

Formed from the Ashes

The Beatitudes

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It's a great and inestimable privilege that we have to open God's word together today. For those of you that perhaps are visiting or haven't been with us for a while, we are in the Gospel of Matthew 5 studying the text known as the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' teaching, his outworking of what it means to repent. In Matthew 4:17, Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and then shortly thereafter, Matthew introduces the Sermon on the Mount which he intends for us to understand as Jesus' exposition, his explanation of what repentance looks like. What we find as we study God's word, what we find as we study the Sermon on the Mount, is that Jesus opens the core of life before us. As he teaches his disciples, he opens our hearts; he splices them open and exposes them for what they are and what they need to become. In Matthew 5:3, he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," making a statement that the true Christian, the true disciple, realizes that he has no merit before God. He comes to God as a beggar, not demanding blessing, not earning blessing or anything of the sort, he comes as someone who is bankrupt asking for grace and mercy. As we've often said, the kingdom of heaven operates on a principle of grace, of undeserved favor rather than coming to God and saying, "You owe me. God, I am good enough to enter your kingdom. God, I'm good enough to go to heaven when I die." That very common phrase, that common principle that you hear almost anywhere in the world is a sure statement that someone does not belong to Christ, is not going to heaven in that condition, is someone who doesn't understand the first thing about grace and the basis upon which God receives someone. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," the bankrupt, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Now, as you move on what we saw last week in verse 4, you can look at verse 4 with me, Matthew 5:4, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." This verse gives you sort of the emotional reaction, the inward response to a recognition of your spiritual bankruptcy. It's a time of mourning, it's a time of grief to recognize that whereas once you were proud and boastful, you realize that you had nothing to boast of at all; that the reality of sin in your life causes you to grieve over the fact that you fall short of the glory of God. You mourn over that. Jesus says God comforts those who truly mourn in that manner.

Now, that brings us to verse 5 for this morning and what I want you to understand and what is very critical for you to realize as we study through the Beatitudes, so essential to grasp if we're going to understand this text at all, is to realize that there is a progression in thought. These are not independent units of thought that are unrelated to one another, no, they all describe the same kind of person and they are meant to be understood together and they walk one into the next. Christ was very precise, he was methodical as he was teaching like this and what we find is that the recognition of bankruptcy leads one to mourn over his spiritual condition. Then in verse 5, what Christ does here is this: Christ begins to show, he begins to form, he begins to instruct the kind of character, the kind of inner man that rises from the ashes of that mourning. Christ when he breaks a man in repentance, when a man is broken over his sin and realizes that he is bankrupt and has nothing to offer to God, the question is where do you go from there? You see, it's not simply to crush someone spiritually for the sake of leaving them in that crushed position. When Christ saves someone, he begins a process of sanctification, of changing them into someone else.

What kind of character rises from the ashes? What kind of character does Christ form? Once someone comes and says, "God, I have no merit before you and it grieves me to be like that," what comes next then? Well, we start to see the picture in Matthew 5:5. Look at it with me. It will be our text for this morning.

5 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

Let's look at it again, "Blessed," in other words, people like this are on the receiving end of God's favor and blessing. You are in a good position and vis-a-vis God when you are like this, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." Well, it's obvious that this verse hinges on what the meaning of "gentle" is, and it's actually a surprisingly rich verse. There is a lot of texture to this term, I mean. "Gentle" is a term that is translated differently depending on the Bible version that you're using and even within the passage that you have within your Bible. So, for example, those of you that are using the English Standard Version see that it says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." But the English Standard Version doesn't translate this underlying Greek term consistently. It uses different terms to translate it, in part because the word has a lot of nuance to its meaning. I prefer the term "meek" but I'm going to stick with the NASB term "gentle" here because it's going to make it simpler for you to follow what I'm having to say.

