

“The longstanding assumption that meekness means Christians are to be quiet and weak has detrimentally affected our churches, our relationships, and, even, our public engagement. In this in-depth and faithful exposition of the third beatitude, Davy Ellison challenges that false assumption. Instead, based on Jesus’ life, ministry, teaching, and example, Ellison calls us to live in true meekness. Grounded in who we are in Jesus, empowered by his Spirit, and with his mindset of humility, we are to act with inner strength for the good of others and the glory of God. If you want to be encouraged by faithful exposition that makes helpful application, you will want to read *Meekness and Majesty*.”

Juan Sanchez

Senior Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church;
Author of *The Leadership Formula*

“In a world where people either tend to be squishy and weak or shrill and mean, and where many erroneously believe ‘the powerful will inherit the earth,’ Davy Ellison delivers a needed book on meekness. Through engaging illustrations, explanations, and arguments, he helps combat the misconception that meekness is weakness. This book will encourage you to walk on the Calvary Road in the footsteps of the meek and lowly Nazarene knowing we too who walk in meekness will one day ‘inherit the earth.’”

Nate Akin

Executive Director, The Pillar Network;
Director, Baptist 21

“Meekness is perhaps the least talked about, but most needed virtue in our Christian culture today. In an age of celebrity pastors and leaders, Davy Ellison gives a fresh and encouraging look at the type of people Christ calls us to be. This book will challenge and convict, and point you to the upside down kingdom Christ brings.”

Courtney Reissig

Author, *Teach Me To Feel:*

Worshipping Through the Psalms in Every Season of Life

“Let me start where Davy Ellison ends, ‘The paradoxical promise remains: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt.5:5).’ The paradoxical promise—what a great expression to summarise the theme of this very readable and accessible, but thought provoking and somewhat hard-hitting book. And how relevant the subject. Meekness is very much out of vogue, whether it be in the offices of corporate business, the hallways of political power or the arenas of professional sport. And sadly, it is out of vogue even within the triumphalistic, ego-centred, self-absorbed lives of many in the Christian church. How few within the church, dare I say, especially amongst leaders in the church, how few are truly meek. And, possibly more soberly, how few even desire to be meek. I hope that through this book many would be willing to play the waiting game of meekness, in the expectation that the paradoxical promise is indeed true.”

John Bell

Pastor, Covenanters Christian Church,
Harare, Zimbabwe

“In this volume, Davy Ellison provides a biblical-theological exploration of the theme of meekness, locating Jesus’ call for meekness within the Bible’s redemptive storyline from creation to new creation and showing how Jesus himself is the meek one *par excellence*. How would our lives, our churches, our witness be different if we all grew in godly meekness? Read this book to see the Bible’s call to a counter-intuitive, upside-down way of living. Read it if you long to inherit the earth.”

Stephen Witmer

Author, *Eternity Changes Everything*;
Council member of The Gospel Coalition

Meekness and Majesty

For
Desi Alexander, Sarah Dalrymple and Tom Moore.

All three of you have been significant influences on me in recent years and in each of you I have witnessed the meekness and gentleness of Christ. The Lord has used this to shape me and for that gift I am immensely grateful.

S.D. Ellison

*Meekness
&
Majesty*



Meekness & Majesty

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Foreword

Stop! Before you continue reading, I want to ask you a question: What does it mean to be “meek”? Try to define it in your own words.

I bet you struggled a bit. I bet you found it easier to define what it is *not* rather than what it is. If you define it like most people—as mousy, weak, inconsequential—I think you’re off target, at least according to the Bible and what Jesus had to say about those who are meek.

Why do we often get the definition of this important idea wrong, especially as Christians? Why do we pray so little about meekness? Why are so few sermons preached on it? After all, the inheritance of the earth is at stake, right?

I can guess why. As someone born in the U.S., I can tell you that meekness is not a very American idea. If it ever was, it has been lost for decades. Netflix documentaries feature the courageous. Social media “likes” the ridiculous. Attention goes to the brazen. The aggressor takes the cake. Not the meek. Never the meek. Or so it seems.

Matthew Henry, a 17th-century pastor, has the best definition of meekness that I’ve ever heard. Not only the best, but also the most challenging:

These meek ones are here represented as happy, even in this world. They are blessed, for they are like the blessed Jesus. They are like blessed God himself, who is Lord of his anger, and in whom fury is not. They are blessed, for they have the most comfortable, undisturbed enjoyment of themselves, their friends, their God; they are fit for

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any relation, and condition, any company; fit to live, and fit to die.

