.

It is the virtue that makes women beautiful. You know how some women are kind of attractive when you first see them – from a distance – but then the more you get to know them the less attractive they are. And there are other women who are just the opposite. The closer you get to them and the more you know them the prettier they get. There is just something about them that makes them so attractive and beautiful and desirable. 1 Peter 3 tells us what it is – it is meekness. It is a virtue that is delightful to God and attractive to men. And it is the one virtue Jesus went out of His way to point out that He had.

So what is meekness? It is crucial that we know exactly what meekness is, because we are commanded to be meek so many times. Meekness is part of the fruit of the Spirit (#8 in the list).¹ In Ephesians 4:2 we are commanded to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord in all humility and meekness. In Colossians 3:12 we are commanded to clothe ourselves with all humility and meekness. In 1 Timothy 6:11 we are to pursue meekness. In James 3:13 we are to show our good deeds in the meekness of wisdom. So obviously it is important for us to understand what meekness is.

Gentleness

The Greek word is translated two different ways – sometimes they use the word “meek” and sometimes they use the word “gentle.” They both mean the same thing.

Blessed are the gentle, for they will inherit the earth.

¹ Gal.5:23.

That helps a little bit, but it still leaves a lot of questions. For example, what sort of gentleness is Jesus talking about? And why is it so important?

And what about the promise? Inherit the earth? What does that mean – you get a title deed or something? Inheriting a planet seems so far from anything we can relate to in practical terms – how is that supposed to actually motivate us to prize gentleness? If you pursue gentleness in this life it will cost you a lot of earthly comforts. And the motivation we have to pay that price is this promise of inheriting the earth. So we need to understand what, exactly, that means and what is so great about it.

Blessed are the Gentle

Let's begin with gentleness. What does a gentle person look like?

Not just a quiet temperament

The first thing we need to understand is that it is not a natural temperament. Some folks are assertive and aggressive, others are laid back and gentle by nature - that is not the kind of gentleness Jesus is talking about. The virtues in the Sermon on the Mount are things that attract people's attention to the glory of God.

Matthew 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

The natural quietness of an introverted personality type does nothing special to cause people to glorify God. Jesus is talking about a very different kind of gentleness – a kind that displays God's glory.

A quiet temperament is not necessarily a virtue

A naturally quiet temperament is not even necessarily a virtue. Some people are reserved and soft-spoken, and they are that way for all kinds of different reasons. In some cases it is because they lack confidence. They do not want anyone to think ill of them in any way or to look down on them, so they just avoid attention altogether. They do not want to risk being laughed at so they try to just go unnoticed. That is not true gentleness; it is just pride.

Other people are quiet and soft because they are just afraid of conflict. They might be raging on the inside, but they hide it because they will do anything to avoid an uncomfortable social situation.

For others it may be because of an inability to express themselves. They just do not know how to put what they feel into words, so they don't say anything.

For others it may be that they have been slammed down so many times in the past that they have just been trained to keep quiet. They are like a whipped puppy. None of those are the virtue of gentleness.

Safe

If you look up all the places in the New Testament where gentleness is described, the most common thread is that the gentle person is non-threatening. The meek are safe – they are not a threat.

It is true – this Greek word was used to describe tamed animals – but not to describe their power. It was used to describe their gentleness. They were not a threat.

Matthew 21:5 See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

When a king rode a donkey it meant he was coming in peace. When they came to threaten war they rode a warhorse – a big white steed. But the donkey communicated peace. So Jesus showed His gentleness – the fact that He was not a threat – by arriving on a donkey.

1 Corinthians 4:21 What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Do you want me to come in a threatening posture or a non-threatening posture?

Gentle people are safe. They make you feel safe and set you at ease. Some people are intimidating to be around. Other people just make you feel relaxed and comfortable. The very first time you meet them you feel like you could tell them anything. You don't have to put on any airs – you can just be yourself. Somehow it does not matter if you remembered to fix your hair – or what you look like, the person just exudes a sense that “I accept the real you.” You do not need to hide behind any façade. It does not matter if you say something dumb or expose some area of ignorance or if you are a klutz – it is like they do not even see any of that stuff.

