

This winter, I have been preaching through a sermon series that I have entitled Revival. My hope in this series is to lead us into a deeper experience of God, that God would give us greater spiritual life and vitality both individually and collectively, that we would experience more of His love and power, and that through us, He would bring His salvation and redemption to our world.

Earlier in this series, I mentioned what Richard Lovelace calls in his book *Dynamics of Spiritual Renewal* the **two preconditions of revival: an increased awareness of the holiness of God, and an increased awareness of the depth of our sin**. By holiness, I mean that God is transcendentally separate from us in His perfection. By sin I mean our rebellion against God, our inability to measure up to His holy standard, and our brokenness. The more we are aware of the greatness of God, the high expectations of God, the incredible promises of God, along with our own inability to live up to His expectations and the terrible effect of our sin on ourselves and others, the closer we are to revival. You want to see revival in your life and in the church? Pray for those two things – Lord, increase my awareness of your holiness and the depth of my sin.

Over the past few weeks, I've been trying to dive deeper into the second part, the awareness of the depth of our sin, and to do so by looking at the Beatitudes, the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes describe the blessed life, the characteristics of the man or woman who is favored by God. In this sense, if we want to live a life that is blessed or favored by God, then the beatitudes are something we should all pay close attention to and strive to live out. But on the other hand, the characteristics emphasized by Jesus are incredibly countercultural, running precisely against what we are taught is the happy life by our world and often by Christian teachers as well. And so, they require a huge shift in our perspective. This morning, we will be looking at Matthew 5:6 – **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."**

If we're going to understand what Jesus means, we have to answer a few questions: What is righteousness? What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness? What does it mean to be filled? What do I do if I do not hunger and thirst for righteousness?

What is righteousness?

In the context of this passage, righteousness is not just being a good or moral person. Righteousness is being in right relationship to God and others. It is living in conformity to God's will, living as the person God has created you to be. It is

loving God with our whole heart, soul, strength, and mind, and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness?

Remember that the Beatitudes build off each other. We begin by coming **poor in spirit, recognizing that we are spiritually bankrupt, dependent upon God for everything**. We have no spiritual resume which we can present before God, nothing that is not stained with sin and self-centeredness. But this is not just an unemotional fact. As we consider our spiritual poverty, we see how our sin has negatively impacted our own lives, the lives of others, and especially our God, whose innocent Son died to pay the penalty for our sins. Remember this quote from The Valley of Vision that I shared two weeks ago:

I have cause to loathe myself,
 And not to seek self-honour,
 For no one desires to commend his own dunghill
**My country, family, church
 Fare worse because of my sins”**

As we see and mourn for our sin, we become meek in our relationship with God and others as a result. With respect to God, we realize that the smartest thing we can do is to submit ourselves to God’s good leadership, like a wild horse submitting to its rider. And with respect to others, we are so aware of our sin that we are willing to take the lowest place in relationship to others, because we know that anything good in us is a complete gift of God’s grace. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “Meekness is essentially a true view of oneself, expressing itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others... The man who is truly meek is the one who is truly amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do.”

This brings us to verse 6. As we see the gap between who we are and what is possible, between how we are living and who God has created us to be, between what we are believing and the promises that God has made, we find within us a growing hunger for God, for godliness, for righteousness, to know Him and be like Him. As we have seen the horror for what our sin has done, and mourned for how it has impacted others, now we long to be free from it, to deal with it no longer, to be holy. We find a burning desire to be done with sin, because sin separates us from God, so that we can walk with the Spirit.

