



Blessed Are The Gentle

Frequently we find ourselves interacting with a manager in some business or organization who appears to be charming at first but who is actually assertive, aggressive, and forceful. Some do not care about their employees – only themselves. We also cross paths with individuals who are kind, gentle, calm, and encouraging to their employees – sometimes sacrificing themselves. Both have authority, but one accomplishes his goals with grace and consideration for those working for him/her. The apparent kindness of some managers may not be real. It is very common today for businesses to send their managers to “charm school” in order to help them be kinder to their employees. One website recently made this statement, “Charmless [CEOs] who rely solely on positional power and expert authority for their influence are the ones left without dance partners as they try to forward their agendas” (www.cio.com). The message in this statement is simple. It is important to add charm to your personality in order to accomplish your goals.

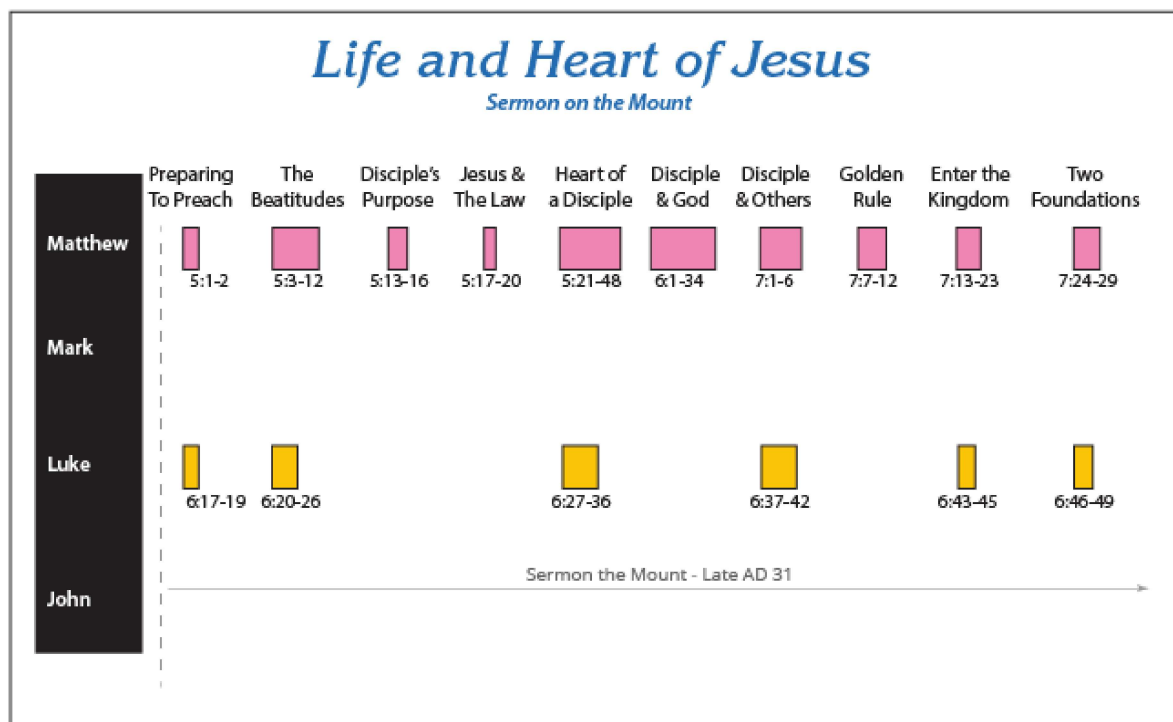
So Many Meanings

When we come to our passage for this study, we find a statement with which some may struggle.

**Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.” Matthew 5:5
(NASB)**

Jesus' words sound like weakness and someone who is a push-over. Jesus says that if you want to inherit the earth, you must be gentle. Does that sound like the characteristics of a business manager? Does this sound like a weak individual who yields to everyone and anyone? Would this individual stand up for himself/herself? Are you gentle? What did the crowd think about this statement? They had already heard that one must be poor in spirit in order to enter the kingdom of heaven and those who mourned would be comforted. Why did Jesus say this next? What did the crowd think? What did Jesus mean?