Being gentle is the opposite of being intimidating. And that is hard, because all the heroes in our culture are intimidating. And so we all grow up trying to be the opposite of gentle. When you are a teenager you want two things: You want to be taken seriously by people, and you want to protect yourself from anyone making fun of you or laughing at you. So you spend all your teen years trying to become cool. You are not trying to set people at ease – you are trying to do just the opposite. You want to be cooler than everyone else. And when you are around someone cooler than you, how does that make you feel? Intimidated. You never feel comfortable or safe or at ease when you are around someone cooler than you – you just feel dorky. So all our middle and high school years, when our adult personality is formulating, we spend trying to become cool so that compared to us everyone else is dorky or intimidated. This is especially a problem for guys. It happens with girls too, but especially guys, because guys want to be tough – like some Clint Eastwood character who is so intimidating that all he has to do is walk into a room and everyone starts shaking in fear.

The world says, “Blessed are the cool,” but Jesus says, “Blessed are the calming.” Blessed are those who are no threat to anyone and who set everyone at ease. And they have that effect on people because of their humility. Gentleness always goes with humility.

Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle

If you have a quiet temperament or disposition, but it is caused by pride rather than humility, that is not gentleness. People like that do not set anyone at ease. Those people might appear to be gentle at first, but you can tell it is not real gentleness, because the people who are quiet just because of insecurity are not easy to be around – they are hard to be around. You never know what they are thinking, and you have to walk on eggshells because they tend to be fragile. They are so full of pride that they are easily wounded and thin-skinned and easily offended. But truly gentle people are humble, and so they set everyone at ease.

So what about you – are you safe – or are you kind of scary? Do people feel like they have to be careful around you? After being around you in a tense situation are they likely to come away bruised, or soothed? Are they likely to be impressed with you, or comforted by you?

The gentle person creates a sphere of safety around people. When you are gentle, people are relaxed around you because they know you will not humiliate them. They know you will never belittle them. They know you would never focus attention on their weaknesses. They know as long as you are around, no one will be able to get away with gossiping about them, because you will speak up. They know they do not have to worry about you discovering something ugly about them, because you cover over their ugliness so no one else finds out.

Is that you? Are you a threat or are you safe? When things go wrong at your house - is it safe for your kids, wife, husband to be around you? When someone in your family does something dumb or awkward around you can they expect to be protected or humiliated? Is it a bad idea for someone to let you see their faults, or is their secret safe with you?

What do you communicate to people with your face? Does it take an act of Congress to get you to smile? It is amazing how encouraged and comforted people are by a smile. I love it when people smile. And the bigger the smile the more I love it.

I have worked for years at trying to become more smiley. My face evidently just has a natural scowl – especially when I am concentrating. I can be in a great mood and have four different people come up and ask me, “What’s the matter with you? Did you wake up on the wrong side of the bed or what?” I used to have people think I was upset with them when I thought I smiled at them. So finally I decided to test it out, so when I was driving around in my car I would pretend I saw a friend, smile like I normally would, then freeze my face in that position and look in the rear view mirror. And what felt like a smile was not even a grin – it was a flat-out frown. And so I had to practice. I would keep smiling bigger and bigger until it actually looked like a smile in the mirror. And even then it was a pretty small smile – but to me it felt like a massive contortion of my face. So this does not come as easily to some as it does to others. If smiling comes easily to you then that is a great gift from God – take advantage of it and make good use of it for the kingdom of God. And if it does not come as easily to you – make use of your rear view mirror. Otherwise you will always have to dig your way out of a hole to reverse people’s perception of you before you can ever manage to set them at ease.

Soft

So to be gentle means to be safe. Secondly to be gentle means to be softness. In Titus 3:2 gentleness goes along with courtesy and is the opposite of quarreling. In 2 Timothy 2:25 gentleness brings sinners to repentance. And in Galatians 6:1 it restores them. In Ephesians 4:2 gentleness goes with humility, patience, and bearing with one another. A gentle person is not harsh or abrasive, but soft and soothing.

Still

The third characteristic of gentleness is stillness. Gentle people are still. They are not riled up with a lot of anger and turmoil on the inside. They have peaceful, calm, poised, quiet hearts.

1Thessalonians 4:11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life

Psalm 37

Remember – the key to interpreting these phrases in Jesus’ teaching where He alludes to Old Testament passages is to examine the passages that He alludes to. We had to go to Isaiah 61 to interpret verses 3-4, because Jesus used the language from that passage in formulating the first two beatitudes. The third beatitude is a quotation from Psalm 37:11. Jesus uses the exact same words as the Greek translation of Psalm 37:11.

