The Third Beatitude

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by

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"Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth." — Matthew v.5

I have often reminded you that the beatitudes in this chapter rise one above the other, and spring out, of one another, and that which come before are always necessary to those that follow after. This third beatitude, "Blessed are the meek," could not have stood first,— it would have been quite out of place there. When a man is converted, the first operation of the grace of God within his soul is to give him true poverty of spirit, so the first beatitude is, Blessed are the poor in spirit." The Lord first makes know our emptiness, and so humble us; and then, next, he makes us mourn over the deficiencies that are so manifest in us. Then comes the second beatitude: "Blessed are they that mourn." First there is a true knowledge of ourselves; and then a sacred grief arising out of that knowledge. Now, man ever becomes truly meek, in the Christian sense of that word, until he first knows himself, and then begins to mourn and lament that he is so far short of what he ought to be. Self-righteousness is never meek; the man who is proud of himself will be quite sure to be hard-hearted in his dealings with others. To reach this rung of the ladder of light, he must first set his feet upon the other two. There must be poverty of spirit and mourning of heart before there will come that gracious meekness of which our text speaks.

Note too, that this third beatitude is of a higher order than the other two. There is something positive in it, as to virtue. The first two are rather expressive of deficiency, but here there is a something supplied. A man is poor in spirit; that is, he feels that he lacks a thousand things that he ought to possess. The man mourns, that is he laments over his state of spiritual poverty. But now there is something given to him by the grace of God;—not a negative quality, but a positive proof of the work of the Holy Spirit within his soul, so that he has become meek. The two character that receive a benediction appears to be wrapped up in themselves. The man is poor in spirit; that relates to himself. His mourning is his own personal mourning which ends when he is comforted; but the meekness has to do with other people. It is true that it has a relationship to God, but a man's meekness is specially towards his fellow-man. He is not simply meek within himself; his meekness is manifested in his dealings with others. You would not speak of a hermit, who never saw a fellow-creature, as being meek; the only way in which you
could prove whether he was meek would be to put him with those who would try his temper. So that this meekness is a virtue, larger, more expansive, working in a wider sphere than the first two characters which Christ has pronounced blessed. It is superior to the others, as it should be, since it grows out of them; yet at the same time, as there is, through the whole beatitudes, a full parallel with the rise, so is it here. In the first case, the man was poor, that was low; in the second case the man was mourning, that also was low; but if he kept his mourning to himself, he might still seem great among his fellow-men. But now he has come to be meek among them,—lowly and humble in the midst of society, so that he is going lower and lower; yet he is rising with spiritual exaltation, although he is sinking as to a personal humiliation, and so has become more truly gracious.

Now, having spoken of the connection of this beatitude, we will make two enquiries with the view of opening it up. They are these,—who are the meek? and, secondly, how and in what sense can they be said to inherit the earth?

I. First, then WHO ARE THE MEEK?

I have already said that they are those who have been made in spirit by God, and who have been made to mourn before God, and have been comforted; but here we learn, that they are also meek, that is, lowly and gentle in mind before God and before men.

They are meek before God, and good old Watson divides that quality under two head, namely, that they are submissive to do his will, and flexible to his Word. May these two very expressive qualities be found in each one of us!

So the truly meek are, first of all, submissive to God's will. Whatever God wills, they will. They are of the mind of that shepherd, on Salisbury Plain, of whom good Dr. Stenhouse enquired, "What kind of weather shall we have tomorrow?" "Well," replied the shepherd, "we shall have the sort of weather that pleases me." The doctor then asked, "What do you man?"

