

The Beatitudes

Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness Matthew 5:6

Introduction

The blessings recorded in Matthew Chapter 5 are the principles and values Jesus based all His teachings upon. We could call the beatitudes Jesus's vision and mission statement. Jesus uses these blessings to teach us some profound truth about life. His message focuses on our attitude towards God.

Today we'll examine the fourth Beatitude in Matthew Chapter 5. Let's read it once again. "And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled."* (Matthew 5: 1-6 NKJV)

Matthew five is one of the most far-reaching of all Jesus' statements. It is one of the most awesome guarantees of godliness found anywhere in the Bible. 'Blessed are those that hunger and thirst.'

I. Hunger and Thirst

Most of us have no real first-hand experience of how many live in developing countries like India or China or nations in Africa. We may have seen pictures of the hunger and famine in places like Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and the Sudan. People all over the world, including children, are literally starving to death from malnutrition. Until more recently, it's mostly been pictures and stories to us. Our country has experienced very little of such extreme need. The hunger and thirst Jesus describes is the fierce, gnawing, killer hunger that doesn't give up.

Starving people will eat bark from trees and shrubs, hoping it will fill their stomachs and tide them over from the torment of hunger? It's a far cry from the pleasant growling stomach that reminds us that it's dinner time. Or what about the awful burning thirst from being in the desert about to die beneath the scorching sun. That's much different from the thirst of working in the heat of the day and longing for a bottle of cold water. It's the difference between life and death or a matter of convenience.

To understand what Jesus is saying, we must first realize the intense nature that hunger and thirst produces before we can apply it to a spiritual desire for the life-giving Spirit of God.

Many believe that education, economic stimulus, and social change are the best way to meet a person's basic needs. Yet, for all this effort, people still go on

hungering and thirsting and yearning for something beyond any human ability to satisfy.

Augustine wrote, "The punishment for sin is sin." In other words, the punishment for sin is built-in – it's inherent within the sin itself. No arbitrary add-on penalties are needed to enhance the total disaster that sin by its very nature produces. The fundamental reality many people have never faced is that the universe we inhabit is of spiritual origin. Our world is the handwork of God.

God created this world to be in harmony with the great spiritual principles that emanate from His very nature. But because of sin, the world is at war with the Almighty. Our planet is no longer the beautiful and harmonious one that God created. It has become a world of dark values imposed upon it by a deceitful and evil satanic being.

The spiritual and godly persons in this world resist this evil and its oppression. The punishment for sin is not arbitrary; it is intrinsic to the very nature of sin. The consequences are built-in. The nature of sin is destructive. Repetitive acts of sin will destroy you. The New Testament truth is, sin does not work to your benefit. Sin will destroy you; it cannot save you! -Not in this world and not with this God.

There may be pleasure in sin for a season, but the pleasure of sin quickly turns to bondage and enslaving misery. Sin separates us from God and from goodness. The Bible says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." (James 1:17 NKJV)

Separation from God can only result in spiritual death because God is the source of all goodness. In his well-known address, Augustine noted, "Thou has made us for Thyself, and we are restless until we rest in Thee." Within each person's heart is a deep need and spiritual longing for God's goodness and love. How do we know that? Because we have been created in the image of God.

In his letter to Titus, Paul looks back at how things were before the kindness and love of God intervened. He writes in Chapter 3, "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:3-7 NKJV)

Because of the sin nature we inherited from Adam and Eve, we are born with a rebellious nature against God. To the Ephesians he wrote in Chapter 2, "And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all

once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).” (Ephesians 2: 1-5 NKJV)

Sin just doesn't work. It never has, and it never will.

Our world today is starving to death from spiritual malnutrition. People are eating up anything and everything to try and satisfy this deep spiritual hunger. We make gods of sports, our jobs, worldly vices, or any number of things, hoping that something will give us a lasting sense of “success” and satisfy the deep inner gnawing of personal unfulfillment. People try everything they can think of to satisfy a longing that only God himself can fill.

Despite all our efforts to convince ourselves that we are nothing more than highly developed animals, the unique revelation of scripture is that we are spiritual beings. And it is not until our spirit becomes united with the Spirit of the Creator that our spiritual emptiness can be filled, making us whole and complete. Once we've tasted and realized that the Lord is good, our appetite changes altogether.

Instead of trying to fill the void with sinful desires, we instead hunger and thirst for righteousness.

II. Righteousness

Around the world, more than enough food is produced to feed the global population—but as many as 811 million people still go hungry.[4] World hunger is on the rise, affecting 9.9 percent of people globally. In the last two years, the number of undernourished people grew by as many as 161 million, a crisis driven largely by conflict, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ (<https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/world-hunger-facts-statistics>)

Listen to these statistics:

- Every year 15 million children die of hunger.
- It is estimated that some 811 million people worldwide are suffering right now from hunger and malnutrition.
- Every 3.6 seconds, someone dies of hunger.
- The Indian subcontinent has nearly half of the world's hungry people.
- Africa and the rest of Asia together have approximately 40%, and the remaining hungry people are in Latin America and other parts of the world.
- Half of all children under five years of age in South Asia and one-third of those in sub-Saharan Africa are malnourished.
- Health Organizations estimate that one-third of the world is well-fed, one-third is under-fed, and one-third is starving.

