

A VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

# *The Beatitudes*

*by Rev. A. T. Vergunst*



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Lecture #5

*Blessed Are the Meek*

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**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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# *The Beatitudes*

10 Lectures

*by Rev. A. T. Vergunst*

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# *The Beatitudes*

*by Rev. A. T. Vergunst*

*Lecture #5*

## **Blessed Are the Meek**

Dear friends, welcome again to the fifth session of our study of Jesus' teachings in Matthew 5:3–12. The passage known as the Beatitudes is one of the most amazing and, I believe also, needed portions of Scripture for us to study. There's a proverb that perhaps you know, that says, "all that shines is not gold." Now that truth also applies to Christianity. Not all who say they are Christians are, sadly, real Christians. The other side of the truth is also true—that not all real gold shines brightly, while it is still real gold. That also applies to believers. Some believers may not appear as golden to us, while, in God's eyes, they are His precious gems. So the third Beatitude will bring us face to face with one of the gemlike aspects of the born-again soul. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." So to warm up our thinking, let me start with a statement and a question.

First, the statement—a meek man is your best neighbor, though he may challenge you the most. Now the question is, how can this statement be true? The best neighbor who may yet challenge me the most is true for two reasons. First, when this neighbor's own name or his own reputation or even his own rights are at stake, he is as meek as a lamb, and he will not insist on his own honor or on his own rights, if that would promote harmony and peace within your relationship. This meek neighbor will take the least place to become the most genuine peacemaker. However, watch out. His meekness is by no means weakness. He's no pushover. When God's name or God's reputation or God's rights are at stake, he is as bold as a lion and as immovable as an ox. He will challenge you as he stands strong on the convictions of the standards of God. So he is the best neighbor, yet he may challenge you the most. That introduces us to one of the most beautiful character traits of the citizen of the kingdom of Heaven. Jeffrey Wilson wrote about meekness, "Meekness is the mark of a man who has been mastered by God." Now where you see this meekness, you know that the person who possesses this quality dwells near to God, for this meekness that Jesus described is always a fruit of someone who is living in closeness and in the awareness of the great majesty of Heaven. God is great, and that greatness reflects itself in meekness in the person who lives near to Him.

So let's consider this third Beatitude as we did the first two, by merely asking two questions. First, what is this meekness that Jesus speaks of, and [second], why are such meek ones blessed? First, what is this meekness—"blessed are the meek"? As we work our way through these Beatitudes, you can see how interconnected these Beatitudes are, and you'll see that really beautifully in these first three. As I discover my personal poverty, the poor in spirit, my personal poverty in relationship to God and in the presence of God, as I discover that I am spiritually destitute, unable to change my condition, and that I cannot be before God what I ought to be—as a fruit of that—I experience the second, mourning. I feel sad, grieving about this sad condition which dishonors

and grieves the God I love. Then upon further reflection, as the Holy Spirit's ministry is teaching me, I realize more and more that this condition of poverty is brought upon myself. It is a fruit of an action I took as we rebelled against God. We became poor and destitute and bankrupt when we caved into Satan's temptation, and we sold ourselves into his service, to do iniquity. So as fruit of that, we are now what we are—proud, boastful, arrogant, narcissistic, selfish, and even demanding. I demand my rights. No, especially this *demanding* mindset is the total opposite of meekness. The meekness that Jesus is teaching about is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It's a supernatural characteristic and is very often misunderstood when we look at it from a human perspective. Biblical meekness is a strength. It is a great strength rather than a weakness, a feebleness of mind or spirit. The meek person is not someone who gives in easily, the meek person is not a pushover. Do not think of the meek person as a person who has no spine, who lives just to please everyone else, who just sacrifices and sacrifices rather than competing, a person who lets things happen, who everyone walks over. Such a characteristic indeed is weakness or dullness, and that's not at all the meekness Jesus speaks about. The meek person that Jesus here describes is someone who has learned to accept the natural consequences of his own doings with grace, with humility instead of fighting and self-justification. The meek person is a person who bows, a person who surrenders, who accepts the consequences of what he sowed in his life, no matter how bitter or painful it is. As we learn to see our spiritual condition as a fruit of our spiritual rebellion, so we learn by the Spirit's work to surrender ourselves before God, as a person who has no more rights—except the right to be punished for our wrongdoing, our sins.