And the shepherd answered, "What weather pleases God always pleases me." "Shepherd," said the doctor, "your lot seems somewhat hard." "Oh, no, sir!" he replied, "I don't think so; for it abounds with mercies." "But you have to work very hard, do you not?" "Yes," he answered, "there is a good deal of labour, but that is better than being lazy." "But you have to endure many hardships, do you not?" "Oh, yes sir!" he said, "a great many; but then I don't have so many temptations as those people have who live in the midst of towns, and I have more time for meditating upon my God. So I am perfectly satisfied that where God has placed me is the best position I could be in." With such a happy, contented spirit as that, those who are meek do not quarrel with God. They do not talk, as some foolish people do, of having been born under a wrong planet, and placed in
circumstances unfavorable to their development. And even when they are smitten by God's rod, they do not rebel against him, and call him a hard Master; but they are either dumb with silence, and open not their mouth because God hath done it, or if they do speak, it is to ask for grace that the trial they are enduring may be sanctified to them, or they may even rise so high in grace as to glory in infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon them. The proud-hearted may, if they will, arraign their Master, and the thing formed may say to him who formed it, "Why hast thou made me thus?" But these men of grace will not do so. It is enough for them if God wills anything; if he wills it, so let it be, Solomon's throne or Job's dunghill; they desire to be equally happy wherever the Lord may place them, or however he may deal with them.

They are also flexible to God's Word; if they are really meek, they are always willing to bend. They do not imagine what the truth ought to be, and come to the Bible for texts to prove what they think should be there; but they go to the inspired Book with a candid mind, and pray, with the psalmist, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." And when, in searching the scriptures, they find deep mysteries which they cannot comprehend, believe where they cannot understand; and where, sometimes, different parts of Scripture seem to conflict with one another, they leave the explanation to the great Interpreter who alone can make all plain. When they in with doctrines that are contrary to their own notions, and hard for flesh and blood to receive, they yield up themselves to the Divine Spirit, and pray, "What we know not, teach thou to us." When the meek in spirit find, in the Word of God, any precept, they seek to obey it at once. They do not cavil at it, or ask if they can avoid it, or raise that oft-repeated question, "Is it essential to salvation?" They are not so selfish that they would do nothing except salvation depends upon it; they love their God so much that they desire to obey even the least command that he gives, simply out of love to him. The meek in spirit are like a photographer's sensitive plates, and as the Word of God passes before them, they desire to have its image imprinted upon their hearts. Their hearts are like the fleshy tablets on which mind of God is recorded; God is the Writer, and they become living epistles, written, not with ink, but with the finger of the living God. Thus are they meek towards God.

But meekness is a quality which also relates largely to men; and I think it means, first, that the man is humble. He bears himself, among his fellow-men, not as a Caesar who, as Shakespeare says, doth "bestride the narrow world like a Colosseus," beneath whose huge legs ordinary men may walk, and peep about to find themselves dishonourable graves; but he knows that he is only a man, and that the best of men are but men at the best, and he does not even claim to be one of the best of men. He knows himself to be less than the least of all saints; and, in some respects, the very chief of sinners. Therefore he does not expect to have the first place in the synagogue, nor the highest seat at the feast; but he is quite satisfied if he may pass among his fellow-men as a notable instance of the power of God's grace, and may be known by them as one, who is a great debtor to the lovingkindness of the Lord. He does not set himself up to be a very superior being. If
he is of high birth, he does not boast of it; if he is of low birth, he does not try to put himself on a level with those who are in a higher rank of life. He is not one who boasts of his wealth, or of his talents; he knows that a man is not judged by God by any of these things; and if the Lord is pleased to give him much grace, and to make him very useful in his service, he only feels that he owes the more to his Master, and is the more responsible to him. So he lies the lower before God, and walks the more humbly among men. The meek-spirited man is always of a humble temper and carriage. He is the very opposite of proud man who, you feel must be a person of consequence, at any rate to himself; and to whom you know that you must give way, unless you would have an altercation with him. He is a gentleman who expects always to have his top-gallants flying in all weathers, he must ever have his banner borne in front of him, and everybody else must pay respect to him. The great "I" stands conspicuous in him at all times. He lives in the house in the street, in the best room, in the front parlour; and when he, wakes in the morning, he shakes hands with himself, and congratulates himself upon such a fine fellow as he is! That is the very opposite of being meek; and, therefore, humility, although it is not all that there is in meekness, is one of the chief characteristics of it.