The spirit of Matthew 5:6 is exemplified in David's words in **Psalm 42:1-2**: *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

And also in **Psalm 63:1** - *O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

It's also seen in Paul's words in **Philippians 3:7-14** - *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, **becoming like him in his death,** ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

The man who hungers and thirsts for righteousness wants more of Christ and less of sin and self in his life. As David Martin Lloyd Jones said, *"The man who truly examines himself in the light of the Scriptures not only discovers that he is in the bondage of sin; still more horrible is the fact that he likes it, that he wants it. Even after he has seen it is wrong, he still wants it. But now the man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is a man who wants to get rid of that desire for sin, not only outside, but inside as well."*

Notice that blessedness does not come from chasing after the blessing. Happiness doesn't come from pursuing happiness. Blessedness is a by-product of seeking after righteousness, being rightly-related to God, being holy, walking in the will of God. The truth is that even among Christians, there are some who chase after blessedness, running after experiences of God instead of running after holiness and righteousness. When you put happiness ahead of righteousness, you get neither.

What does it mean to be filled?

You will have what you have been longing for, what you have been pursuing, what you have been craving. You will be filled with righteousness. You will have God.

Jeremiah 29:13 - You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Psalm 37:4 - Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

That verse doesn't mean delight in God and He will give you a Porsche. Delight yourself in God and He will give you Himself. And as we are filled, we hunger and thirst for more of God. As we taste His goodness, we want more. And notice that it is passive – we will be filled. We don't fill ourselves. But as we come hungry and thirsty, we will be filled, just like when we come poor in spirit and empty, we will be filled with His Spirit.

And one day, when you are finally with Him for eternity, you will be filled completely. You will be perfected. You will know and have God.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. This verse is an incredible test of whether or not you are a believer, or of what kind of believer you are. Does your soul resonate with this verse or not? As I have spoken, do you find within you a hunger and thirst welling up? What do you hunger and thirst after? What are you desperate for? What do you crave? Is it God, or is it something else?

The reality is that none of us perpetually hungers and thirsts for God. So:

What do I do if I do not hunger and thirst for God?

Where do you turn if you do NOT relate to Jesus' words?

1) Look again at the depth of your sin

Go back to the beginning of the Beatitudes to understand your poverty of spirit and the reasons you have to mourn. Look full in the face at what lies within you and what you are capable of. Stop lying to yourself and be honest about the evil within. If you truly understood your capacity for evil and the horrors you could unleash upon the world with one wrong decision, you would run after righteousness with all your being.

In 1983, Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes interviewed a man named Yehiel De-Nur, a survivor of Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp. Twenty-two years earlier, in 1961, De-Nur had testified at the trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of the men primarily responsible for the holocaust. When De-Nur had entered the courtroom to testify against Eichmann, he had started to sob uncontrollably before collapsing. The judge had to restore order in the court after the commotion that ensued.

In the 60 Minutes interview, Wallace asked De-Nur what he had been feeling there in the court. Was it post-traumatic stress? Rage? De-Nur answered by saying that when he walked in and saw Eichmann, he suddenly realized that he was no demon. He was not a superman either. He was an ordinary human being, exactly like De-Nur. And suddenly De-Nur became terrified about himself. **He told Wallace that he realized that he was capable of doing the exact same things.**

And that is correct. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn put it, *“If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”*

The seeds of murder, adultery, and every other sin live in our heart, and in the right conditions, they could grow and happen. The Nazis weren't some special breed of evil people. They grew out of one of the most civilized and advanced countries in the world. The terrible truth is that we are all capable of being Nazis.

Gordon MacDonald, who served for many years as pastor of Grace Chapel in Lexington, Mass, was the president of InterVarsity in the mid 1980's when he had an affair that cost him his job. In an article for Christianity Today years later, as he reflected upon church leaders who fall into sin, he wrote:

“From those terrible moments of twenty years ago in my own life I have come to believe that there is a deeper person in many of us who is not unlike an assassin. This deeper person can be the source of attitudes and behaviors we normally stand against in our conscious being. But it seeks to destroy us and masses energies that – unrestrained – tempt us to do the very things we ‘believe against.’ If you have been burned as deeply as I (and my loved ones) have, you never live a day without remembering that there is something within that, left unguarded, will go on the rampage.”

Paul described this dynamic in Romans 7:

Romans 7:15-25 - *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me **that does it.** ²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

You have the capacity for incredible evil.