That sounds nothing like weak and mousy! No, it sounds like a challenge, a calling. Oh, that Christ's church would be meek! That all God's people would understand meekness and walk in it!

Davy Ellison has helped us take a giant step forward in our understanding of what it means to be meek. Gain from his wisdom and make it your own. May God make you fit to live and fit to die.

Matt Schmucker
Washington, DC
2023

Introduction: Taking Issue with Jesus

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). I take issue with these words, and I know who spoke them. But before you begin shaking your head and tutting at me disapprovingly, you too take issue with Jesus. Everyone takes issue with the message of Jesus at this point. We do so because there is one primary problem with Jesus’ declaration: no-one wants to be known as meek.

If I am honest, I do not want to be known as meek. If you are honest with yourself, you do not want to be known as meek. No one does. Meekness is a trait seldom if ever valued in modern society. It is a characteristic we rarely look for in one another. Consider the last application form you completed, or job interview you attended; I doubt you were asked to demonstrate the ways in which you are meek. Our issue with Jesus’ declaration is that we do not want to be meek.

Our aversion to meekness is so embedded in us that we are often blind to it. This is exemplified by Jerry Bridges’ friend who, after listening to a series of messages on the Beatitudes given by Jerry, told him he had actually skipped the message on meekness. He wasn’t interested in being meek.¹ Neither am I and neither are you.

There is a reason that we take issue with Jesus and his declaration. The reason is that we equate meekness with weakness. Matthew Henry observes: “Meekness is commonly despised

¹ Jerry Bridges recounts this story in *The Blessing of Humility* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016), 27.

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by the grandees of the age as cowardice.”² Meek people are weak people, or at least that is the image we have conjured up in our mind. D. A. Carson captures this humorously by suggesting that we think a meek person could be knocked over by a hard slap with a wet noodle.³ I am not sure if he is thinking of the foodstuff or the swimming aid. I prefer to picture the foodstuff; or to be more specific, someone teasing a long noodle out of a Pot Noodle, and then applying it ferociously to someone’s face! It is a rather ludicrous image, but it paints the picture: meek people are weak people, or so we tell ourselves.

Not only do we equate meekness with weakness, but we also believe that weak people will be left empty-handed. The world is directed, owned and exploited by those who are strong. Only those who are willing to be bold, take the bull by the horns and assert their authority, will gain an inheritance worth talking about. The powerful will inherit the earth, or so we tell ourselves. In addition to taking issue with Jesus’ call to be meek, therefore, we also take issue with his promise that the meek will inherit the earth. We behave as if it is a lie.

The belief that meekness equals weakness is a major misconception. Conducting our lives in a manner that implicates the veracity of Jesus’ words carries serious implications. This discovery is the reason you hold this book in your hand. I am familiar with the Beatitudes, but it was not until I was asked to preach on the third Beatitude—blessed are the meek—that I was confronted with the reality I have described above. Without realising it I had taken issue with Jesus and his teachings. To be kind, I had completely ignored Jesus’ declaration,

² Matthew Henry, *A Discourse on Meekness and Quietness of Spirit* (New York: American Tract Society, 1836), 48.

³ D. A. Carson, *Sermon on the Mount: An Exposition of Matthew 5–7* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), 22.

Introduction

“Blessed are the meek.” To be honest, I had actively cultivated in my mind the lie that meek people are weak people. I cannot afford to be weak, so I do not need to be meek. Perhaps you have come to the same realisation in your own life and that is why you hold this book in your hand. Maybe it is a discovery that you are yet to make.

This book aims to combat the misconception that meekness is weakness. As I studied Scripture, I soon discovered that meek people are actually the strongest of people. In short, the Bible defines meekness as controlling our personal preferences in the present in full knowledge of our future blessings. The application of this truth has a bearing for us in true Christian discipleship, rightly aspiring to leadership and faithfully enduring suffering. In all of this, Jesus Christ is our exemplar—he leads the way.

