

Illustrated Bible Life

“Gentle Jesus”

Remember the phrase, “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild”? I often heard this in years past, primarily from those who wanted to point out its fallacy. Jesus didn’t “pull any punches” when dealing with His opponents, they said. He took a whip to the moneychangers and overturned their tables in the temple courts (Matt. 21). He called the religious leaders “whitewashed tombs” (23:27).

In fact, Jesus had many harsh words for the religious leaders (see e.g., 6:5, 16; 9:3-4; 12:39ff.; 16:5; 23:13ff., etc.), who held themselves up as examples to follow and thereby led astray those who looked up to them. The religious leaders claimed to have all the knowledge of what it meant to be God’s people, and the people—whose lives probably consisted of hard work from sunup to sundown six days a week—trusted their leaders to teach them correctly each Sabbath. Having no time for deep religious study, they depended on their leaders to teach the truth of God’s Word.

It becomes quickly obvious, however, that Jesus’ harsh words were not simply anger at the arrogance of the religious elite, but because of His great love and compassion for His people (see e.g., 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34). God wants His people to not only *not* do evil, but to go the extra mile and *do good*. The parable of the sheep and goats (25:31-46) is a chilling warning of what will befall those who think they are religious because they have adopted the trappings of religion but have not embraced Jesus in their hearts.

In our studies this quarter, we spend a lot of time looking at Jesus’ teachings. In them, we discover that God loves us too much to allow us to settle for anything less than what He offers us. That’s why Jesus’ parables have a way of striking at the heart of a person. God wants us to experience citizenship in the kingdom of God, even when it costs us. That’s why when we think we are doing well, God calls us out, and we realize we have become the religious elite. That’s why Jesus came, died, and rose again—through a right relationship with Him, we may experience life to the fullest extent (John 10:10).

What about “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild”? This title does indeed apply—it applies to Jesus’ love and compassion for people everywhere. To everyone, Jesus does indeed say with open arms, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (11:28-30).

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