Now, let me start you out with a definition of what this biblical gentleness is and maybe we can start by saying what it's not, it might be a better place to start. When we think of the word "gentle," we tend to think of someone that has a mild mannered disposition or somebody that is pleasant in his interactions. That's really not the point of what we're talking about here and if you think about it, you can see that that couldn't possibly be all that Jesus has in mind here before you even get to any biblical exposition of the term. You could have a dog that is gentle; you could have a dog that has got a mild disposition, is pleasant to be around, is non-aggressive. Jesus isn't talking about something that you could find in a dumb animal, he's talking about something far more than that. And what

we're going to do today is we're going to trace how this term is used elsewhere in Scripture so that you can see the different aspects that are involved in biblical gentleness. It's going to open up your eyes if you've never seen this before, and what you're going to see, remember that what we said, how we framed this is this: that Jesus is here describing the character that he forms from the ashes of spiritual brokenness. Where is it that he takes a man once this man comes to him in repentance? Where does he go with a woman who says, "Lord, I have sinned my life away. I have no merit before you. I deserve nothing. I ask you simply for grace. I ask you to save me according to sheer mercy, not because I deserve it." What comes from that over the course of time?

I'm going to give you a definition that I encourage you to write down. Every word in this is important and I'm going to give you the definition and then we'll unfold different texts to help you see why this must be the case. Biblical gentleness, the gentleness that abides the blessing of God is this: biblical gentleness is spiritual composure rooted in trust in God which responds in peace to conflict or difficult circumstances. I'll say that again. It's multifaceted. Biblical gentleness is spiritual composure rooted in trust in God which responds in peace to conflict or difficult circumstances. In other words, what Jesus is describing here is a fundamental heart attitude. It is a fundamental disposition toward life, toward people, toward God, toward circumstances. This is a controlling, what I mean by controlling is, is that this is the direction that a life goes when it has truly repented. And you can find as you understand the course of this term, you can find that it clearly exposes who is a true Christian and who is not. It gives you an understanding of what God would have you to be. It helps you to see where you even as a Christian fall short and would cultivate your character still more.

I'm going to give you five principles that define this biblical gentleness and I'm excited and yet at the same time, sobered by the opportunity that we have to talk about these things that are in front of us today because this has real substance. And you know, here's the thing that I continually want you to think about as we go through the Sermon on the Mount: Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He is wisdom Incarnate. He has an infinite mind, infinite wisdom, infinite omniscience. He knows all things. And so what you should expect when you study the words of Christ, is to find something with some manner of depth; that there is significance to it; that it challenges you; that it confronts you; that it takes you to realms that earthly men do not take you. That's what you should expect when you come to Christ, when he teaches about the reality of his kingdom. You know, he didn't create the world and come to the earth and die to save his people in order to deliver us into a superficial earthbound existence. What would be the point of that? It's not about giving us a little bit of a bump as we go through life and smoothing off the rough edges of life. When a finite sinful creature is confronted by the word of God found in an infinite, sinless, holy Son of God, you can expect to find things that penetrate. Well, that's what we're going to find here in Matthew 5:5.

What's the first thing that I would have you understand about biblical gentleness? What is the character that Christ is at work to form in you? Point 1: gentleness starts in the heart. Gentleness starts in the heart. It starts in your inner man. It starts in the way that you think. It is shaping the affections and the priorities and the loves of your life in a way that

everything else kind of flows out of that. You see, I'll say it again: this gentleness of which Jesus speaks is a complete disposition toward life. It defines your expectations in life. It shapes your reactions to life and we can say without fear of contradiction that this biblical gentleness is alien, it is unknown to the unsaved natural man.

Look over at Galatians 5 with me for a moment. Galatians 5. We don't often preach messages like this but we're going to go to a number of different passages, in some senses for those of you that like hermeneutics, in some senses doing a word study on this word "gentle" to see the fullness of what the biblical teaching of it is. In Galatians 5:22 and 23, the Bible says this, it says, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness," here's our word, "gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." What you find from the start when you systematically put these things together is that this kind of gentleness is something that is only produced by the Spirit of God. It finds its source in the character and the operation of the Spirit of God on the human heart, on the saved heart, you might say. And as you study Scripture, you find – now think about this with me – if it ultimately finds its origin and its source in God, then it's also going to be something that marked our Lord Jesus Christ because he himself is God in human flesh. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus said, "I am gentle and humble in heart," that same word being at work here. This gentleness comes from the Spirit and Jesus says, "This gentleness is fundamental to who I am. In my heart, I am gentle. In my heart, I'm humble."

