

Lesson 5

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger After Righteousness

The pursuit of God in the most extreme terms

Matthew 5.6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Introduction

At first glance, the fourth beatitude is quite paradoxical. How can one be desperately hungry or thirsty, and yet at the same time find satisfaction? What imagery is conveyed when Jesus speaks about hungering or thirsting? What is the righteousness disciples are to seek after? And finally, how can we find true satisfaction while we live in this world looking for the next?

The fourth beatitude is the logical outcome of the previous three, all of which describe how we relate to God. It is the positive of the three previous negatives. The more we lay aside what we have, the more we will long for what God does.²³ This beatitude is actually a great way to test your spiritual life. If you are not hungering and thirsting after righteousness, then you need to revisit your commitment to the first three beatitudes:

- To be *poor in spirit* means to reject **self-seeking**. *I must die to myself.*
- To *mourn* means to reject **self-satisfaction**. *I must face up to my sinfulness.*
- To be *humble* means to walk away from being **self-serving**. *I must surrender to God's control.*

Hungering and Thirsting

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst...

As Americans we may have a very difficult time identifying with the type of hunger and thirst to which Jesus refers. But you can know without a doubt that Jesus' audience did ... as the lack of basic resources for the most vital of human needs was much more a part of life in ancient times. This was much more than a passing twinge of hunger or thirst ... it described intensity and desperation. Think starvation.

Physical thirst and hunger are some of the strongest and deepest physical impulses we experience and here Jesus makes the application to the spiritual. This is the *desperate hungering to be conformed to God's will*.²⁴ As you read the wording here, note the verb tense. The hungering and thirsting is continual. There

²³ MacArthur, p. 183.

²⁴ Hughes, p. 41.

is never enough. In his best times, David was always hungry for God: *God, you are my God; I eagerly seek you. I thirst for you; my body faints for you in a land that is dry, desolate, and without water*, Psalm 63.1.²⁵

It was John Darby who said, “To be hungry is not enough; I must be really starving to know what is in God’s heart toward me. When the prodigal son was hungry, he went to feed on the husks, but when he was starving, he turned to his father.”²⁶

We will hunger and thirst after righteousness when we:

- Possess a deep recognition of our personal unrighteousness.
- See our desperate need for God ... possessing a hunger for righteousness that only the Father can satisfy.
- Understand its constant, consistent need ... hungering and thirsting are not passing feelings.
- Feel its deep pain ... like actual hunger and thirst.

Righteousness

Righteousness is used five times²⁷ in the Sermon on the Mount. In this context it is referring to a subjective righteousness that works itself out through righteous living ... or obedience to God’s will. Some scholars associate the word with upright behavior and the desire to see God’s standards established and obeyed in every area of life. Food, for the righteous person, is to do the will of God. *My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work*, ... John 4.34.

It's not optional

Just as you can’t live physically without food or water, you cannot live spiritually without righteousness. Its desire is at the very essence of our spiritual life, where we continually desire to be more and more like Jesus by growing in righteousness.

What is your view toward obedience?

Do we possess a passionate desire for our sin to be replaced with virtue? Do we yearn to replace disobedience with obedience? Do we have an eagerness to comply? As we look out at our world, do we grieve over all the unrighteousness we see? Does that make us long for heaven more? Heaven is the “home of righteousness,” 2 Peter 3.13.²⁸

The following passages illustrate the type of attitude we should have:

- Psalm 119.97: “How I love your instruction....”
- Romans 7.22: “For in my inner self I delight in God’s law...”

²⁵ See also Psalm 17.15.

²⁶ MacArthur, p. 181.

²⁷ Matthew 5.6, 10, 20; 6.1, 33.

²⁸ Carson, D. A. “Matthew.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin. Vol. 8. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984, p. 134.

- We desire to obey ... even though we struggle with unredeemed flesh, Romans 8.23.

Our spiritual life needs to be characterized by:

1. An ever-increasing desire to be more like God.
2. A longing for practical righteousness in our personal life.
3. A growing commitment to live out the fruit of the Spirit.
4. Wanting God's will and all it entails.

They Will Be Filled

What it means

To be filled means "to experience inner satisfaction in something."²⁹ The verb tense is passive, i.e., the satisfaction is given to us. We seek. God satisfies.

Now we think back to the paradox mentioned at the beginning of the lesson. How can a person who is continuously, desperately hungry be satisfied or filled at the same time? Perhaps the best way to describe this is to think about the taste we acquire for things. I absolutely love ribeye and filet mignon steaks.

Mexican food is also a favorite, so much so that I want it over and over again. Ice cream is also something I really enjoy. I could eat my fill of steak or tacos & chips and salsa at lunch ... and gladly eat it again for supper. I have been known to eat ice cream for breakfast.

Now, let's make the application. The more and more we conform to God's will (practice righteousness) the more fulfilled or content we become. Our taste for it will develop more and more. What we are discussing here could be likened to the cycle Paul experienced.

- 2 Timothy 1.12: *I know whom I have believed...*
- Yet, he still has a profound longing for Christ: Philippians 3.10: *My goal is to know Him and the power of his resurrection...*

Paul knew Christ. But the taste of that intimacy and satisfaction made him long for more.

Complete Satisfaction

The world only offers broken cisterns. Nothing it offers provides lasting satisfaction. True and lasting satisfaction is offered only to believers:

- John 4.14: *whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life.*
- John 6.35: *No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again.*

Other passages that describe the feeling:

²⁹ **Χορτάζω**. Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

- Psalm 107.9: *for he has satisfied the thirsty and filled the hungry with good things.*
- Psalm 34.10: *Young lions lack food and go hungry, but those who seek the Lord will not lack any good thing.*
- Psalm 23.1: *The Lord is my shepherd, I have what I need.*
- Psalm 23.5: *My cup overflows.*

How Do I Know if I am Hungering/Thirsting After Righteousness?

Here are some handy suggestions for self-examination:³⁰

- Study Biblical examples of those who did hunger/thirst - and who were filled.
- Do I understand my personal righteousness is of little value?
 - Isaiah 64.6 - our righteousness is like a polluted garment.
 - Philippians 3.7-8 – we must count everything as loss.
- Do you allow "harmless" things to take the edge off your spiritual appetite?
 - We must concentrate on/approve things that are excellent, Philippians 1.9-10.
 - We must take in wholesome things, Philippians 4.8.
 - We must take every thought captive, 2 Corinthians 10.5.
- Do you discipline yourself daily to keep in mind your pursuit of righteousness?
- Do you always put yourself in places to obtain righteousness?
- How much time do you spend with your Bible?
 - The Scriptures point to God's power, Romans 1.16.
 - The Scriptures point to the life Jesus provides, Luke 8.11; Hebrews 4.12.
- How often and earnestly do you pray?
 - This is a good gauge of your appetite.
 - See Luke 6.12; 18.1-8.

Few things are more important than our spiritual appetite. *We are what we eat.*

John 4.10: *If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would ask him, and he would give you living water.'*

Are you hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Have you experienced what it means to be filled?

³⁰ The thoughts presented on this list aren't original with me and I can't remember the source. I have reworded them a little.