Out of this grows gentleness of spirit. The man is gentle; he does not speak harshly; his tones are not imperious, his spirit is not domineering. He will give up what he thinks to be lawful, because he does not think it is expedient for the good of others. He seeks to be a true brother among his brethren, thinks himself most honoured when can be the doorkeeper of the house of the Lord, or perform any menial service for the household of faith. I know some professing Christians who are very harsh and repellent. You would not think of going to tell them your troubles; you could not open your heart to them. They do not seem to be able to come down to your level. They are up on a mountain, and they speak down to you as a poor creature far below them. That is not the true Christian spirit; that is not being meek. The Christian who is really superior to others amongst whom he moves is just the man who lowers himself to the level the lowest for the general good of all. He imitates his Master, who, though he was equal with God, "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." And in consequence, he is loved and trusted as his Master was, and even little children come to him, and he does not repel them. He is gentle towards them, as a loving mother avoids all harshness in dealing with her children.

In addition to being humble and gentle, the meek are patient. They know "it must needs be that offences come;" yet they are meek either to give offence or to take offence. If others grieve them, they put up with it. They do not merely forgive seven times, but seventy times seven; in fact, they do not feel as if anything had been done that needed any forgiveness, for have not taken it as an affront; they consider that a mistake was made, so they are not angry at it. He may be angry for a moment; he would not be a man if he were not. But there is such a thing as being angry, and yet not sinning; and the meek man turns his anger wholly upon the evil, and away from the person who did the wrong, and is as ready to do him a kindness as if he had never transgressed at all. If there
should be anybody here who is of an angry spirit, kindly take home these remarks, and try to mend that matter, for a Christian must get the better of an angry temper. Little pots soon boil over; and I have known some professing Christians, who are such very little pots, that the smallest fire has them boil over. When you never meant anything to hurt their feelings, they have been terribly hurt. The simplest remark has been taken as an insult, and a construction put upon things that never was intended, and they make their brethren offenders for a word, or half a word, at, and even for not saying a word. Sometimes, if a man does not see them in the street through being short-sighted, they are sure he passed them on purpose, and would not speak to them because they are not so well off as he is. Whether a thing be done or be left undone, it equally fails to please them. They are always on the alert for cause of annoyance, and almost reminds one of the Irishman at Donnybrook Fair, trailing his coat in the dirt and asking for somebody to tread on it, that he may have the pleasure of knocking that somebody down. When I hear of anybody like that losing his temper, I always pray that he may not find it again, for such tempers are lost. The meek-spirited man may be, naturally, very hot and fiery, but he has had grace given to him to keep his temper in subjection. He does not say, "That is my constitution, and I cannot help it," as so many do. God will never excuse us because of our constitution; his grace is given to us to cure our evil constitutions, and to kill our corruptions. We are not to spare any Amalekites because they are called constitutional sins, but we are to bring them out,— even Agag who goeth delicately,— and slay them before the Lord, who can make us more than conquerors over every sin, whether constitutional or otherwise.