Now to illustrate meekness, let's look at three examples in the Scripture to show you the beauty of this characteristic. The first one you find in Genesis 13:5–12, where we read about Abraham—Father Abraham. A quarrel arose between the shepherds in Abraham's tribe about grazing rights, between Abraham and Lot his nephew. Now Abraham had the right for the best grazing lands, for, first of all, he was the oldest of the two; secondly, he has been benefiting Lot by his gracious care for all the years already; and thirdly, God had given Abraham all the land by promise. When it came to this quarrel, Abraham gave up his rights. He allowed a younger Lot to choose first. Now, see, that's meekness, standing away from your rights in order to promote peace and harmony. That's meekness. The second example is Moses. We read of Moses in Acts 7:22 that he was a man "mighty in words and in deeds." He was a strong, fierce character. Yet later on, in Numbers 12:3 we read that "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." So what happened to this fierce Moses? How did he become so meek? This meekness was fruit of Moses's long and repeated encounters with God. He lived in God's nearness, and that transformed this fierce man into one of the meekest men on earth. One of the greatest moments of meekness is when Moses is ready to give up all his privileges and rights, even in the face of the utter failure and wickedness and ingratitude of the Jewish people he was leading to the land of promise. He was willing to give up his privilege to promote peace and harmony. Now thirdly, take David, the strong warrior king who fought many battles with wild beasts and giants. Yet in a very sad part of David's life, Nathan the prophet needs to confront this king with some of the darkest deeds a man can ever do. He murdered a faithful husband to cover up the cheating on his wife. Nathan confronts him with that sin. David bows without an objection before God, and he said this, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight," and then he says, "that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest" (Psalm 51:4). Whatever Thou dost, I have no more rights before Thee and for any of Thy mercies. That's Biblical meekness. The meekness Jesus has in mind is therefore an attitude of heart—a *Be*-attitude—which flows from the awareness of the first Beatitude—my awareness of sin and guilt—as we face the truth of God's judgment upon what we have done wrong. So let it be clear to us all that this meekness is nothing of self-education, nothing of a natural characteristic. We are by nature not ready to give up our rights. Look at a little child as they grow up. They will fight, they'll bite to not

give up their rights. None grow meekness also by just knowing yourself. Knowing yourself may grow depression and sadness. Do not mistake—a depressed person and a sad person, about his own choices, can still be proud and assertive about his own rights. A person who begins more and more to comprehend that his or her choices have offended, have dishonored or misrepresented his good and gracious God, now such a person will experience a growing meekness of heart. They'll step off their own pedestal, and they will bow before God, and to such, God can do no wrong anymore, even if He would pass them by with His grace and leave them in the mess that they themselves have created, even if He would cast them off forever. "Blessed are the meek."

Now this meekness as a fruit of the Spirit becomes a characteristic of the born-again soul. Therefore, this meekness is not only visible in our attitude of heart before God in relationship to Him. No, the beauty of this characteristic is, and we'll see that later in the next Beatitudes, but this meekness also becomes known in our attitude of heart before other men around us. Meekness is not that I will allow others to walk over me. No, I already said that meekness is *not*, I will never assert myself. That's not meekness, that's weakness. Instead, meekness is that I don't assert myself for every right I have, or that I will bear patiently an insult or an injustice *if* that would promote peace and harmony, *if* that would bring people back in the right relationship with God or with myself or others. This meekness is the spirit that is willingly sacrificing the rights, our rights, if it serves God's cause and our neighbor's good. I'll give you one example out of the further teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:41. The Lord says there, "And whosoever shall compel you to go a mile, go with him twain." Now this, of course, has an historical context. Imagine the surprise, when a battle-hardened Roman soldier, who compels you to carry his pack for one mile, which by Roman law he was allowed to compel you to do—imagine that, after that one mile, he looks into your kind face, and he hears you say, "My friend, though it is hot and though I am tired, I'll carry your pack for one more mile even though I don't need to do this." Doing that will show that battle-hardened soldier a strength he may not possess himself. It is the strength of meekness in which I give my rights to serve a neighbor. I give up my rights to serve a neighbor *even* if he is my enemy. So considering this meekness, I can see why Martin Luther said this kind of meekness is one of the rarest herbs among men. So before we now consider the blessing Jesus adds in this Beatitude, let me give one more evidence that this meekness is not natural and not a personality thing that some of us are born with, but it is definitely a fruit of the Spirit's ministry—someone, something that looks like Jesus. It's noteworthy that in all of Jesus' own ministry that is recorded, He has only *once* said something about His own character. Of course, we can see His character in His actions, in His ministry, which reveals Him in all His glory and beauty, but only once He said something directly about His own character. You find it in Matthew again, in Matthew 11:28–29, in which He directs us to His own meekness. Before I read that passage of Scripture, let me just remind you to whom He is speaking. He is speaking to sinners who are rejecting Him, who are offending Him, who are grieving Him and His Father, who are hostile to Him, who are disdainful of His Father, sinners who have destroyed His creation, sinners—men, women, boys and girls—all wasting the glorious things that God gives us and [has] given us. Now, to them He speaks in this verse, and He says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . for I am meek and lowly in heart." Now don't you need that? He's not berating us, He's not berating us at all for the real reason why we are laboring, are heavy laden and are struggling in our life's journey. He's not rubbing it in by saying, "See, that's what you've got for doing what you have done!" No, no, instead of that, He warmly, He genuinely, He compassionately invites us to come to Him, and then He encourages us not to be afraid. He encourages us to overcome our timidity or shyness as we realize how unworthy we are, as you sometimes see in the eyes of a child, or you see in those who are guilty. Then He adds, "Come . . . for I am meek and lowly in heart." I've got no stones to cast, I am ready to receive you. I don't insist on My rights. I am willing to sacrifice Myself to make things well between you and God. Now isn't He an awesome and a glorious Lord? Isn't He worthy