Three sections comprise the vision of a truly meek Christianity. In part one we learn Messianic meekness directly from Jesus. He defines meekness by correcting the prevailing expectations concerning the Messiah (chapter 1), teaching his disciples how they are to live (chapter 2) and finally exhibiting it himself (chapter 3). In part two we are invited to adopt the Messiah’s mindset as we explore Jesus’ worldview based on Psalm 37. The third Beatitude is a direct quotation from Psalm 37:11. This Old Testament background will demonstrate the multiple injustices God’s people face (chapter 4), the two destinies that await all people (chapter 5) and the one Judge who will eradicate all injustices and assign us our everlasting destiny (chapter 6). In part three we will catch a glimpse of the share of messianic majesty that awaits the meek. Both Psalm 37 and the third Beatitude promise an eternal inheritance for the meek

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(chapter 7) and, implicitly, a co-rulership with Jesus Christ (chapter 8).

By exploring meekness from a biblical perspective, we will quickly see that we do not take issue with Jesus when he declares, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Rather, Jesus takes issue with us.

Part One
Learning Messianic Meekness

A Tale of Two Kingdoms: Constant Correction

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.¹

So begins Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. Although these famous lines introduce Dickens' historical novel set before and during the French Revolution they could serve as an equally fitting introduction to the life and times of Jesus Christ. The era during which Jesus of Nazareth walked the dusty roads of the Near East was at once the best and worst of times.

The life and times of Jesus bring into greater focus not a tale of two cities, but a tale of two kingdoms. One of the key features of the ministry of Jesus was his focus on the kingdom of God (or heaven).² It is the opening motif of his ministry (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15), and throughout, Jesus repeatedly returns to this

¹ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Revised, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 2003), 5.

² The Gospel according to Matthew primarily uses the phrase kingdom of heaven as opposed to kingdom of God. Despite some suggesting that these are two different kingdoms, a careful reading of the context makes it abundantly clear that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Heaven are synonymous. It is likely that Matthew employs the term "heaven" out of respect for his Jewish readers who may have retained some qualms about saying God's name audibly.

same motif. Matthew helpfully records a series of parables that Jesus taught to explain further the kingdom of God (Matt. 13). In fact, preaching the good news of the kingdom of God was one of the purposes for the Father's sending Jesus (Luke 4:43; 8:1). Moreover, it was not enough for Jesus alone to preach the good news of the kingdom, and so he commands his disciples to join him in this venture (Luke 9:1–2, 57–62). This is something they do with great fervour and devotion after the ascension of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:3; 8:12; 19:8; 28:23, 30–31). This focus on the kingdom of God brings to the fore a tale of two kingdoms.

While there is widespread agreement that the kingdom of God forms a key motif in Jesus' preaching, it has proved a little more difficult to define what exactly Jesus means by the kingdom of God. There is no succinct definition recorded in the Gospels. Instead, Jesus introduces his explanations of the kingdom with the phrase: "the kingdom of God is like... ." Unfortunately, this has led to much debate. For our purposes it will be helpful to note one key feature of the kingdom of God as presented by Jesus. Vital to understanding the kingdom of God, as the Gospel authors record Jesus presenting it, is the realisation that it is not something we build. Rather, it is made for us. The kingdom of God is the experience of a new era in which a relationship with God is made possible through the saving work of Jesus Christ. More, it points forward to the permanent place in which this kingdom will be fully manifest: the new heavens and the new earth. The kingdom of God is the restoration of humanity's glad and willing submission to the perfect rule and reign of God which was lost through the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This is achieved

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by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and will be experienced in all its fullness in the new creation.

But I said that the life and times of Jesus Christ brought into focus a tale of two kingdoms, and so it does. The second kingdom is also known as the kingdom of God, but instead of being presented by Jesus it is a flawed view, presented by the Jews of his day. To be more specific it is a vision of the kingdom of God presented by particular groups of Jews. One group, known as the Essenes, withdrew from society, devoted themselves to the Law of God and awaited a supernatural army of heaven to arrive and establish the kingdom of God. They were ready to join the army of heaven and fight to establish the kingdom of God when the time came. The kingdom they envisioned, however, reflected the glory days of ancient Israel. The Essenes were awaiting a temporal kingdom located in a specific place.