So here you and I are as believers in Christ following after the Lord Jesus Christ, being shaped to become like him as the goal of our salvation, do you see that what Christ is working and developing from the ashes of mourning and bankruptcy is to shape you into someone that is like he is; to shape you after himself. And Jesus said, "I am gentle and humble in heart," and if our Lord and Master, our Lord and Teacher is like that, then that becomes our goal, our aspiration; it becomes the magnet that draws us to itself. "I'm gentle and humble in heart," he says. And as you follow through in Scripture, beloved, what you find is that this biblical gentleness which is spiritual composure rooted in trusting God which responds in peace to conflict or difficult circumstances, this kind of gentleness is thus an operative, a key operative principle in the life of every believer. There is no such thing as a believer who does not somehow have this dynamic at work in his heart. Someone who does not have this dynamic of which we're speaking this morning somehow operating in his life is not a Christian because this is central to it.

Look over at 1 Peter 3, again just seeing that this is something in the inner man. It starts in the inner man. 1 Peter 3, just after the book of James. We kind of have to, this is kind of like putting a bit of a puzzle together, getting the pieces to fit together so that you have a comprehensive view when we're done. 1 Peter 3, speaking to wives says in 1 Peter 3:3, he says, "Your adornment must not be merely external--braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses," but look where he goes, verse 4, "but let it be the hidden person of the heart," the place where men do not see, the place where you think, where your volition orients, where it finds its source, in the hidden person of your heart, let your adornment be like this, he says, verse 4, "with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God." Peter says, "Wives, I want

you to be like this." He's taking an application of the fruit of the Spirit and applying it to them in their marital relationship and saying, "In the inner person of your heart, make this your life priority, who you are inside as opposed to decorating yourself on the outside," he says. "Let that character be what adorns your life and think less about your external makeup and appearance and focus on the inner person and have this gentle and quiet spirit."

Men, understand that this applies equally to us. If you look down at chapter 3, verse 7, Peter says, "You husbands in the same way." In other words, "Husbands, I'm calling you to the same kind of character trait that I just called your wives to and here's how it's going to play out in your lives." Our point for this morning is not to talk about marriage and husband and wife relationships, simply to see that Peter places gentleness in the realm of the believing heart as the place where this all begins. This is the starting point and so when you think about becoming the kind of person that Christ calls you to be, when you think of what the goal of spiritual life is, understand that Christ, as it were, points to your heart, he places his finger directly on who you are inside and says, "That's where I'm going." You cannot escape this. The searching omniscience of Christ, which we saw from the passage we read in Revelation 2, he tests the hearts, he knows the minds, he knows what you're like inside, he says, "This is where I want to discuss things with you. This is the place where scriptural teaching takes you, who are you inside."

So, beloved, let's step back and ask the question. We're not messing around here today. Jesus is teaching for keeps. He means what he says and he is confronting you in the totality of who you are and the question then is, if gentleness starts in the heart, the question is as you sit here today, my friends is: what is your heart like? What is your heart like? Are you content? Are you peaceful? Are you trusting? Or are you a person that lives life in anxiety and in continual repeated conflict with others? Does conflict follow you where you go? Maybe the principle of gentleness is not at work in your heart. Are you always laid down with anxiety and what's going to happen next and I don't know and I don't know if I can go on? Well, you wouldn't necessarily think of the word "gentleness" as applying to that but as you're going to see, gentleness addresses those distrusting, anxious, contentious kinds of people and says, "This is not life in the kingdom of God." Instead, life in the kingdom of God is something else. It is something completely different. It is alien to that spirit which tends to mark unsaved men. So you see right from the start, beloved, do you see right from the start that you're conscious of being in, this is a completely different realm. This is a different area of existence that we're talking about. The world doesn't lead us into this. The whole point of marketing and news is to stir you up and get you agitated to try to motivate you to buy things or to vote in a particular way. Gentleness lifts you up out of that and says, "Life in the kingdom of God is something completely different." It's foreign to that.

