

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## Happy Are The Humble

by Dan Trygg

“Happy are the meek, for *they* shall inherit the land.”

Matthew 5:5

“Do not fret because of evildoers, be not envious toward wrongdoers. <sup>2</sup> For they will wither quickly like the grass and fade like the green herb. <sup>3</sup> Trust in Yahweh and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. <sup>4</sup> Delight yourself in Yahweh; and He will give you the desires of your heart. <sup>5</sup> Commit your way to Yahweh, trust also in Him, and He will do it. <sup>6</sup> He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noonday. <sup>7</sup> Rest in Yahweh 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. <sup>8</sup> Cease from anger and forsake wrath; do not fret; it leads only to evildoing. <sup>9</sup> For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for Yahweh, they will inherit the land. <sup>10</sup> Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there. <sup>11</sup> But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.” Psalms 37:1-11

Once again, Jesus employs a statement that would have sounded almost *paradoxical*. The *meek* are *fortunate* because the land will be *theirs*? This seems to go against the grain of observed worldly wisdom. The ones who *seem* to get ahead, who *seem* to come to power and wealth are often those who are arrogant and proud, the ones who claw their way to the top. It was the *aggressive* person who *wrested* from others their property, or imposed heavy taxes upon them. This was the experience of the first century Jew, at least. They were living in a land *promised to them by God, ...but one which had been overrun by pagan overlords*, brutal people who *oppressed* them and who *lived scandalously*. It seemed a *great injustice*, even a *slap* in God's face, that such things could happen, and seem to go on and on. To those who knew God, and were zealous for God's Kingdom, the temptation was to take matters in their own hands and attempt to throw the invaders out. Unfortunately, those who tried it usually ended up *dead*. The Herods and the Romans did not play around when it came to insurrection. The common people were no match for the Roman legions, as history would soon show. The other temptation would be to become *angry, sullen and vexed toward God*, because He did not seem to be doing what He “should do” in enforcing His justice upon those who disregard Him, or in answering the prayers of His people. Someone has said that a cynic is an idealist who has been hurt or disillusioned. There were *lots* of cynics in Israel in Jesus' day.

Jesus' words here are a direct allusion to the first part of Psalm 37:11, “the meek will inherit the land”. The quotation is so clear that no one who was acquainted with the LXX OT could have missed it. Psalm 37, like Psalm 73, deals with the problem of *why do the unrighteous seem to prosper, and the righteous seem to struggle?* How does “meekness” seem to fit into this context? What is “meekness”, anyway? Unfortunately, our English word does not effectively communicate the flavor of the Greek word. There are three basic ingredients to the Greek word, *praus*: (1.) Humility, or not thinking yourself to be above others; (2.) Teachableness; and, (3.) Gentleness toward others. This is *not* a word that means being a wimp, or being afraid, or timid, however. It refers to the attitude and demeanor of being *willing to listen and yield to others, without compromising your true self*.

Interestingly, in the *Greek culture*, where *man* was the measure of all things, and the highest good would be independence and *self-fulfillment*, meekness was *looked down upon as a negative quality*. To them, being considerate *of others*, and yielding to the preferences or conditions *of others*, was too *self-limiting*. It seemed to them to be almost contradictory to what was valuable and important for a person to become, ...an independent, self-directed, self-fulfilled individual. *Biblically, however, it is held in high esteem*. Moses was said to be the meekest man in all the earth (Num. 12:3), and Jesus characterized Himself as being “meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). Neither of them could be accused of being wimps. Having a leader who *did not think of themselves as more important than you, one who was teachable and approachable, and who was gentle in his treatment of those around him, were qualities that were desirable*, if rare (cf. Phil. 2:19-21; Ezk. 34). Matthew quotes from Zech. 9:9 (LXX), which uses the *same* Greek word, to describe Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:5), “Behold, your King is coming to you, *meek*, and mounted on a donkey, even a colt, the foal of a beast of burden”. This was a very *bold* move, openly parading into the city with crowds of people shouting in celebration, “Hosanna to the son of David” (21:9). This was *not* self-effacing, but neither was it *arrogant* or *inappropriate*. *Boldness, even the acceptance of public recognition, was not contradictory to the characteristic of meekness*. Humility is *not* self-effacing. Instead, a humble person sees him or herself *accurately*, ...as *God* sees them, no more, and no less. What is critical is that a person see him or herself as given gifts and responsibilities from God. The *meek* person does *not* run away from this responsibility. He or she does not avoid taking up the task which God has assigned to him or

her. The meek person recognizes the grace and strength which has been accorded them by God, and takes the appropriate steps to fulfill their assignment to bring God the glory, not for any selfish vanity. **One of the definitions of meekness is “power under control”**, because the meek person *accurately perceives* their strengths and abilities, but chooses to not to overstep inappropriately to promote self-interest. **They wait for God’s timing and God’s plan, but then they are men and women of action.**