Unlike the passive Essenes, a group known as the Zealots were true to their name. Although a poorly organised group, with very loose ties between different factions, they all had one common conviction: God would honour any military efforts to overthrow the kingdom of Rome and establish the kingdom of God. The Zealots actively attempted to do so through guerrilla warfare, assassination and stealing from the rich to give to the poor. In contrast to the Essenes, the Zealots were fighting for the kingdom now. They thought they could usher it in by their action.

Many Jews living in the first century did not belong to any particular group (such as Essenes, Zealots, Sadducees, or Pharisees). Even so, the hopes and dreams acted upon by these groups were the hopes and dreams hidden in the hearts of typical Jews. Thus, a tale of two kingdoms. The life and times of Jesus Christ was the best of times, the age of wisdom, the epoch

of belief, the season of light, the spring of hope, everything the Jews had long awaited and taking us all to heaven, as Messianic expectation of the impending kingdom of God reached fever-pitch. Indeed, as Jesus himself proclaimed, the kingdom of God had arrived (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:16–21). Yet the life and times of Jesus Christ was the worst of times, the age of foolishness, the epoch of incredulity, the season of darkness, the winter of despair, nothing at all like what the Jews had anticipated and taking us all the other way, as the Jews misplaced their Messianic expectation in something less than they should have. They did not understand the kingdom of God.

An Aversion to Meekness

What exactly has this tale of two kingdoms got to do with learning Messianic meekness? Everything. It demonstrates that our aversion to meekness is not a modern problem, it is an ancient one.

As we noted above, the key feature of Jesus' presentation of the kingdom of God was the realisation that it is not something we build. The Jews were eagerly anticipating the exact opposite. They expected the kingdom to be established in Jerusalem, and they expected to be participants in building the kingdom. The Jews hoped to do it themselves in the city they loved so dearly. Jesus established the heavenly Jerusalem as an expression of his kingdom; he had little interest in restoring its earthly counterpart. In addition to these mistaken ideas, the Jews knew they needed a charismatic leader. He was known as the Messiah. He had been promised by God. There were Scriptures that depicted the victory he would usher in when establishing the kingdom of God.

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The Old Testament is replete with the hope and promise of a mighty, majestic Messiah. Israel's Scriptures assured their reader that there was one who would be victorious. The careful reader could hardly miss the majesty with which this Messiah is described. From beginning to end the Old Testament offers the confidence that a Messiah was coming to establish the kingdom of God.

If the kingdom of God is the restoration of humanity's glad and willing submission to the perfect rule and reign of God which was lost through the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we might expect the first promise of the Messiah who would establish this kingdom to follow close on the heels of this disastrous disobedience in Genesis. And we are right. As God pronounces both judgement and salvation in Genesis 3 there is the remarkable promise that the woman's offspring will bruise the enemy's head (v. 15). There is a Messiah coming who will stamp on the head of the enemy. Yes, the enemy may strike the Messiah's heel, but that heel will crush the enemy's head.

The hope of this Messiah is given a royal hue in the historical books. This is particularly the case in 2 Samuel 7 as God promises to David, Israel's king *par excellence*, a son who will sit on his throne forever. A Davidic descendant will have a kingdom established forever by God. Matthew makes it unmistakably clear that in his mind Jesus is this king by including David in Jesus' genealogy (Matt. 1:1, 6, 17). The Messiah will be the king of an eternal kingdom—can this be anything other than the kingdom of God? The Jews were not stupid: they came up with the same answer as Matthew. This Jesus fits the mould of this Davidic Messiah.

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Add to these two references the idyllic king portrayed in Israel's poetry. Psalm 72, for example, speaks of a king who in his righteousness provides for his kingdom (vv. 1-7). This king will also rule and reign so that his enemies will lick the dust as they fall down before him (vv. 8-11). This sounds like the type of Messiah who will crush the enemy's head and sit on his throne forever. In fact, Psalm 72 tells of a king's reign that will endure as long as the sun and moon shine (v. 5). This is a majestic Messiah.

When the prophets come to add some finer detail to this broad brushstroke image the message does not change. The prophet Isaiah promises the forlorn people of God that there is a Davidic descendant coming (11:1). He will be endowed with God's Spirit, which will enable him to be wise and powerful (v. 2). This wisdom and might will be executed with justice and righteousness (vv. 3-5). Inevitably, there will be peace (vv. 7-9), and so all nations will flock to him (v. 10). This is the kind of Messiah everyone wants: strong, upright, fair and victorious.