But since is a wicked world, and there are some men who will persecute us, and others who will try to rob us of our rights, and do us serious injury, the meek man goes beyond merely bearing what has to be borne, for he freely forgives the injury that is done to him. It is an ill sign when anyone refuses to forgive another. I have heard of a father saying that his child should darken his door again. Does that father know that he can never enter heaven while he cherishes such a spirit as that? I have heard of one saying, "I will never forgive So-and-so." Do you know that God will never hear your prayer for forgiveness until you forgive others? That is the very condition which Christ taught his disciples to present: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." If thou takest thy brother by the throat, because he oweth a hundred pence, canst thou think that God will forgive thee the thousand talents which thou owest to him? So the meek-spirited man forgives those who wrong him; he reckons that injuries are permitted to be done to him as trials of his grace, to see whether he can forgive them, and he does so, and does so right heartily. It used to be said of Archbishop Cranmer, "Do my lord of Canterbury an ill turn, and he be a friend to you as long as you live." That was a noble spirit, to take the man who had been his enemy, and to make him henceforth to be a friend. This is the way to imitate him who prayed for his murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do;" and this is the very opposite of a revengeful spirit. There are some who say that they have been wronged, and they will retaliate; but "retaliation" is not a Christian word. "Revenge" is not a word that ought to be found in a Christian's dictionary; he reckons it
to be of the Babylonian dialect, and of the language of Satan. His only revenge is to heap coals of fire upon his adversary's head by doing him all the good he can in return for the evil that he has done.

I think that meekness also involves contentment. The meek-spirited man is not ambitious; he is satisfied with what God provides for him. He does not say that his soul loathes the daily manna, and the water from the rock never loses its sweetness to his taste. His motto is, "God's providence is my inheritance." He has his ups and his downs, but he blesses the Lord that his God is a God of the hills, and also of the valleys; and if he can have God's face shining upon him, he cares little whether it be hills or valleys upon which he walks. He is content with what he has, and he says, "Enough is as good as a feast." Whatever happens to him, seeing that his times are in God's hand, it is with him well, in the best and most emphatic sense. The meek man is no Napoleon who will wade through human blood to reach a throne, and shut the gates of mercy on mankind. The meek man is no miser, hoarding up, with an all-devouring greed, everything that comes to his hand, and adding house to house, and field to field, so long as he lives. The meek man has a laudable desire to make use of his God-given talents, and to find for himself a position in which he may do more good to his fellow-men; but he is not unrestful, anxious, fretful, grieving, grasping; he is contented and thankful.

Put those five qualities together, and you have the truly meek man,—humble, gentle, patient, forgiving, and contented; the very opposite of the man who is proud, harsh, angry, revengeful, and ambitious. It is only the grace of God, as it works in us by the Holy Spirit, that can make us meek. There have been some who have thought themselves meek when they were not the Fifth Monarchy men, in Cromwell's day, said that they were meek, and that were, therefore, to inherit the earth; so they wanted to turn other men out of their estates and houses so that they might have them, and thereby they proved that they were not meek; for if they had been, they would have been content with what they had, and let other people enjoy what belonged to them. There are some people who are very gentle and meek so long as nobody tries them. We are all of us remarkably good-tempered while we have ow own way; but the true meekness, which is a work of grace, will stand the fire of persecution, and will endure the test of enmity, cruelty, and wrong, even as the meekness of Christ did upon the cross of Calvary.

II. NOW, in the second place, let us think of HOW THE MEEK INHERIT THE EARTH.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." This promise is similar to the inspired declaration of Paul, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." So, first, it is the meek man who inherits the earth, for he is the earth's conqueror. He is the conqueror of the world wherever he goes. William the Conqueror came to England with sword and fire, but the Christian conqueror wins victories in a superior manner by the weapons of
kindness and meekness. In the Puritan times, there was an eminent and godly minister, named Mr. Deering, who has left some writings that are still valuable. While sitting at table, one day, a graceless fellow insulted him by throwing a glass of beer in his face. The good man simply took his handkerchief, wiped his face and went on eating his dinner. The man provoked him a second time by doing the same thing, and he even did it a third time with many oaths and blasphemy. Mr. Deering made no reply, but simply wiped big face; and, on third occasion, the man came and fell at his feet, and said that the spectacle of his Christian meekness, and the look of tender, pitying love that Mr. Deering had cast upon him, had quite subdued him. So the good man was the conqueror of the bad one. No Alexander was ever greater than the man who could bear such insults like that. And holy Mr. Dodd, when he spoke to a man who was swearing in the street, received a blow in the mouth that knocked out two of his teeth. The holy man wiped the blood from his face, and said to his assailant, "You may knock out all my teeth if you will permit me just to speak to you so that you soul may be saved;" and the man was won by this Christian forbearance. It is wonderful what rough natures will yield before gentle natures. After all, it is not the strong who conquer 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 to-day. In our 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 before long.—Mahomet with his sharp scimitar or Christ with his doctrine of love. When all earthly forces are overthrown, Christ's kingdom will stand. Nothing is mightier than meekness, and it is the meek who inherit the earth in that sense.

