



Ministry of the Word

Wednesday 01st July 2020

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Scripture: Matthew 5:6

Subject: Part 18 – Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for Righteousness

This sermon that we find here in Matthew chapter 5, is more than a great message that was taught by the greatest teacher ever. It is a blueprint and it is the Constitution for life in the Kingdom of God. Jesus is teaching us here the meaning of true righteousness. As we have already noted in previous studies, the religious leaders of Jesus' day believed and taught that true righteousness was something external, visible; and was reflected in the external observances of the Law. And we know, many still believe and practice the same thing, external works. But Jesus teaches that true righteousness with God goes way beyond religion and religious observances. Right throughout this chapter we see this. In verse three we are asked to consider; *“what do you believe about yourself?”* The answer Jesus gives is that citizens in the new kingdom have the right to be humble. In verse 4, we are asked, *“what do you believe about your sin?”* The Lord will bless those who realize they need help and forgiveness from God alone. In verse 5, we are asked *‘what is your attitude towards God?’*

Jesus clearly wants his followers to know the difference between true righteousness and false righteousness; by describing the laws of his Kingdom and the spiritual principles that will govern in that kingdom. As we examine these verses we ought to think of them as the character traits or characteristics of true followers of the Lord Jesus. And we need to be

honest while asking ourselves, *'What exactly is our attitude about ourselves?'* We as believers recognise that we are spiritually bankrupt and have absolutely NO spiritual resources apart from God, Christ, the Gospel and His love. We also need to ask ourselves *'what is our attitude about sin?'* Yes, we recognize its horror and its power in this world and sorrow over its presence *but are we aware of it in our own lives?* Since we admit our need for Jesus and sorrow over sin we adopt a teachable spirit—a willingness to learn from God and His Holy Spirit; a willingness to learn from others and refuse to defend ourselves in our sin (v.5). Last time we look at it, but I think that it's good to keep hold of how the words of Jesus build—since we feel our need and admit our need for God - verse 3; true sorrow over sin- verse.4; are reachable and teachable (v.5) we hunger and thirst for the Lord; we long for His righteousness by faith—we seek it; we ask for it by faith as we will see tonight in verse 6. All the rest of the beatitudes show the results of our new life of faith in Christ—lived out in the life of the believer which we will see as we make our ways from verses 7 to 10.

Irrespective of class or culture, these beatitudes have the same application and the same high standard for all of His disciples. So let's look at verse 6 tonight -

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.'

This beatitude is addressing a spiritual desire that ought to be in each and every child of God as well as within the church. *What do you see as you look at the church worldwide today? Are these qualities that we are looking at very obvious to you and everyone else?* It seems that the devil has tapped into the underlining greed and desire for power and personal godhood, drawing untold millions away in a concert like delusion from the claims of the true Christ to follow a false one. Here in this verse is a characteristic that is not common, and one we need to know and understand and search our own hearts concerning it.

How can you be happy in hunger? Well it all depends on what you are hungry for. In the broken world real poverty leads to real hunger. However, what Jesus is teaching here is a particular principle. In the spiritual world of the King spiritual poverty leads to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Jesus is speaking of those who really desire God's rule in their lives and in this world.

Such spiritual hunger is a characteristic of all of God's people whose ultimate ambition is not material but spiritual. Here is where we need to stop and really think, *"Is that so in my life, do I hunger and thirst for God's righteousness?"* Remember the saying in Matthew 6:21?

"Where your treasure is there will your heart be also".

That drive, that get up and go factor is not common in all believers lives. We know that we are going to heaven one day, but it seems for many, as if they have already arrived, they just sit back and are sailing on, so to speak! But the bible is very clear, this world is not our home, Our true home is with God. Maybe we have lost our appetite, our taste for the Lord, for the things of God? Do we have a need to taste and see that the Lord is good? Maybe perhaps we have replaced it with the here and now taste!