Psalm 36:11 *hoi praeis claronomasousin gan*

Matthew 5:5 *hoi praeis...claronomasousin tan gan*

The meek will inherit the earth (land)

In your Bible Psalm 37:11 probably says **The meek will inherit the land** and in Matthew 5:5 **The meek will inherit the earth**, but the word for land and earth are the same word. The only way to know if the writer is referring to the whole world or just the land of Israel is from the context. So you can see it is pretty much a direct quotation.

And you do not have to study Psalm 37 very long before it becomes clear that the entire psalm is a commentary on the third beatitude. The whole psalm is all about two things – being meek (gentle) and inheriting the land. Five times the psalmist refers to inheriting the land. And an additional three times he speaks of dwelling in the land. And most of the rest of the psalm describes the type of person who

inherits the land, so the psalm becomes a portrait of meekness (gentleness). So let's gaze at this portrait of meekness for a while.

No Anger

The first and most basic characteristic of the gentle person who will inherit the land in Psalm 37 is that he does not burn with anger on the inside because of evil men.

Psalm 37:1 Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong

The word translated **fret** means to burn with anger.

7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. 8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret--it leads only to evil.

The gentle person is still – he does not have the turmoil of anger rising up in his heart when evildoers pull their shenanigans. “Wait a minute – what about righteous anger? Isn't there a place for righteous anger?” Yes – but we need to be very careful about excusing our sinful anger by calling it righteous anger. So many people say, “I'm angry because someone sinned, therefore it is righteous anger.” If you think that is the definition of righteous anger you have got a real problem with Psalm 37, because the very first line says **Do not burn with anger because of evil men**. And think long and hard before you try to justify your anger by calling it something else – “Oh, I'm not angry. I'm just hurt” – because the Lord knows what anger is and He does not fall for lame excuses.

When to be harsh

Are there some times when gentleness is not appropriate? Yes. Jesus cleared the Temple with a whip – nothing gentle about that. When is that sort of thing OK?

Is it when someone sins? Is it OK for us to be harsh with people when they sin against God?

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

That word **gently** is the same word – **meekly**. When someone sins God calls us to restore the person with a soft, mild, gentle, non-threatening approach. Proud people are harsh with sinners because they have such a high view of themselves that they think they are above certain sins. They think they could never possibly fall into any of the really bad sins. And so when you do they look down on you with disdain, and they are anything but gentle in the restoration process. But God says **you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted**. That is an amazing statement because he is talking to the spiritual. If you are spiritual then you are vulnerable to fall into the sin. Nobody is above any sin.

So is it OK to be harsh with someone who has fallen into sin? No. When the woman at the well had gone through husband after husband and now she was living in fornication with a guy – repeated, ongoing, scandalous, sexual immorality – did Jesus take a whip to her back? No, He was gentle. He was gentle with Matthew the tax collector, Zacchaeus the crook, the sinful woman in Luke 7, the thief on the cross, the disciple who publicly denied even knowing Him. Jesus was gentle with sinners. He was known as a friend of tax collectors and sinners. He was never soft on sin – He talked a lot about hell and demanded that people repent. He never compromised, and yet He went about all that in a gentle enough way that those who were willing to repent loved to be around Him.

How about when we face opposition in ministry? That is pretty serious – then is it OK to be harsh?

2 Timothy 2:25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,

There is our same word again – those who oppose the man of God he must meekly, gently instruct. How about non-Christians who have not accepted the gospel? Is it OK to answer them harshly?

1 Peter 3:15 Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness

“Is there ever a time for a sharp rebuke?” Yes. In certain rare circumstances, when someone is causing widespread apostasy – destroying people and leading many astray – that sometimes calls for a sharp rebuke. There was a group of people like that Paul had to warn Titus about in Titus 1.

Titus 1:11-12 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach--and that for the sake of dishonest gain. ... 13 Therefore, rebuke them sharply

In Matthew 23 Jesus rebuked the Pharisees sharply because they were slamming the door of heaven in men’s faces. So yes, there is a time when gentleness needs to be laid aside.