They inherit the earth in another sense, namely, that they enjoy what they have. If you find me a man who thoroughly enjoys life, I will tell you at once that he is a meek, quiet-spirited man. Enjoyment of life does not consist in the possession or riches. There are many rich men who are utterly miserable, and there are many poor men who are equally miserable. You may have misery, or you may have happiness, according to your state of heart in any condition of life. The meek man is thankful, happy, and contented, and it is contentment that makes life enjoyable. It is so at our common meals. Here comes a man home to his dinner; he bows his head, and say, "for what we are about to receive, the Lord makes us truly thankful;" and then opens his eyes, and grumbles, "What! Cold mutton again?" His spirit is very different from that of the good old Christian who, when he reached home, found two herrings and two or three potatoes on the table, and he pronounced over them this blessing, "Heavenly Father, we thank thee that thou hast ransacked both earth and sea to find us this entertainment." His dinner was not so good as the other man's, but he was content with it, and that made it better. Oh, the grumblings that some have, when rolling in wealth, and the enjoyment that others have, when they have but little, for the dinner of herbs is sweeter than the stalled ox if contentment be but
there. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," but in the meek and quiet spirit which thanks God for whatever he pleases to give.

"Oh!" says someone, "but that is not inheriting the earth; it is only inheriting a part of it." Well, it is inheriting as much of it as we need, and there is a sense in which the meek do really inherit the whole earth. I have often felt, when I have been in a meek and quiet spirit, as if everything around belonged to me. I have walked through a gentleman's park, and I have been very much obliged to him for keeping it in such order on purpose for me to walk through it. I have gone inside his house, and seen his picture gallery, and I have been very grateful to him for buying such grand pictures, and I have hoped that he would buy a few more so that I might see them when I came next time. I was very glad that I had not to buy them, and to pay the servants to watch over them, and that everything was done for me. And I have sometimes looked, from a hill, upon some far-reaching plain or some quiet village, or some manufacturing town, crowded with houses and shops, and I have felt that they were all mine, although I had not the trouble of collecting the rents which people perhaps might not like to pay. I had only to look upon it all as the sun shone upon it, and then to look up to heaven, and say, "My Father, this is all thine; and, therefore, it is all mine; for I am an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ." So, in this sense, the meek-spirited man inherits the whole earth.

He also inherits it in another sense,—that is to say, whatever other men have, he is glad to think that they have it. Perhaps he is walking, and gets weary; someone comes riding by, and he says to himself, "Thank God that my neighbour does not have such a pinch as I have; I should not like to see him in such a plight as I am in." Sometimes, when I am ill, someone comes in, and says, "I have been to see somebody who is worse than you are;" but I never get any comfort out of such a remark as that, and my usual answer is, "You have made me feel worse than I was before by telling me that there is somebody worse even than I am." The greater comfort for a meek man is this, "Though I am depressed in spirit, I am glad that there are sweet-voiced singers;" or this, "though I am an owl, I rejoice that there are larks to soar and sing, and eagles to mount towards the sun." The meek-spirited man is glad to know that other people are happy, and their happiness is his happiness; he will have a great number of heavens, for everybody else's heaven will be a heaven to him. It will be a heaven to him to know that so many other people are in heaven, and for each one whom he sees there he will praise the Lord. Meekness gives us the enjoyment of what is other people's, yet they have none the less because of our enjoyment of it.