If these promises were a menu, we would be salivating. If these promises were a holiday brochure, we would be on the plane. If these promises were an online dating profile, we would have the wedding organised. If these promises were in an estate agent's window, we would be knocking on the bank manager's door. It is a magnificent and majestic character sketch of the Messiah. Picking up on this concept Owen Strachan writes: "The biblical metanarrative unfolds with speed and momentum, building the reader's expectation for the Messiah who will rescue God's people ... and set up a greater kingdom than any can imagine."³ This is the type of Messiah that

³ Owen Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind* (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2019), 349.

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the Jews of the first century were desiring. It was someone bearing this description that would inaugurate the kingdom of God.

Now, it must be admitted that the evidence is skewed somewhat. The Jews appeared to overlook the suffering of a royal servant described in Isaiah's "Servant Songs" (42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:1-11; 52:13-53:12).⁴ They neglected to include the suffering of the king in the book of Psalms. There the king is abandoned by God (Ps. 22) and betrayed by a friend (Ps. 69). The discipline promised by God for kings who transgressed his law (2 Sam. 7:14) was apparently ignored. Those awaiting the Messiah did not seem to fancy all of this perceived weakness. Someone who was willing to endure all of this, despite being a majestic king, could rightly be described as meek. That, however, is unappealing.

The Jews were looking for a mighty Messiah. No one wanted a meek Messiah. After all, they thought, only a mighty Messiah could overthrow the powerful Roman Empire and truly usher in the kingdom of God. We cannot condemn the Jews for this belief. Consider the leaders we seek out today: powerful, compelling, strong, unwavering, focused. Just like the Jews, we do not look for meekness. We are attracted to the assertive, the brash and the commanding. But the kingdom of God is different, and leadership within the kingdom is different. The stipulations for appointing leaders in the local church—which is a tangible manifestation of the kingdom of

⁴ See my arguments at both a popular and academic level on reading Isaiah's 'Servant Songs' Christologically. S. D. Ellison, 'Who's the Mystery Guest in Isaiah's Servant Songs?', *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), 10 June 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/isaiahs-servant-songs>; S. D. Ellison, "'Man of Sorrows': A Christian Reading of Isaiah's Servant Songs," *Semănătorul: The Journal of Ministry and Biblical Research* 1, no. 2 (2021): 83-96.

God yet to be experienced in its fullness—laid out by Paul in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, make this clear. Commenting on those lists John Stott observes,

A gift for leadership usually includes a forceful disposition. But pastors who have learned their leadership style from Jesus Christ will never ride rough-shod over other people's sensibilities. They will lead by example not by force, and by humble service not by self-assertion.⁵

The Jewish population in first century Jerusalem was awaiting an enigmatic figure who would win a following and lead them to victory. They were not looking for meek and mild; they were looking for mighty and wild. Do we look for anything different? All of us apparently possess an aversion to meekness.

A Mistaken Interpretation

When Jesus Christ began his public ministry, the Jews thought they had found whom they were waiting for. To be fair the accounts of Jesus' life and ministry recorded in the Gospels are rather remarkable. Who wouldn't be just a little impressed with someone who taught with authority, healed others and was ultimately confessed as the Messiah?

Matthew is keen to impress upon his reader the striking nature of Jesus' teaching. He does this in part by placing Jesus' teaching in five distinct blocks spread throughout his Gospel (5–7; 10; 13; 18; 23–25). The response to the first block of teaching reveals the impact that it had on its hearers: "And when Jesus had finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, Bible Speaks Today (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 177.

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authority, and not as their scribes” (7:28–29). The mighty, majestic Messiah would surely be able to teach with authority. How else could he gather an army around him to establish the kingdom of God?

In addition to teaching with authority, Jesus miraculously healed others. A snapshot of this is recorded for us in Matthew 8–9. In these two chapters Jesus heals a leper, a centurion’s servant and Peter’s mother-in-law; he proceeds to calm the sea, exorcise demons and heal a paralytic. Once more the response recorded by Matthew reveals the impact of these miracles. Jesus’ own disciples marvelled, wondering who this Jesus really was (8:12). Those who knew the demon-possessed men before their exorcisms were terrified at the power of Jesus and begged him to leave their city (8:34). Those who saw the paralytic healed were afraid but gave glory to God (9:8). The mighty, majestic Messiah would surely be endowed with a similar divine power. How else could he overthrow such a powerful opponent as the Roman Empire?