Well, let's move on then, now that we see that we're in a different realm, how does this realm flesh itself out? What are the inner attitudes that are to be cultivated in a believing heart. Point 2: gentleness trusts God. Gentleness trusts God. Go back to Matthew 5 with me. We'll keep this text kind of like the anchor, the center, the hub of our message. Matthew 5, look at it with me again, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the

earth." Remember in our context once more, the poor in spirit are the spiritually bankrupt, realizing I have no merit, I have no demands, I have no claims on God because I have forfeited them all with my sin. Now, what does that lead to? What does being poor in spirit lead to? Oh, it's something so fundamental, so essential that is the starting point of developing the right kind of trust in God. Not trusting God that he'll give you what you want, what you think you want out of life, that's not it. What do the poor in spirit do? What does a bankrupt individual do before God as God continues to give him life and breath? Do you know what a poor in spirit person does? Simply this: the poor in spirit accept what God gives them without complaint and without resistance.

You see, beloved, it's like this: when you realize that you have no claim on God, that you have forfeited everything with your sin, then you claim nothing else beyond what God actually gives you. Why? Because you're sitting on the ashes of your own spiritual bankruptcy. You're mindful of the fact, "I don't deserve anything from God. Are you kidding me? I broke his law. I have sinned against him. I haven't loved him with all my heart, soul, strength and mind like he deserves. God owes me nothing. God owes me nothing," you say to yourself, and that becomes the anchor, the cornerstone, that becomes the pivot point on which you view all of life. Everything flows from that fundamental recognition, "I am bankrupt before God. You mean I'm still standing here? I'm still breathing? I have things? I have relationships? And all of this can only be an overflow of God's goodness and grace to me, not giving me the judgment I deserve and giving me something else instead. If Christ has saved me, boy, he must be someone really good and kind and loving and therefore whatever he gives me must somehow be a further expression of his good love and kindness toward me." So rather than approaching life with a sense of demanding expectation, "I deserve this and I deserve that. I deserve a break today." You say, "God is being gracious with me in giving me breath and life and giving me salvation. Whatever he gives, I accept with a spirit of gratitude."

Matthew 5:5 echoes a verse in a Psalm that we studied on Tuesday nights. Turn back to Psalm 37. Remember, we're looking at a Psalm that says, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." Psalm 37 said something remarkably similar much earlier in the progress of God's revelation. Psalm 37:11 says, "I'll give you just another moment to turn there, Psalm 37:11, "But the humble will inherit the land And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity." The humble, the gentle, the meek, are marked by this and have the assurance that God is going to give them blessing in the end.

Now, Psalm 37, follow me here – oh, this is just so crucial and critical that you see this and that you stay with me as we bounce around today. Psalm 37 points us to this kind of gentleness and points us to this kind of trusting attitude despite the prosperity of the wicked, despite the fact that people who do not live this way seem to get it on pretty good in life. Look up at verse 7 in Psalm 37 and see how gentleness and humility trust God and are fundamental to understanding the disposition that you should have as a believer. Psalm 37:7, the context that leads into the verse that Matthew 5:5 parallels. Psalm 37:7, "Rest in the LORD 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, they will inherit the land."

Go back to Matthew 5 for just a moment. Keep your finger in Psalm 37. Go back to Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." Psalm 37:9, "those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land." Look, beloved, what do humble people do? What do biblically humble people do? What do people who know Christ and have been saved out of their spiritual bankruptcy, what do they do fundamentally? What kind of person are they inside their heart? Well, Scripture points us to something that is immensely practical and deeply searching. Scripture points you to this: humble people, gentle people, to use today's word, trust God – watch this – they trust God enough not to worry when a wicked person experiences prominence or prosperity. That is what Psalm 37 says, "Do not fret. Rest in the LORD and wait patiently on Him. Evildoers will be cut off. Look beyond the present. Look beyond the here-and-now and see how God deals with his people vis-à-vis how he deals with the wicked."