Again, the meek-spirited man inherits the earth in this sense,—if there is anybody who is good anywhere near him, he is sure to see him. I have known persons joining the church, and after they have been a little while in it, they have said, "There is no love there." Now, when a brother says, "There is no love there," I know that he has been looking in the glass, and that his own reflection has suggested his remark. Such persons cry out about the deceptions and hypocrisies in the professing church, and they have some cause
for doing so; only it is a pity that they cannot also see the good people, the true saints, who are there. The Lord still has a people who love and fear him, a people who will be his in the day when he makes up his jewels; and it is a pity if we are not able to see what God so much admires. If we are meek, we shall the more readily see the excellences of other people. That is a very beautiful passage, in the second part of "The Pilgrim's Progress," which tells that, when Christiana and Mercy had both been bathed in the bath, and clothed in fine linen, white and clean, "they began to esteem each other better than themselves." If we also do this, we shall not think so badly as some of us now do of this poor present life, but shall go through it thanking God, and praising his name, and so inheriting the earth.

With a gentle temper, and a quiet spirit, and grace to keep you so, you will be inheriting the earth under any circumstances. If trouble should come, you will bow to it, as the willow bows to the wind, and so escapes the injury that falls upon sturdier trees. If there should come little vexations, you will not allow yourself to be vexed by them; but will say, "With a little patience, they will all pass away." I think I never admired Archbishop Leighton more than when I read a certain incident that is recorded in his life. He lived in a small house in Scotland, and had only a man-servant beside himself in the house. John, the manservant, was very forgetful; and, one morning, when he got up before his master, he thought he would like to have a day's fishing, so he went off, and locked his master in. He fished until late in the evening, forgot all about his master, and when he came back, what do you think the bishop said to him. He simply said, "John, if you go out for a day's fishing another time, kindly leave me the key." He had had a happy day of prayer and study all by himself. If it had been some of us, we should have been fuming, and fretting, and getting up a nice lecture for John when he came back; and he richly deserved it; but I do not suppose it was worth while for the good man to put himself out about him. The incident is, I think, a good illustration of our text.

But the text means more than I have yet said, for the promise, "They shall inherit the earth," may be read, "they shall inherit the land," that is, the promised land, the heavenly Canaan. These are the men who shall inherit heaven, for up there they are all meek-spirited. There are no contentions there; pride cannot enter there. Anger, wrath, and malice never pollute the atmosphere of the celestial city. There, all bow before the Kings of kings, and all rejoice in communion with him and with one another. Ah, beloved, if we are ever to enter heaven, we must fling away ambition, and discontent, and wrath, and self-seeking, and selfishness. May God's grace purge us of all these; for, as long as any of that evil leaven is in our soul, where God is we cannot go.

And then, dear friends, the text means yet more than that,—we shall inherit this earth by-and-by. David wrote, "The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." After this earth has been purified by fire, after God shall have burned the works of men to ashes, and every trace of corrupt humanity shall have been destroyed by the fervent heat, then shall this earth be fitted up again, and angels shall
descend with new songs to sing, and the New Jerusalem shall come down out of heaven from God in all her glory. And then upon this earth, where once was war, the clarion shall ring no more; there shall be neither swords nor spears, and men shall learn the arts of war no more. The meek shall then possess the land, and every hill and valley shall be glad, and every fruitful plain shall ring with shoutings of joy, and peace, and gladness, throughout the long millennial day. The Lord send it, and may we all be among the meek who shall possess the new Eden, whose flowers shall never wither, and where no serpent’s trail shall ever be seen!

But this must be the work of grace. We must be born again, or else our proud spirits will never be meek. And if we have been born again, let it be our joy, as long as we live, to show that we are the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, with whose gracious words I close my discourse: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." So may it be, for Christ's sake! Amen.

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