to know and to follow? Jesus is the real Peacemaker. You notice then how here the third Beatitude, “Blessed are the meek,” is interconnected to the seventh Beatitude, the peacemaker—“they shall be called the children of God,” and we’ll see that in our next lectures.

So then why are such meek ones called blessed—our second question? Now, first of all, like all others, because this meekness is again an evidence of the Father’s work in us, making us fit for a new world, for the inheriting of the kingdom of God. Let’s not forget that not only do we need Christ’s work on the cross to save us from the guilt that we have, we also need the Holy Spirit’s work within us to save us from our sinfulness, for in that new society, there will not be fighting and destroying. There will be harmony and peace. We need to be prepared for that. Jesus’ work was to provide the price to open the door to God, and the Spirit’s work is to provide us the fitness for dwelling with God in eternal glory. So the second reason why “blessed are the meek”—“for they,” as our promise says, “shall inherit the earth.” Notice the word *inherit*. Inherit points to something you receive as a gift instead of wages you earned. Now this inheritance also is willed to you by the good will of the One who possessed what He gives us in the inheritance. So again, this receiving of the earth as an inheritance has nothing to do with us. It is not based on being meek or good or worthy. The Scriptures declare, from beginning to end, that God’s gifts always flow from His sovereign, good, and gracious pleasure, not what we earned. One of the great occupations of eternal life will be the increasing marvel of why God, in this great, loving mercy, caused the lot to fall on them this inheritance, for they all will understand that this gift was *despite* of what we did and how we were and what we gave to God.

I’ll secondly notice what they will inherit—the earth. That means the earth. Together, the redeemed humanity will again be given the earth as God’s gift. You go back into the beginning of the Bible—Adam and Eve were given the earth to enjoy, to manage, to culturally develop, to beautify every part of God’s creation, to be something similar to the garden that God planted Himself, called the Garden of Eden, Paradise. It was a delightful task that we were given as mankind, to develop, and to engineer, and to invent, and to manage the resources that God has given, and to joyfully share the riches and the resources with one another. We all know how the entrance of sin has turned this earth in a scene of destruction and competition, oppression, violence, injustice, unfairness, and destructive exploitation. The promise is that the meek will inherit the earth. That’s a brilliant and an exciting future. No, that will not be the earth in its current state. The Lord reveals in the Scripture that He will create a new Heaven and a new earth which will be filled with, and catch that word, *righteousness*, perfectness, holiness. This is the final act, and will be the final act of the Redeemer of Heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, once He returns upon this earth, and once He’s finished preparing the new earth, as He finished preparing the first earth as we read of in Genesis 1 and 2. After He’s finished with that, He will cause the meek to inherit this new earth. Consider the promise in 1 Peter 1:3–4, where Peter has also a beatitude, but this one about God, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you.” So therefore, ye meek ones, be encouraged. Even though you will endure various forms of injustice, even though you may need to sacrifice, and you *will* sacrifice your rights from time to time for peace’s sake, and though you will experience unfair setbacks and abuse, be reminded how Paul writes in Romans 8:18, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

So finally, are you having the same experience I have? The deeper I dig and have dug in these amazing statements of the Beatitudes, the more beauty and riches I find in this mine of Biblical truth. Friends, though we have no control over the Holy Spirit, like we have no control over the wind in the realm of nature, yet you have control over where you place yourself in the wind, you can go outside. So also, we can place ourselves in the wind of the Holy Spirit, where He blows,

where He is active. Therefore, I encourage you to place yourself daily before your open Bible, take and read and hear and let the Spirit blow, and pray for the meekness. That is God's promise in Psalm 25:9, "The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way." So thank you for listening again. After this session, we are ready to listen to the heartbeat of the Beatitudes—"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." Thank you.