"Blessed are the gentle, for they will inherit the earth." Psalm 37, "Rest in the LORD 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." Beloved, do you see something going on here? This tells you to look at the world through a different prism. It tells you to think differently. It tells you to trust God because God will ultimately settle the accounts. God will ultimately make things right even if for a time wicked people ascend and have prosperity and you suffer while they do. The wicked will be cut off, the righteous will be blessed, and humble faith will be rewarded. What does biblical gentleness do? What does a true believer do? It makes that the foundation of the way that he views all of life and all of the world and all of existence and all of history. It says, "God reigns over all of this, God is good, God has shown favor to me and therefore I trust him because that's what he deserves after the way he has dealt graciously with me in my spiritual bankruptcy. God saved me from death, sin and hell and delivered me into a path that leads to eternal life and therefore the only right thing," you say to yourself, "the only right thing that I can do in life then is to continue to trust him with every moment that he gives me here, no matter what's happening around me."

Now, beloved, it should be obvious to you, it's certainly obvious to me, that every four years when the American presidential political cycle comes up, Christians fail on this point again and again and again and they are failing at it again and again and again now. "Oh, look who could rise to power regardless of what you think you're going to do with your vote. Look who is coming up! This is bad! That person is wicked and so is that person and one of these wicked people is going to be reigning over us, going to be our president, and I can't stand it and what's going to happen to the future and persecution and all of that stuff?" And all kinds of people that have spiritual leadership agitate that and stir it up and lend to the problem. Isn't it time for us to come back and see what God says and to apply it to our lives and make it central to our hearts even if no one else around us is doing it? To recognize that God's word speaks directly to this. Yes, we have two wicked candidates for president and what does God say about that to us? He says, "Rest patiently in the LORD." He says, "Don't fret because of him who prospers in the way

because of the man who carries out wicked schemes." He says, "Cease from anger and forsake wrath. Don't fret because it only leads to evil doing," your evildoing because you stop trusting God and then you start speaking wickedly and you start manipulating and inviting other people to do the same. That's not biblical gentleness.

This text comes to your life today at a perfect time if you're agitated over these things because biblical gentleness does this: it trusts God. Biblical gentleness is spiritual composure. It has a sense of calm and serenity about it that says, "I realize what's happening and, yes, this is all bad, at one level this is all bad, but do you know what? My heart is anchored in something else, it's anchored in deeper truth and there is someone who has been gracious to me who reigns over this and therefore I'm going to cultivate a spirit of serenity in my heart over these things. I'm not going to fret. Why? Because God commands me not to. Why? Because to fret over what's happening on an earthly level with wicked people who are doomed to die with their breath in their nostrils aren't worthy of defining the spirit with which I approach life."

So as you cultivate, Jesus says, "Blessed are the gentle," and you realize that gentleness includes this spirit of trust and composure even when wicked people rise. What it does is it composes your soul and you can still go out and vote and do whatever you want. I don't care about that by comparison to this, is what is it that is anchoring the way that you view the world? What is it that is controlling the spirit with which you respond to what happens every four years and has been happening ever since the beginning of our Republic. Every election is a crisis. Well, it can't possibly be that you and I as believers in the sovereign God who loves us and gave himself up for us are meant to rise and fall with every political cycle. That's just not the case. That is not biblical Christianity. Biblical Christianity is found in the spirit of gentleness, spiritual composure that is rooted in trusting God because that's what gentleness does, it trusts God.

Believer in Christ, brother and sister in Christ, that's what you must do, especially when a lot is on the line. The more the stakes are raised, the more that you raise your level of trust and say, "God, I trust you even when the stakes are high in my nation or in my life or in my health." You say, "I've got a terminal illness, God, I trust you. My soul is composed. Lord, I'm on the brink of financial ruin, God, I trust you. God, this relationship that I cherish is breaking apart at the seams and I don't know if I can fix it, God, I trust you. My soul is calm. My soul is serene. Because, God, I'm a spiritual bankrupt, I'm a spiritual beggar. I'm going to receive whatever you have for my life and I'm going to trust you for it and I'm going to walk day by day trusting you because that's what you're worthy of and that's what biblical gentleness leads me to do."