But those times are very rare. The exceptions are just that – exceptions. And if anger is the rule in your life and not a rare exception, then you are not a gentle person. If you find yourself getting angry every single week – that is not a sign of a gentle heart – especially if your anger is mainly over how you are being treated. Someone is inconsiderate and causes an inconvenience for you, and you are mad. Someone treats you in an unfair way, you get mad. Someone cuts in front of you, you are mad. Someone fails to show you proper love, you are mad.

And you know it is really getting out of control when you start getting mad at inanimate objects. You drop a bolt while you are working and you get mad at the bolt. You hit your head on a cabinet and you are angry at the cabinet. You lose your car keys and you are mad at your keys. You are mad at the computer, mad at your car, mad at your bed – anything that does not fall into line with the ideal circumstances you expect.

The hardships in our lives are like fireballs landing on the ground. And some hearts are like ground covered with dry kindling. Every fireball causes a big fire of anger. Some hearts are even worse - like ground covered with fireworks and explosives. But the gentle heart is like dark, moist, rich, soft soil. The fireballs hit it and just – go out.

In Numbers 12 Miriam and Aaron spoke out against Moses – as if Moses did not have enough problems his own family starts speaking against him. They do that in verses 1-2, and so verse 3 is where you would expect Moses to say, “Watch your mouth!” and defend himself. But instead of that, verse 3 just says this:

Numbers 12:3 (Now Moses was a very meek man, more meek than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

And then in verse 4 God speaks up on Moses’ behalf and punishes Miriam and Aaron. He was meek – he did not get angry; he just let God take care of it.

Generous

So gentle people are still in the sense that they do not get riled up or angry or bent out of shape. And they are also still in another way. They do not fight to get ahead. While everyone around them is scrambling to grab everything they can grab for themselves, and they are scratching and clawing to get ahead of everyone, and racing to be first in line all the time; gentle people are quiet and calm and still. In

fact, while everyone else is in a mad scramble to grab everything they can get, the gentle people are busy giving.

Psalm 37:21 The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously

26 They are always generous and lend freely

That is another thing that makes them so non-threatening. They are not looking for ways to take from you; they are looking for things they can give to you. While everyone else fights to get ahead the gentle heart remains still and quiet, and instead of grabbing they are giving.

Supple

Another aspect of being meek is being supple. The meek can adapt to whatever is going on and absorb the energy of the trials of life that come flying at them. Proud people are so rigid and unbending that they injure everyone around them. You walk past them and just barely catch the corner edge of one of their opinions and you get a deep gash because there is just no give.

They are slow to listen, quick to speak, and quick to become angry. But God calls for just the opposite.

James 1:19-20 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

You read that and think, OK, be slow to anger. Fine – but how do I do it?

21 ... gently accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

You overcome anger by cultivating a gentle heart that gently accepts the truths of God's Word. You do not fight against them, resist them, or twist them to justify what you are doing – you just gently, humbly accept them.

The gentle heart is teachable and eager to learn. The gentle heart would much rather be corrected than continue believing something that is not true. The proud, hard heart will only listen to certain experts. He is afraid to just humbly learn from ordinary people because it makes him look like an underling or subordinate instead of an expert and authority. But the gentle, humble heart can learn from anyone – which is why gentle people tend to be much wiser than proud intellectuals.

Faith

Hopefully now you can start to see why this virtue is so precious and beautiful to God. It really is a wonderful trait. But we still have not answered the most important question about it. What does it have to do with God? How does it attract attention to the glory of God?

There is a very particular reason why meek are meek. They are meek and gentle because of what happens in their heart instead of anger.

Psalm 37:7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not burn with anger when men succeed in their ways

If you are the quiet type because you keep things on the inside, that is not gentleness. Even if you have no anger over evil men – that by itself is not gentleness. Some people have no anger over evil men because they love evil, so it does not bother them. That is not gentleness. Gentleness is when you hate evil, but your heart remains calm because you know how to be still before the Lord and wait patiently for

Him. There is no turmoil and boiling in your heart because of your relationship to God – the kinds of interactions you have with God.

What kind of interactions are those? What sort of relationship with God keeps the heart calm?

3 Trust in the Lord and do good

5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him

It is a relationship in which He makes promises and you trust in those promises and rest in Him.