True followers of Christ should not be like pagans, engrossed in the pursuit of possessions. What we should be pursuing is 'seeking first' God's kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33). *What is this "righteousness" that Christ is speaking of?*

Righteousness in the Bible has at least three aspects: legal, moral and social. By the way it is exactly the same for the Levitical Law. The Old Testament spoke of righteousness in terms of legal relationships; courts, judges, in terms of ethical or fair behavior. It also described a covenant relationship between individuals or groups; but it also came to mean God's relationship towards His people; and their relationship towards Him. In the New Testament Paul expands the legal concept and applies it to the person and work of the Lord Jesus. The death of Jesus on the cross (he died in our place) provides the basis of a whole new covenant. In order for sinners to be righteous (right with God); God must first justify the sinner As Romans 4:5 tells us -

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

What does Paul mean when he says God makes right or "justifies the ungodly" based on those who believe in Him? God applies Christ's righteousness—his perfect obedience and guiltlessness—to us and becomes legally (judicially) acquitted of the penalty of sin, which is death. As John 5 verse 24 tells us - and I'm quoting from the Berean Literal Bible - ***Truly, truly, I say to you that the one hearing My word and believing the One having sent Me, he has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.***

Legal righteousness is justification, a right relationship with God. The Jews ‘pursued righteousness’ but they failed to attain it because they pursued it in the wrong way. They sought ‘*to establish their own*’ righteousness and ‘*did not submit to God’s righteousness*’, which is Christ himself. (See Romans 9:30; 10:4; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 3:24; Genesis 15:6; Acts 13:39; Romans 5:1). Some commentators have understood verse 6 to be legal righteousness, but this is scarcely possible since Jesus is addressing those who already belong to him.

Moral righteousness is righteousness of character and conduct which pleases God. Jesus goes on after the beatitudes to contrast this Christian righteousness with pharisaical righteousness (Matthew 5 verse 20). Practicing religious Jews were only into external conformity to rules; However Jesus is speaking about an inner righteousness of heart, mind and motive. For this we should hunger and thirst. (See Daniel 4:27; Hossea 10:12; 1 Corinthians 15:34; Ephesians 6:14; Philippians 1:11; 1 Timothy 6:11)

It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that the biblical word ‘righteousness’ means only a right relationship with God on the one hand and a moral righteousness of character and conduct on the other. For biblical righteousness is more than a private and personal affair; it includes social righteousness as well. And social righteousness, as we learn from the law and the prophets, is concerned with seeking man’s liberation from oppression, together with the promotion of civil rights, justice in the law courts, integrity in business dealings and honour in home and family affairs. Christians are committed to hunger for righteousness in the whole human community as something pleasing to a righteous God.

With that in mind, then let me pose this question to you, ‘*What is your passion?*’ Or in other words - ‘*What do you long for in your life?*’ ‘*Do you long for honesty in your life, in your dealings with God and others?*’ ‘*Do you long for integrity?*’ ‘*How about justice in society?*’ You know that non-Christians can and do desire change. They can even hope for honesty and integrity and social justice. The non-Christian can wage war against poverty, hunger, homelessness, and social injustice. They envision a world of equality and justice—apart from the forgiveness of sin; apart from the gospel; apart from God. They long for a peace they cannot have—and

will never have—because they deny **the truth; satisfaction rests with God. Peace is found in God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Forgiveness is found in God through Christ.**

The danger lies with those who stress being righteous and neglect doing righteousness. It leads to the error of false assurance; the error that believing in Jesus exonerates us from ever doing good! A right belief does not result in wrong behavior.

So we can see from this, social righteousness is the desire to bring not just aid to those in need, as in solely material need, but to bring the gospel with meeting the many needs that can, and ought to be met. We look at the past history of the church, when hospitals, orphanages, schools, housing, food centres and homes for the homeless, as well as collages and medical centres. In fact, this is what a lot of missions around the world sought to do and still do. In Dublin we had the Dublin Christian Medical Mission. Throughout history believers, especially in the UK, who held positions of power, used their position to become advocate's for social reform in the work place, to end child labour, and the abolishment of slavery. Such people did not get lost in the social aspects of helping others, their influences were born out of a right relationship with God and for God and the furtherance of the Gospel. They want to glorify the Lord at all times. There was no empire building but God's kingdom building, it was not about them as individuals but about the Lord. Quite unlike the social gospel where it tends to be all social and no spiritual, no gospel, sure the ungodly can do that, but not for the glory of God (see Acts 2:44-45. Acts 4:34-35. Luke 10:34-35. 2Kings 6:22. 2 Chronicles 28:15. Isaiah 21:14).