When you trust God, beloved, it composes your soul. When you're biblically gentle, it composes your soul. The question is: is your soul composed? If not, Christ invites you to remember from whence you came, from the judgment and the guilt and the shame from which he delivered you and he brings you here today and refreshes your memory, as it was, and says, "Remember, I'm over all." Christ says, "Remember that Christ is over all. Remember that Christ has your soul. He has his eye upon you. He walks with you and he preserves you and he keeps you. How can it possibly go bad for you in the end?" And if

that is the defining spiritual anchor of your life, then trust flows out of that. Trust flows out of that truth and it is not moved, it is not shaken, it does not crumble no matter what the circumstances of life bring. Look, my great desire for Christians in America is simply that they would act and live like Christians. That's all I'm asking for. That's all Scripture calls us to. Live like a Christian, like you know a sovereign God and that you trust him. And as soon you embrace that and acknowledge that and accept that and receive it and say, "Yes, that will be the defining conviction of my soul," then it narrows the range of response and worry that you have in whatever is going on around you, right? Scripture just calls us to live and act and believe like Christians. That's all we're saying. Be a Christian. Trust God. That's what we do. That's what we do.

Thirdly, what else is gentleness? I like this one too: gentleness is teachable. Gentleness is teachable. Spiritual mourning, again, think about it, go back to where Jesus starts in the Beatitudes: spiritual brokenness, spiritual bankruptcy, mourning over sin, recognizing that God owes me nothing and that I'm a debtor at his window, that I trust him. Well, what follows from that is when you come to God like that you say, "Okay, Lord, teach me. Shape me into what you would have me to be. I have abandoned my old man. I have denied myself. He is dead. He is gone. He is in the past. I'm living with new motivations and aspirations and things that matter to me now and so, Lord, lead me in what those should be." You see, when a man truly repents, when he is truly broken, when he is truly mourning over sin, here's what happens without exception, without exception: spiritual mourning softens the heart to learn from God's word. It removes that spirit of stubborn self-reliance, of stubborn pride that says, "I know what's best. No one is going to be my boss. No one is going to tell me what to do." Spiritual mourning slays that sinful human pride and replaces it with a spirit that says, "Lord, teach me. Lord, lead me." Not through voices inside your head because those aren't true, but through the place where God has truly revealed himself, in his word.

Look back at the book of James, James 1. I say look back to it, actually we haven't been there yet, have we? So look at the book of James 1. The point is that gentleness is teachable. Gentleness is teachable. James 1, beginning in verse 19, "This you know," I'll give you just a moment. I hear those pages crinkling. I hear the whir of iPads spinning down to James, actually I don't hear that but you know what I'm saying. James 1:19, "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." You see, spiritual composure. What do we do then? Verse 21, "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness," here it is, "in humility," it's the same biblical word. If you see it, look in your margin if you've got a Bible that has some marginal notes, you'll see the word "gentleness" in the margin. The same word. "In humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." James says, "Beloved brethren, here's what life is to be like for you: put aside your wickedness, put aside your anger, put a button on your mouth, open your ears and humbly, gently receive the teaching of God's word and let it do its work in your heart."

You see, the gentle person, biblically speaking, the gentle Christian which you realize I'm duplicating terms there because to say a gentle Christian is just to say, "Yeah, a

Christian," because all Christians are like this because they and they alone will inherit the kingdom of God. The gentle person then realizes that he does not know it all. He realizes that he needs to change. He realizes that there is an authority. He realizes that his mind needs to be renewed. He realizes that God is infinite and great and he could never exhaust the wonders of his immensity. He realizes that having come from spiritual bankruptcy, he has a whole new way of life to learn. And even after he's been a Christian for 20, 30, 50 years, that there is still advance and progress to be made.

So what does all of that do? It makes him teachable. It makes him receptive to the word of God that says, "I'm going to listen to what God's word says. I'm not going to defy it. I'm not going to challenge it. I'm going to receive it. I'm going to let Scripture correct me. In fact, what I find in my heart," the gentle Christian says to himself or herself is this, "I want to obey what I read. I want to conform my life to this word because I was bankrupt, I was lost but now I am found. Grace has saved me. Christ shed his blood to redeem me from my sin. He has graciously brought me into a family that I didn't deserve and here it is, from heaven he has given this word to me. I want to know what he says. I want to respond to this. I want this in my life. This is the most important thing in the universe to me because this is the way that I respond to the God who saved me in my bankruptcy." Do you see how this works? It all makes perfect sense, doesn't it? This is obvious.