Roll your way

That phrase **commit your way** is literally **roll your way upon the Lord**. Take all your cares and just roll them over onto Him. Someone once asked George Muller how he managed to keep his composure in the midst of so many stresses and troubles. He was having an especially difficult day and the person was amazed at how calm he was and they said, “How can you be so calm?” And Muller said, “I rolled sixty cares upon God before breakfast this morning.” That is the way Muller would pray in the morning – he would go through some passage of Scripture, and as a care or concern or worry or fear or anxiety or problem would come to mind he would just roll it off his back onto God’s back. He would entrust those things to God.

“I have tried casting my cares on God, but afterward I am still just as anxious as ever. Why isn’t it working? Usually when it is not working it is because we do not trust Him to handle them in the best way. Have you ever had someone supposedly turn something over to you but then constantly keeps supervising the way you are doing it? A woman says to her husband – “I have had it with this situation. I’m turning it over to you – you handle it.” He says, “OK,” and then the next day she is asking him, “Did you talk to him? Did you make the phone call? Did you do this? Did you do that? When are you going to send the letter? Have you called him? Did you set up a meeting? ...” Obviously she has not really turned it over to him. She has not entrusted it to him – she just assigned it to him. She wants him to carry out her wishes for her. You can tell when you truly turn something over to someone and roll it off your back onto their back because when you have done that you are not supervising them. You trust them to handle it. If I tell Josiah to go put oil in the car I might watch over his shoulder to make sure he does it right. But when I take my car to a mechanic I am not in the garage telling them what to do, because I genuinely believe they know better than me how to do it. And so I am relaxed at home while they are fixing the car.

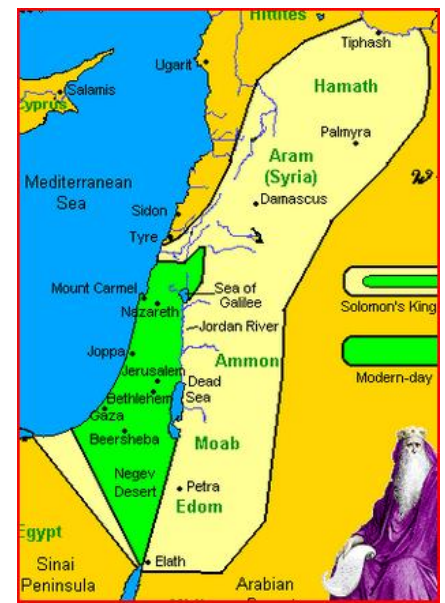
That is the posture of the heart that has genuinely entrusted something to God. You are not supervising Him, you are not anxious and worried that He might not handle it the way you think it should be done. You are able to just relax and be at peace because you are fully confident that He will handle it in the best way because you truly believe that His idea of the best way is better than your idea of the best way.

You see how that kind of gentleness brings glory to God? It glorifies Him because it shows Him to be utterly trustworthy. It is the gentleness not of natural disposition or personality type; it is the gentleness of faith and complete confidence in what God has promised. And what has He promised?

They will Inherit the Land

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

That is the promise that will enable you to be this kind of person. “What does it mean to inherit the earth?” Let’s go back to the passage Jesus quoted and see. Five times in Psalm 37 he mentions inheriting the



land, and three more times dwelling in the land. So that is a big theme. The word translated **inherit** just means to *possess*. So the promise is they will possess the land.

What is interesting to me is that all the references to possessing the land are future. The reason that is striking is because look at the superscript at the beginning of the psalm – it says it is a psalm of David, and verse 25 says he was an old man. This was the time when Israel has had the firmest control of the land they have ever had – before or since. David controlled an area well over four times as large as modern day Israel.

2 Samuel 7:1 King [David] was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him

So if David was settled in the land and had rest from enemies – why are all these promises about possessing the land future? Evidently this psalm is talking about a kind of possession of the land that went well beyond what was a reality in David’s time.

The land is really a massive theme in the Old Testament. In fact some scholars have said it is a more central theme even than the covenant.² From the time God promised the land to Abraham, that phrase “the land” became the embodiment of all blessing from God for His people. Peace, protection, abundance, wealth, comfort, joy, prosperity, safety, longevity, security, fruitfulness, blessing, provision, vindication, a legacy, favor with God – pretty much everything God promised His people is connected in one way or another with the promise of the land.