The key to understanding Matthew 5:5 hangs on the meaning of the Greek word *praus*, which is translated as "gentle." If you read Matthew 5:5 in your Bible, you might discover that Matthew 5:5 does not say "gentle." The New American Standard Bible (NASB) and New Living Translation (NLT) translate *praus* as "gentle." But the King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), and New International Version (NIV) translate the Greek word *praus* as "meek" and the New Century Version (NCV) and Contemporary English Version Bible (CEV) translate *praus* as "humble." This has occurred because the meaning of *praus* is hard to translate from the Greek to the English language. Some words are very difficult to translate from one language into another, and *praus* is one of these words. So what does *praus* mean? The answer to this question will unlock the meaning of Matthew 5:5.



What It Does Not Mean

One way to discover what the word does not mean is to see how it is used in other places in the Bible. For example, in Matthew 11:29 we read,

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

Matthew 11:29 (NASB)

The word “gentle” in this verse is *praus*. You will notice that the word “humble” also appears in this verse. It is translated from a different Greek word. The NASB, NLT, NIV, CEV, and NCV all translate these words the same way as “gentle” and “humble.” This is a clear indication that *praus* does not mean “humble.”

Colossians 3:12 will now reveal that *praus* does not mean some other things.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience . . . Colossians 3:12 (NASB)

The root word of “gentleness” in this verse is *praus*. This time we discover that *praus* does not mean compassion, kindness, humility, or patience. What do you think “gentle” means?

If we look at Galatians 5:22-23 we discover that “gentle” does not mean love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, or self-control.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB)

And Titus 3:1-2 reveals that *praus* does not have the idea of good manners.

I used to think that “gentle” referred to someone who had good manners. He or she was courteous, patient, kind, and caring. But that is not true.

What It Does Mean

So what does *praus* mean? The ancients would use *praus* to refer to a fever being reduced. It was used to refer to Xerxes “calming” his troops. It was also

used to refer to leniency for the guilty, to a soft voice, to be easygoing, to not be easily offended and to be considerate. The best sense of *praus* is illustrated for us by a trained dog, tamed horse, or a tamed lion – animals which were once wild.

When I was in my twenties, I remember discovering a stray, or wild cat in an old building. I attempted to capture the cat and all that I received for my efforts was an arm full of scratches. That cat was wild. It was not tame. It was unfriendly and a fighter. It was not *praus*. *Praus* has the idea of yielding like a domesticated animal. This third beatitude could read as, “Happy are those who lovingly defer or yield to others.” Is that you? Most of us want others to lovingly defer to us but not the reverse.

Praus does not have the idea of weakness. A horse or lion that has been tamed is not weak. The animal has learned to yield and to control its natural instincts. Over the centuries of time, many lion tamers have been mauled, chewed on, and hospitalized by a trained lion because they abused the animal in some way.

An Example – Moses

Moses is an example of a man who was *praus*. In Numbers 12:1-13 we read,

Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth. Numbers 12:3 (NASB)

This Old Testament passage was written in Hebrew. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, it was also translated into Greek – the Septuagint. This Greek translation uses *praus* for the word we read as “humble” in Numbers 12:3. Moses was *praus*. He was “tamed power.” Moses had killed an Egyptian soldier. He had stood before the Pharaoh of Egypt and declared that God wanted His people to be released from bondage. God had performed miracles through him. He had crossed the Red Sea, visited God on a mountain, and smashed the Ten Commandments in anger when he saw the Israelites worshipping another god. Moses was not weak. He had power, boldness, and discipline. Yet, he was *praus*. He was calm, not easily offended, and yielded to others.

In Numbers 12:1-13 we read that Miriam and Aaron had spoken against Moses because he had married a Cushite woman. So God came to his rescue and

rebuked both of them,

He said, "Hear now My words: if there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. "Not so, with My servant Moses, he is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?" Numbers 12:6-8 (NASB)

Apparently, Moses had not defended himself. So God did. That is an example of *praus*. Moses was not weak. He chose to not defend himself.