Notice how it all starts with that brokenness of spirit, that brokenness of heart. And some of you who were saved maybe a little bit later in life, you can look back and you can see the distinction. I know I can. Look back on your former life and your pride and your arrogance and nobody told you what to do. Nobody was your boss. The surest way to get you to do something was to tell you to do the opposite because you had that spirit of rebellion in your heart and mind. Some of you are probably still like that, indicating that you're not even saved to begin with. You get that. But then Christ saved you and you repented and you were broken over your sin and that whole disposition changed. Now instead of raising your fist and fighting against God, you say, "God, lead me. Help me. Teach me your word. I am thy servant. Give me understanding that I may know thy testimony," Psalm 119:125. That's the spirit of gentleness in a biblical sense.

With the Apostle Paul when Paul was converted and after breathing out threats on the road to Damascus, threatening and persecuting the church of God, casting his vote with those who would vote for their execution, Christ confronts him on the road to Damascus and immediately his whole disposition changes and he asks the Lord, Acts 22:10, "What shall I do?" That's the teachable spirit of gentleness. We come to God's word, we come before him, we bow before him and say, "What do you want from me? I'm teachable now, Lord. The rebellion has been slain. Lead me under your word." Gentleness is teachable. In humility, receive the word. I thank God that in this church we have people who want to do just that. I'm grateful for that. It shows in your lives. Excel still more.

Fourthly, gentleness is peaceable. Gentleness is peaceable. That's point 4: gentleness is peaceable. Step back for a moment and remember the first three things that we've said. Gentleness finds its origin in the Spirit of God; that gentleness trusts God; that gentleness is teachable under God's word. Think about it and realize there is a vertical dimension to

all of those points; that this is us responding to God in the fundamental aspirations and motivations of our heart, okay? This is what Christians do. This is what Christians are like. If you've come and been taught a different version of Christianity that just focuses on feeding the poor and that kind of stuff and you say, "This is different," yeah, exactly. It is different. This is not a social Gospel that Jesus taught here and so there is this vertical dimension to it. But when these things are rightly aligned vertically in your life, you are oriented toward trusting God and being teachable under his word, well, there is an overflow that takes place in your life toward other men. Gentleness is peaceable.

Look at James 3, you're still in James. James 3:13 says, "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth." This gentleness has a sense that it is manifested in deeds; it is manifested in wisdom that comes from this teachable trusting heart that is oriented toward God. What does that gentleness look like? Oh boy, is this going to sting our toes. The word of God is going to take a steel toed boot and step on your toes right now. You might as well get ready for it. Manipulate your toes and get ready because it is going to sting and that's okay.

Go over to Colossians 3. What does this gentleness look like? Chapter 3, verse 12 of Colossians, "as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another," do you see the horizontal human dimension? "Bearing with one another and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." Scripture speaks of this gentleness and puts it in a horizontal realm that flows from the vertical realm. God has saved you vertically from your spiritual bankruptcy, praise God for his mercy and kindness toward you, now you go and be like that with others.

The gentleness that true salvation produces in a heart produces a spirit that is peaceable toward other people. Think about it. Jesus said, "I'm gentle in heart." What happened to him later after he said those things? They spat on him. They beat him. They opposed him. They crucified him. They thrust a crown of thorns on his head. They beat him with whips, bone and metal embedded in the leather whips, ripped out his flesh before he was crucified. What did he do? Did he retaliate? Did he strike back? "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." Like a sheep that was silent before its shearers, he uttered not a word of protest in his defense. Beloved, mark this word: Christ in that moment of extreme human provocation did not retaliate. That's gentleness. That's a peaceable spirit under the most extreme of provocations.

Bearing with one another, forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone. Follow me here. The commentator William Hendrickson said this talking about this gentleness, talking about the kind of life and the kind of person that God calls you to become as a disciple of Christ. He said and I quote, "This gentleness describes the person who is not resentful. He bears no grudge. Far from mulling over injuries received, he finds refuge in the Lord and commits his way entirely to him." Trust in God enough that

if God brings through sinful men adversity, hardship, unfairness, mistreatment, "Lord, I'm unmoved. I still trust you. And because I've committed my way entirely to you, I don't have to retaliate and fight to protect myself, to defend myself to get what I think I deserve out of life. Christ did it, O God, the sinless Son of God who truly was innocent in his suffering. He was like that. O God, how could I be any other way?"