Let’s go back to Psa. 37. It is clear that this passage is written to keep the one who values the honor of God in a place of meekness, when surrounded by injustice and evil. **Meek people know their limits, and wait for God to show them what to do and when to act.**

**The first eleven verses of Psa. 37 are full of warnings against inappropriate anger.** In verse 1, the word translated as “fret” means “to burn”, and in this particular form, refers to “heating oneself in vexation”. **What can make the people of God “hot” with vexation or exasperation? It was the fact that evildoers seem to sin with impunity and get away with it!** It was making a mockery of God and of all that this believer was holding dear. Yet, God seemed silent, unhearing. David’s response? **Let God be the judge** (vs. 2; cf. Psa. 73:16-20). **He will deal with them in His own time and way.** Again in vs. 7, “do not fret (become ‘hot with vexation’) because of him who prospers in his way, because of him who carries out wicked schemes. *Cease from anger* (lit., ‘let go’ or ‘withdraw’ from anger) and *forsake* (lit., ‘leave, abandon’) wrath; do not fret (‘make yourself burn with exasperation’ – The *third* time this word is used in these first eight verses!); it *leads* only to evildoing...” Wow! Apparently this is a serious problem! **If we continue to hold onto and feed feelings of resentment or anger** (And frustration, exasperation, and vexation *are* forms of anger!), **these unresolved emotions churning inside of us will eventually lead us to act in ways that are wrong.**

**What are we supposed to do if we have feelings like these?** Psalm 37 gives us some *very specific* and *practical* counsel. **(1.) Stop heating yourself up** with exasperation. This word picture implies that *we are doing something* to contribute to building up hostility and frustration. **What are we doing? We are focusing on the problem. Stop it!** “Do not fret” means that we have the *ability* to not do it (vss. 1,7,8). Stop it. Stop thinking about what is making you angry. **Two other word pictures are to “cease, let go, or withdraw from” anger (vs. 8) and “leave, forsake, abandon, desert” wrath** (vs. 8). Again, we are told to do this because we *can*. It may come back, but *as often as it does*, we are to once again stop feeding this anger. “For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down” (Prov. 26:20). Sometimes *we* become the “whisperer” to keep feeding fuel to the anger-fire in our own minds. **We can get fixated on some past injury or injustice and keep fanning those smoldering hurts back into open flames of rage and bitterness.** If *we* are not doing it *to ourselves*, we can be sure that *the enemy will take every advantage he can* of any area where he can *hook us* with some offense, real or imagined, against God or man. We are to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (II Cor. 10:5). The word picture here is to “take every thought captive at the point of a spear”, which means that we need to deal with *each* thought, *when* it comes up. We can’t rely on some blanket prayer. It is not about getting *God* to do something. It is about *us* taking responsibility to *take action* in our attitude and thought life. **(2.) Direct your heart and focus toward God.** There are a number of specific admonitions given to us here. Trust in *the Lord* (vs. 3,5). Delight yourself *in the Lord* (vs. 4). Commit your way *to the Lord* (vs. 5 – This means give Him unconditional permission to make of your life whatever He desires.). Rest *in the Lord* (lit., ‘be silent, be still, become unspeaking’) and wait patiently (lit., ‘longingly’) *for Him* (vs. 7). Wait (here the word means to ‘linger’ and ‘look *eagerly* for’) *for Him* (vs. 9). **(3.) Try to get an eternal perspective.** God *will* judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous, whether in the present time or in the Kingdom to come. We can observe the examples of this around us, just as we can observe the times when His judgment seems to be delayed. **We have a choice what to focus on.** We can count our blessings, or carp about our perceived lacks. We can *be scandalized* by the apparent escape of godless people from God’s wrath, or *we can observe when judgment does* fall, or, better yet, *rejoice* when He brings a sinner to repentance. *He* is God, *we* are *not*. His ways are *not* our ways, but He *is* righteous, holy, just and loving. **We can entrust these matters to Him. We can, and must, release them into His care, if we are going to be able to have peace and be effective for Him in this world.** In the end, the meek toward God (those who do not presume to know better than He) *will* inherit the land. **(4.) Live a life of active faith and obedience.** We are not just to “trust in the Lord”. We are admonished to “do good”. We are to dwell in the land and *cultivate* faithfulness (vs. 3). Later verses tell us to *be gracious* and *help others* (vss. 21,26,27). Service to God and human beings are *choices* we make to be responsible to God.

When Jesus uttered this third “declaration of happiness”, these scripture-saturated Jews would have thought of Psalm 37. What was this utterance supposed to mean? **Jesus was calling His followers to an “other-worldly” Kingdom** (Jn. 18:36), one where their *ultimate vindication* and *hope will be fulfilled*, ...where they *will* inherit the land. **They need to stay meek toward God and men, knowing that they have Kingdom-business to do here**, even though the full revelation of God’s justice, blessings or rewards might not come until later.