An Example – Jesus Christ

Jesus is a great example for us. In Matthew 21 we are told that Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Then the Holy Spirit reminds us that this was a fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in Zechariah 9:9.

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, 'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'" Matthew 21:4-5 (NASB)

The prophecy was correct. Jesus did ride on a donkey when he came into Jerusalem. If you had a choice between riding on a donkey or a horse which would you choose? Which would you prefer?

The Talmud quotes King Sapores, who after reading the prophecy in Zechariah, said, "You say your Messiah will come on an ass, I will send him a brave horse." In ancient times kings, generals, and noble men rode horses and not donkeys. Jesus did not come on a "brave horse" but on a poor animal of low regard. The God of the universe could have come on a "brave horse" to impress, to honor Himself, to obtain their submission, and to receive their adoration. But he did not. One who is *praus* does not have an "I" problem. Jesus was tamed power.

A. W. Tozer says that the man or woman who is characterized by *praus* is one who is nothing himself or herself.

In himself, nothing; in God everything.[1]

Neither Moses or Jesus were weak individuals. Yet, they were calm and yielding to others, except in matters related to sin or when someone was being abused.

Inherit The Earth

Jesus told His listeners that only the *praus* inherit the earth. We have already discovered that *praus* is one of the fruits of the spirit. *praus* is the result of the Holy Spirit working in the life of a man or woman. It is a spiritual virtue. It is not something that we can create within ourselves. There can be imitations of *praus* in our cultures but only the Holy Spirit can bring about real *praus*.

But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . gentleness [*praus*]. . . Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB)

Only Christians can be characterized by *praus*, and only Christians will inherit the future earth. With the Holy Spirit helping us, we will become more “tamed.”

Will we inherit anything else besides just the earth? Romans 8:16-17 says that we are heirs with Jesus.

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ . . . Romans 8:16-17 (NASB)

That means that everything that belongs to Jesus will belong to us. 1 Corinthians 6:9 adds that the “unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.” The *praus* will inherit the kingdom of God and the future earth. They will inherit everything. But those who never believe in Jesus and follow Him will not inherit anything but a Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15). This will occur because they never saw themselves as “poor in spirit” and never mourned their sin.



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Conclusion

Some years ago I had a dog named Prince. He was a Spitz and cream in color. He was very friendly. He was my friend, and I was his master. I trained him to

sit, lick my face on command, roll over, beg, shake his paw, stay and heel. He was great. One day a stray black cat adopted us and would spend his days and nights in our backyard. So eventually we accepted him and named him Cinder. He was not very friendly towards me, yet one day while I was watching the dog lying on the grass in our backyard with his legs outstretched, I saw the cat come to him and lie down between his outstretched legs. After a while they were both asleep. The unfriendly cat and my gracious dog were strong animals. They once were enemies but no longer. On another day I saw them eating together out of Prince's food bowl. I was amazed. Prince was an example of *praus*. He was a strong animal, especially compared to the smaller cat, yet he lovingly yielded his bowl of food to his former enemy.

Martin-Lloyd Jones writes this about "gentle," or "meek,"

The meek man is not proud of himself, he does not in any sense glory in himself. He feels that there is nothing in himself of which he can boast. It also means that he does not assert himself. You see, it is a negation of the popular psychology of the day which says, "Assert yourself," "express your personality." The man who is meek does not want to do so; he is ashamed of it. The meek man likewise does not demand anything for himself. He does not take all his rights as claims. He does not make demands for his position, his privileges, his possessions, his status in life. No, he is like the man depicted by Paul in Philippians 2. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus . . ."

Has the Holy Spirit tamed you yet or are you fighting for yourself?

References:

1. The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations. Baker Books. 1984. p. 672.
2. David Martyn Lloyd-Jone. Studies in the Sermon on the Mount. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1974. p. 69.

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