

Teachings of Jesus

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Matthew 5:5

Introduction

Jesus based all His teachings on the principles and values of the blessings recorded in Matthew Chapter 5. We might call the Beatitudes Jesus' vision and mission statement. In these Blessings, Jesus teaches some profound truths about life. The message of Jesus focuses on our attitude towards God. Jesus spends very little time dealing with situational ethics.

Today, we will examine the fourth Beatitude, 'Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.' It's one of the most far-reaching of all Jesus' statements. It is also one of the most incredible guarantees of godliness found anywhere in the Bible.

Let's read once again from Matthew Chapter 5. "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 5:2-6 NKJV)

'Blessed are those that hunger and thirst.'

I. Hunger and Thirst

When was the last time you were really hungry? Most of us have no real firsthand experience of the way that many live in a third-world country like India, China, or Africa. Oh, we may have seen films showing the atrocities of hunger and famine in places like Ethiopia, Bangladesh, or Darfur and the Sudan of children who are starving to death from malnutrition.

Still, it's mostly pictures and stories to us. In our country, we know little about such extreme needs. But 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 hunger pangs reminding us it's dinner time.

And what about the awful burning thirst of being in the desert about to die beneath the scorching sun? It's a far cry from the tantalizing thirst of working in the day's heat and longing for a bottle of cold water. One is a matter of life and death. The other is a matter of convenience.

To understand what Jesus is saying, we must realize the intense nature that hunger and thirst can produce and then apply that to our spiritual desire for the life-giving Spirit of God. Unfortunately, in our society, many believe that education, economics, and sociology are the best ways to meet people's basic needs. And yet,

people still go on hungering, thirsting, and yearning for something beyond any human ability to satisfy.

Augustine wrote, "The punishment for sin is sin." 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 our universe is spiritual.

Our world is the handwork of God. He created it to be in harmony with the great spiritual principles that flow from His very nature. But because of sin, the world is at war with the Almighty. Our world is no longer the beautiful and harmonious one that He created. It has become a world of dark values imposed upon it by Satan. But the spiritual world still resists evil, and the evil still oppresses the godly. The punishment for sin is not arbitrary; it is intrinsic to the very nature of sin.

The consequences of sin are built into the nature of the act of sin. Sin just does not work, 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 separation from God results in spiritual death. Why? Because God is the source of all goodness, and sin destroys what is good.

Augustine is well known for this address to God, "Thou has made us for Thyself, and we are restless until we rest in Thee." God created us in His image with a deep need and spiritual longing for His goodness and love.

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." ([Titus 3:3 NKJV](#))

That is the kind of "success" our rebellion against God gives us.

To the Ephesians, Paul wrote, "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 from spiritual malnutrition, eating anything and everything to try and satisfy this deep spiritual hunger. We've made gods of sports, our jobs, worldly vices, or any number of things, hoping something will satisfy the deep inner gnawing of personal unfulfillment. We try everything to satisfy a longing

that only God can fill. Despite our best efforts to convince ourselves otherwise, the unique revelation of scripture is that we are truly spiritual beings.

Only when our spirit is united with the Spirit of the Creator can our spiritual emptiness be filled, making us whole and complete. Our appetite changes completely once we taste and see that the Lord is good. We no longer fill the void in our lives with sinful desires. Instead, we hunger and thirst for righteousness.

II. Righteousness

United Nations World Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley says, "There is 400 trillion dollars' worth of wealth on the earth today, and the fact that 9 million people die from hunger every year—shame on us. At the height of COVID, billionaires' net worth increased by \$5.2 billion per day. At the same time, 24,000 people died per day from hunger—shame on us."

It is estimated that over 800 million people in the world are suffering right now from hunger and malnutrition. Every 3.6 seconds, someone dies of hunger. Half of all children under five years of age in South Asia and one-third of those in sub-Saharan Africa are malnourished. And this is in a world where so many Western children suffer from obesity! It is estimated that at any moment, one-third of the world is well-fed, one-third is under-fed, and one-third is starving to death.

Since I began sharing these statistics, at least 200 people have died of starvation, and 60 of them were children under the age of five.

In the desert communities Jesus spoke to, hunger and starvation went together, and thirst was equated with a desperate need for water to survive. So when Jesus blesses those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, he is not merely talking about those who think that seeking righteousness is a cool idea. He says, "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 is describing a desperate longing of the soul for God and a life that's right with God as a matter of spiritual life and death. He is blessing those who want to live right and desire righteousness as a profoundly urgent and vitally important priority. Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye 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, justice, truth, mercy, and love. Those are the traits of righteousness.

Micah 6:8 says it this way, "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)

Jesus blesses those who hunger and thirst to identify with justice, truth, mercy, and love of God. What Jesus is talking about is serious stuff - Especially when you reflect on life here in America and the vast gulf between God's righteousness and the American lifestyle.

So what can we do about it? Well, as King Solomon confessed in his prayer to God at the dedication of the temple, "for there is no man who does not sin" 1Kings 8.46 and Paul's statement in Romans 8, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God – we can only throw ourselves on the mercy of God and beg His forgiveness and help! - Because only God can fill the spiritual emptiness inside us!

III. Be Filled

So, how can we be blessed when we are so far removed 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, for they shall be filled.'

The blessing is a challenge to embrace the journey of living a life that is right before God. It is a blessing that comes with the promise that we will be filled. We 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. The fruit of the Spirit does its work in us, and we become more truthful and humble, compassionate, merciful, courageous, and just. Then, we are truly blessed to be a blessing to our world.

It is the Holy Spirit that fills us with the presence and power and life and strength of God. Our spirit now leaps for joy where before it sank in sin and despair. With an overwhelming appreciation and gratitude for God we cry, "You are my Father and you alone can satisfy my desire and longing to be more like You.

As we partake of the Bread of Life we are filled and will never starve because we have found the source of spiritual nutrition! To be filled with the presence of God is to enjoy His company and spend time with Him each day.

In Galatians 5, Paul explains what the fullness is. When the Holy Spirit controls our lives He will produce this kind of fruit in us. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." ([Galatians 5:22-23 NKJV](#))

The fruit of the Spirit reveals who's hungering and thirsting after righteousness and who's hungering and thirsting after something else – Hello?

Conclusion

In your life right now, what are you hungering and thirsting for? Where is your heart?

In one sense, it is easy to see that we are filled and satisfied when we accept the free gift of salvation, but too often that is where hungering and thirsting stops.

Many believers continue to struggle with big areas of sin when they try to fill a hole with something other than Jesus Christ. Yes, even Christians today are falling into the trap of pornography, drug abuse, and other destructive behaviors. Divorce has destroyed many families because of hungering and thirsting for the wrong things. We'd all be surprised at the number of Christians who 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.

Are we as believers hungering and thirsting after righteousness? 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, then he will have no appetite for God and the things of God. But a person who is spiritually healthy will be hungry and thirsty for God and for the things of God.

Paul said, "For me to live is Christ". I hunger and thirst for God.

In Matthew Chapter 4 Jesus said, "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 writes in Psalm 68: 47 – Seek after God and your soul shall life! This fourth blessing is for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness – for they shall be filled!