And David understood that. If someone looked over David’s shoulder while he was writing Psalm 37 and said, “What do you mean we will someday possess the land? We control the land right now!” – David would have no doubt said, “I am not just talking about the soil and the borders. I am talking about all the blessings God has promised for His people.” Dwelling in the land represented essentially what we think of when we talk about heaven – the full possession and enjoyment of all that God has promised.

You see, the big question Psalm 37 is answering is this: “Why are the wicked prospering? If God is really there and He is so powerful and He is so loving what is the explanation for the successes of the wicked?” And the answer is – “What you now see is temporary. It is an anomaly that will soon be corrected. And when it is the proud and arrogant will be punished, and the meek and gentle will get all the promises.”

When that time arrives the wicked will be ripped away. That is why all through this psalm the opposite of inheriting the land is being cut off.

9 For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.

10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. 11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.

22 those the LORD blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off.

27 Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever. 28 For the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. They will be protected forever, but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off; 29 the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.

34 Wait for the LORD and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it.

The current success of the wicked is a flash in the pan.

² Anchor Bible Dictionary, “Land”

So what is Jesus saying in the third beatitude? Those who are safe, soft, still, and supple have it made because they and they alone will receive all the blessings God ever promised to His people. They will live in a place of security and blessing and abundance and richness and joy and favor with God.

Conclusion

That is our motivation. We can afford to be safe and non-threatening because God has promised to deal with our enemies. We do not have to protect ourselves because we fully trust God to protect us. We can afford to be soft because we trust God to bring whatever harshness is appropriate on the people who hurt us. We can be still when all kinds of terrible things happen because we trust God to make things right. We understand that this situation is temporary and will be corrected by God in His time, and so we can be calm and poised as we wait for Him. If someone we do not like is elected, we do not have to fret and worry and wring our hands. The wicked will dry up and blow away like dust and we will inherit the promises of God and enjoy them forever. When someone accuses us we do not have to get all worked up and defensive because we trust God to make things right. If you are being sued or charged with something in a court of law, you might get real anxious and scramble to hire a good lawyer and everything else. But if the judge tells you ahead of time that he is for sure going to rule in your favor – you don't sweat it. And while the world scrambles to get ahead and grab everything they can grab, we can relax because we know we will get it all anyway.

Years ago I pastored a church in Oklahoma, and several of the people in my church were living in houses that their grandparents got in the land run. I was fascinated by that, and so I did a little research about the land run. And I read about how on the day of the run everyone lined up on the starting line, and when they said "go" they all took off. And the ones with fast horses got the best plots, those with wagons got so-so plots, and those on foot did not get much at all. But leading up to that day they had army troops guarding the whole region to prevent people from coming and staking out plots ahead of time. But some people managed to anyway. Have you ever wondered why the University of Oklahoma sports teams are called the Sooners? You know what a Sooner is? That was the name they gave to the dishonest people who snuck in early and staked out a claim "sooner" than they were supposed to. So the University of Oklahoma sports teams are named after a bunch of cheaters.

I mention that because this life is like one giant land run. And in this run the sooners get the best plots. Then the really fast and strong and wealthy get the next best. And then there's us. And there we are at the starting line, and when the gun goes off and everyone goes rushing off in a mad hurry we are stretched out on lawn chairs sipping iced tea. Why? Because the one in charge of this whole land run said, "Blessed are the gentle because I'm going to just give all the land to them." We do not have to participate in the mad grab because all that land they grab is someday going to be taken from them and given to us. A meek person is someone who is gentle now because when mistreatment happens he thinks two things: 1) *I trust God to someday make this right*, and 2) *In the meantime I have all I need – the nearness of God.*

Spurgeon: It is wonderful what rough natures will yield before gentle natures. After all, it is not the strong who conquer, but the weak. There has been a long enmity, as you know, between the wolves and the sheep; and the sheep have never taken to fighting, yet they have won the victory, and there are more sheep than wolves in the world today. In our own country, the wolves are all dead, but the sheep have multiplied by tens of thousands. The anvil stands still while the hammer beats upon it, but one anvil wears out many hammers. And gentleness and patience will ultimately win the day. At this present moment, who is the mightier? Caesar with his legions or Christ with his cross? We know who will be the victor.

Benediction: Psalm 37:3 Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. 4 Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Roll your way onto the Lord; trust in him and he will act.