In the desert communities Jesus spoke to, hunger meant starvation, and thirst meant a desperate need for water to survive. So when Jesus blesses those that

hunger and thirst after righteousness, he is not merely talking about those who think seeking out righteousness is a cool idea to consider. Jesus is saying, "Blessed are those who long for righteousness as a starving person longs for food and as a person perishing from thirst desires water to soothe their cracked and parched throat."

Jesus describes the desperate longing of the soul for God and His righteousness as a matter of spiritual life and death. He is blessing those who pursue righteousness as a profoundly urgent priority in their lives. It's a blessing of vital importance, and He reiterates this priority in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" before anything else.

The word "righteousness" occurs five times in the Sermon on the Mount (5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33). Jesus uses the word '*Righteousness*' to describe the very nature and attributes of God. He's talking about the qualities of virtue and justice and truth and mercy and love. Those are the traits of righteousness.

Micah 6:8 says, "He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8 NKJV)

So those Jesus blesses those who hunger and thirst to identify themselves with the nature of God; with His justice and truth and mercy and love. It impacts the way we treat each other, the way we treat the environment, our political views, the way we conduct our business, the way we shop, the kind of neighbors we are, our parenting, our leadership- every part of our existence.

We are called to hunger and thirst for righteousness, not dabble in righteousness. What Jesus is talking about is serious stuff! Especially when you reflect on life here in America – There is a vast gulf between God's righteousness and our own nature and lifestyle. So what can we do about it? King Solomon admitted in his prayer to God at the dedication of the temple, "there is no man who does not sin." (1Kings 8:46)

Paul agrees in Romans 8:32 when he says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23 NKJV)

All we can do is throw ourselves on the mercy of God and pursue His blessing! Because only God can fill the spiritual emptiness inside us!

III. Be Filled

The question is, "How can we be blessed when we are so far from the righteous nature of God? The beatitude does not say, 'Blessed *are* the righteous.'" It says, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.'" The blessing is a challenge to commit ourselves to a journey that continually reaches out for the righteousness of God.

It's a blessing that comes with a promise - that we will be filled. Our hunger and thirsting will be satisfied, we will be content, we will be filled and transformed by his Holy Spirit. Our life begins to bear witness to the presence of God at work in us. We see ourselves as truly blessed to be a blessing to our world.

The Holy Spirit fills us with the presence and life and of God. Our spirit now leaps for joy where before it sank in despair. With overwhelming gratitude to God, we cry, "Abba Father, You alone can satisfy my desire and longing is for more of You. In John 6: 35, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." (John 6:35 NKJV)

When we partake of the Bread of Life, we will never starve because we have found the source of spiritual nutrition! Those filled with the presence of God enjoy his company and companionship. Those filled with the Holy Spirit rely upon the righteousness of Christ.

Christ lives in us and wants to express His love through us. He wants us to become a spiritual refreshing to a starving world. In Galatians 5:22, Paul explains what the fullness is, "When the Holy Spirit controls our lives He produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control within us."

When you examine the fruit, it's not that hard to figure out who's hungering and thirsting after righteousness and who's hungering and thirsting for something else.

Conclusion

What do you hunger and thirst after? Where is your heart? In one sense, we are filled when we accept the free gift of salvation, but too often, that is where hungering and thirsting stops. Some believers continue to struggle with areas of sin because they try to fill a void in their life with something other than Jesus Christ.

It's true; there are Christians today falling prey to the tragedy of pornography and drug abuse, and other destructive behaviors. Some families have been destroyed because of hungering and thirsting for the wrong things. How many Christians sit week after week in the pews at church, longing and hoping for a day when they could truly experience some satisfaction in their life.

Where are the believers who hunger and thirst after righteousness? Are you a believer in name only, or do you have a continual hunger and thirst for a greater Christlikeness? Hungering and thirsting is continual and reoccurring.

Isaiah writes in Chapter 55, "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. Why do you spend money for *what is* not bread, And your wages for *what* does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is* good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance." (Isaiah 55:1-2 NKJV)

Hunger is a normal healthy sign. It is the sick who have no appetite or desire for food. And what's true naturally is also true spiritually. If a person is sick spiritually, they have no appetite for God or the things of God. But a spiritually healthy person will always be hungry and thirsty for more of God in their life. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ." He had a genuine hunger and thirst for God.

As believers, we need to focus on seeking God's righteousness to receive this fourth blessing. God will honour our hunger and thirst for him by filling us with his Holy Spirit. When faced with temptation, Jesus told Satan, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" (Matthew 4:4 NKJV)

The Psalmist David wrote in Psalm 68:47, "Seek after God, and your soul shall live." The fourth blessing is promised to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness – they shall be filled!