Here comes the steel heeled boot. Beloved, anybody, you and I, you don't even have to be saved to be agreeable and pleasant when you have prosperity, when men praise you, when men do what you want them to do, in your marriage, in your relationships, in your friendships, in the church. You don't have to be gentle to be agreeable when it's going exactly the way that you want. Do you realize that this biblical gentleness is tested? Do you realize that the spirit of your heart in this realm is exposed not when you're getting what you want, not when you're happy about the circumstances, not when everybody is telling you what a great person and Christian you are, it is tested, it is exposed when that is not happening, in fact when you're getting the exact opposite. So the question becomes: how do you react when people are unkind to you? When they are critical toward you? When they don't do what you want them to do? How do you respond when things are not as you like? When you are expecting a clear road and the traffic is jammed? When the equipment doesn't work like you want it to, what comes out of your life and mouth then? That's the test of your gentleness.

You say, "Wait a second, this is getting personal!" Yeah, exactly. That's what I mean, Jesus is teaching for keeps. Jesus is placing his hand on your heart, as it were, and says, "Not like that but like this is how you should be: peaceable, not retaliating, composed, serene, calm." Why? Because God is in control and your life is somehow a furtherance of what God has for you and so you accept it, even the adversity, even the criticism as that which God would use as an instrument of blessing in your life and therefore you respond to it as though it is coming from God, not from man. The sufferings of Christ on the cross were foreordained before the beginning of time so, of course, he could walk in obedience to what the Father had, of course he could please God like that, and if Christ could please his Father in the worst of provocations, beloved, and respond like he did, then, beloved, there you go. There you go. That's what it means and there is the path by which you should go forth from here.

Final point. We'll wrap it up as, once again, time gets away from us. Point 5: gentleness is blessed. Gentleness is blessed. You see, we pursue this gentleness with a sense that there is a good outcome at the end and that's what calms our heart, that's what fuels our motivation, that's what helps us do this, is that there is a good outcome at the end. We look beyond the immediate provocations and say, "I'm looking for the reward that awaits and therefore I want that reward, I want to maximize that reward and so I walk in the Spirit now," content with whatever comes because God has an inheritance for the gentle.

Go back to Matthew 5 one final time. You see, in all of this we have an eye on the future. "Blessed are the gentle, for they," future tense, "they shall inherit the earth." There is a present aspect to this position and to this possession. There is a present aspect to this possession. Look over at 1 Corinthians 3. One or two final little other passages. 1

Corinthians 3. What does it mean to belong to this God? What does it mean to belong to Christ in his generosity where he shares all that he has with us? Oh, it means that there are better things ahead for us.

1 Corinthians 3:21, "So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God." All things belong to you. Christ is going to share it all with you. It is going to manifest in abundant blessing in the days to come. You see, but it's only for those who are gentle in spirit. It's only for those who manifest this biblical character.

Revelation 20:6 says, "they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." When Christ comes and establishes his kingdom on the earth, we are going to share in the reign of that and the ultimate fulfillment of inheriting the earth will come to pass. But, beloved, it's only for those who belong to Christ and you recognize, you test yourself to see whether you belong to Christ by saying, "Is something of this gentleness operative in my life?" You're going to inherit the earth, beloved. Are you going to be there to share in the blessing?

Let's pray together.

O Father, your word has searched us so profoundly here this morning. I pray that you would comfort and encourage your people who truly belong to you and say, "I see those principles in my life. I see a difference from what I used to be. O God, thank you. Thank you for what you've done. Thank you for what still lies ahead, because there is more to come." Father, perhaps this teaching from your word has exposed others as imposters. They realize that this is all foreign to their lives and there is nothing about them that in any way reflects the spirit of which Christ spoke. Father, may you take this point of conviction and graciously lead them into your kingdom through repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

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