After witnessing his teaching and miracles, Jesus’ disciples begin to realise just who he is. This realisation is revealed in Peter’s confession. Jesus is aware of the gossip, and so he asks the disciples about it. “Who do people say I am?” Jesus asks (Matt. 16:13). There are a variety of answers given: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, really any of the prophets (v. 14). Then Jesus turns the question on his disciples. “Very well then,” replies Jesus, “who do you say that I am?” (v. 15). Peter speaks for the whole group with the declaration: “You are the Messiah” (v. 16). The confession is made! Someone has dared to utter the idea that this Jesus of Nazareth may actually be the one everyone has been waiting for.

Expectant Jews undoubtedly watched this man named Jesus with bated breath, high hopes and an ever-expanding excitement. They must have been open-mouthed as they listened to and discussed his teaching. They must have been wide-eyed as they heard reports of and witnessed his miracles. They must have murmured, “This could be him,” as rumours of Peter’s confession were passed on. To be fair, these diligent and expectant Jews could be forgiven for beginning to think: “This Jesus could be the one to lead an army and take back the Promised Land.” But instead, Jesus pronounces: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). This is not the battling rally cry that the Jews had anticipated.

The Necessity for Constant Correction

I hope you have followed the logic throughout this chapter. The Jews, with hope burning painfully, were eagerly awaiting the Messiah. Their Scriptures promised him; their circumstances demanded him; the kingdom of God would only be established with his appearance. All of this expectation is swirling around in the first century, and then suddenly a man appears in the public eye. “The kingdom of God is here, repent and believe” (Mark 1:15). It is not simply a claim. Jesus backs up this declaration with astonishing teaching, terrifying miracles, and a band of brothers who after living with him day in, day out, confess him as the Messiah.

At this point we want to shout out, “Do it!” “Establish the kingdom.” “Assert yourself.” Everyone has been awaiting this mighty and victorious Messiah; everyone is desperate for him to yell “Charge!” They would follow him into battle without hesitation. Yet all that is heard is: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). As Jerusalem twitches

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with expectancy, Jesus seems to press pause with this third Beatitude. Leon Morris notes that Jesus is teaching us: “Self-assertion is never a Christian virtue; rather, it is Christian to be busy in lowly service and refuse to engage in the conduct that merely advances one’s personal aims.”⁶ This must be why Jesus urges those he heals to refrain from spreading the news (Matt. 9:30). He is seeking to calm this simmering hope.

The Jews were right, Jesus is the Messiah. It is just that their understanding of the Messiah and his kingdom was deficient. The kingdom they thought this Messiah was bringing was materially and militarily orientated. The Messiah was going to lead them to victory through violence. Conquest was the order of the day. But Jesus the Messiah dismisses this view with the third Beatitude. It is the meek, not the mighty, who will enter this kingdom and inherit the earth.⁷

Jesus is correcting the people of his own day, and his own people today. A biblical understanding of the kingdom of God must be holistic, fully-orbed. The kingdom of God is the restoration of humanity’s glad and willing submission to the perfect rule and reign of God which was lost through the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This undoubtedly incorporates victory won by the mighty Messiah, but it also includes the Messiah’s heel being struck by the enemy. In meekness Jesus will embody the perceived weakness in the Old Testament’s portrayal of the suffering Messiah.

All of this to say that we cannot understand meekness until we understand the kingdom of God. More, we cannot comprehend the Christian life until we grasp the nature of Christ’s

⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester: Apollos, 1992), 98.

⁷ This paragraph was aided by comments in D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Reprint (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 63–64.

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kingdom. There is of course more to the kingdom than meekness, but there is not less. If the Messiah is meek, it follows that the Messiah's people must also be meek. If the true kingdom of God is established by a king of meekness, it follows that its citizens must also be marked by meekness. This is the constant correction that is ever necessary. As Matthew Henry lamented: "We are called Christians ... we name the name of the meek and lowly Jesus, but how few are actuated by his spirit, or conform to his example!"⁸

The correction Jesus offers, however, is not merely implicit. He speaks directly to this issue with the third Beatitude, and that is our focus in the next chapter.

⁸ Henry, *A Discourse on Meekness and Quietness of Spirit*, 79.

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