Brennan Manning put it this way: “When I get honest, I admit I am a bundle of paradoxes. I believe and I doubt, I hope and get discouraged, I love and I hate, I feel bad about feeling good, I feel guilty about not feeling guilty. I am trusting and suspicious. I am honest and I still play games. Aristotle said I am a rational animal; I say I am an angel with an incredible capacity for beer.”

Think of how James described our words:

James 3:5-6 - *Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*

2) Look again at God's promises

Fear of what sin can do if unchecked can drive us to God and give us a deeper desire for righteousness. But on the other hand, so can a vision of what God has promised to us when contrasted with the current state of our lives. You are capable of so much evil, but in Christ, by the power of His Holy Spirit, you are also capable of incredible goodness, if you can kill your sin and run after righteousness. Within you lies the power to transform the world. Do not forget what Paul prayed:

Ephesians 1:17-19 - *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*

If you truly believed all that God has promised for you, you would stop fooling around with things that will never satisfy, and you would run after righteousness with everything you have. As C.S. Lewis put it:

“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Go after righteousness because without it, you will shipwreck your life and the lives of those you love. But also, go after righteousness because with God’s power within you, you will leave an incredible legacy in this world.

3) Stop filling up on things that will not satisfy

There’s nothing worse than making a nice meal and watching people snacking an hour beforehand, knowing that they will not be hungry for what you have made. Is that not how God feels, watching His children fill up on things that will not satisfy them when He has offered them life to the fullest?

Isaiah 55:1-3 - *"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. ³ Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.*

Jeremiah 2:13 - *"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own **cisterns**, **broken cisterns** that cannot hold water.*

Nothing in this world will satisfy. All the things you hunger and thirst for, the things you crave and desire and run after, will never fill the God-shaped hole in your heart.

As Augustine wrote in Confessions, “*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.*”

Be honest. What are you desiring? What are you craving? Excitement? Predictability? Love? Sex? Food? Novelty? Escape? Freedom? Companionship? These are good things. But if you run after these things as ultimate things that you believe will fill you, you will not be satisfied. Hunger and thirst for righteousness, go after God above all else, and you will be filled.

Consider this quote, from Tim Keller’s book ***The King’s Cross***:

“On January 7th, 2007, the New York Times Magazine ran an interesting article called ‘Happiness 101.’ It described positive psychology, a branch of psychology that seeks to take a scientific, empirical approach to what makes people happy. Researchers in this field have found that if you focus on doing things and getting things that give you pleasure, it does not lead to happiness but produces what one researcher has dubbed ‘the hedonic treadmill.’ You become addicted to pleasure, and your need for the pleasure fix keeps growing: You have to do more and more. You’re never really satisfied, never really happy. According to the article, scientific studies have shown that the best way to increase your happiness is actually to do acts of selfless kindness, to pour yourself out for needy people. The main researcher’s goal was to show that ‘there are ways of living that (research shows) lead to better outcomes.’ Some of these better outcomes were ‘close relationships and love,’ ‘well-being,’ and ‘meaning and purpose in life.’

The researcher pointed out that when you are leading an unselfish life of service to other people, it gives you a sense of meaning, of being useful and valuable, of having a life of significance. So, naturally, he argued that you should live this way in order to achieve these ‘better outcomes.’

Now, of course, this study leaves God out of the equation, and paradoxically advocates living unselfishly for selfish reasons. But those objections aside, the results of the study confirm what I am saying. If you spend your life pursuing the things of this world, the pleasures of this world, the happiness of this world, you will not be satisfied. Like anyone with a drug addiction can tell you, your tolerance grows, and you need more and more of your addiction to bring you pleasure, until you are trapped. Go after God, live to love and serve Him and to love and serve others, and you will be filled.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. One of the best ways to stop filling up on things that will not satisfy is the Biblical discipline of fasting. Fasting is choosing not to feed your earthly hungers and desires, but instead to turn to God to satisfy you instead. We will be doing a 21-day fast beginning on March 6th. What do you need to stop looking to for your satisfaction and comfort, and begin to look to Him to fill you instead?

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