Remember the biblical approach is that we first help the household of Faith and our families, and then we are to help others. If the characteristic that Jesus is speaking about, if they are not held tight, then we will go the way of all flesh, and lose out both here and hereafter. There is perhaps no greater secret of progress in Christian living than a healthy, hearty spiritual appetite. Again and again Scripture addresses its promises to the hungry. God *'satisfies him who is thirsty, and the hungry He fills with good things'* Psalm 107v9. If we are personally conscious of slow spiritual growth, perhaps the reason is that we have a world-weary appetite? It is not enough to mourn over past sin; we must also hunger for righteousness, as well as all these beatitudes.

Yet in this life, our hunger will never be fully satisfied, nor will our thirst be fully quenched. True, we receive the satisfaction which this beatitude promises but our hunger is satisfied only to break out again; just like our natural appetite, we need to eat and drink continuously to grow strong and keep strong. Even the promise of Jesus that whoever drinks of the water he gives *'will never thirst'* is fulfilled only if we keep drinking. Beware of those who claim to have attained, and those who look to past experience rather than to future development! Like all the qualities included in the beatitudes, hunger and thirst are perpetual characteristics of the disciples of Jesus, as perpetual as poverty of spirit, meekness and mourning. Not till we reach heaven will we *'hunger no more, neither thirst any more'*, for only then will Christ our Shepherd lead us *'to springs of living water'*. (Psalm 36:8; Isaiah 12:3; Isaiah 44:3; Isaiah 55:1; John 4:14; John 6:35; John 7:37; Revelation 7:16. Revelation 21:6; Revelation 22:7.)

So as to be very clear let me explain the meaning of spiritual hunger. Most of us have never faced life-threatening hunger and thirst. We think of hunger as missing a meal or two in a row, and of thirst as having to wait an hour on a hot day to get a cold drink. But the hunger and thirst of which Jesus speaks here is of a much more intense sort. This is well explained by a true account from WW1, in fact I believe a film was made of the account, which goes like this:

During the liberation of Palestine in World War I, a combined force of British, Australian, and New Zealand soldiers were closely pursuing the Turks as they retreated from the desert. As the allied troops moved northward past Beersheba, they began to outdistance their water-carrying camel train. When the water ran out, their mouths got dry, their heads ached, and they became dizzy and faint. Their eyes became bloodshot, lips swelled and turned purple, and mirages became common. They knew that if they did not make it to the wells of Sheriah by nightfall, thousands of them would die—as hundreds already had done. Literally fighting for their lives, they managed to drive the Turks from Sheriah.

As water was distributed from the great stone cisterns, the more able bodied were required to stand at attention and wait for the wounded and those who would take guard duty to drink first. It was four hours before the last man had his drink. During that time the men stood no more than twenty feet from thousands of gallons of water to drink, which had been their

consuming passion for many agonizing days. It is said that one of the officers who was present, *“I believe that we all learned our first real Bible lesson on the march from Beersheba to Sheriah Wells. If such were our thirst for God, for righteousness and for His will in our lives, a consuming, all-embracing, preoccupying desire, how rich in the fruit of the Spirit would we be?”* (E.M. Blaiklock, “Water,” Eternity (August 1966), p. 27).

Hungering and thirsting after righteous is a continuous longing, continuous seeking. Those who truly come to Jesus Christ, come hungering and thirsting for righteousness, and those who are in Him continue to know that deep longing for holiness. The parallel passage in Luke says, *“Blessed are you who hunger now”* (6:21). Desire for righteousness is to characterise our life now and in the rest of our earthly existence.

You know, in all that Moses had seen and experienced of God, he never had enough of God. From the burning bush in the wilderness, to the 10 plagues, to the Dead Sea, the pillars of cloud and fire, even in the Tabernacle when he saw the Lord’s glory shining over the Holy of Holies. Over and over Moses had sought and had seen God’s glory. *“Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend”* (Ex. 33:11); but Moses was never satisfied and always wanted to see more. He continued to plead, *“I pray Thee, show Thy glory”* (Ex. 33v18). From that dissatisfaction came satisfaction. Moses found favour in God’s sight because he continually longed for God,(v. 17), and God promised him, *“I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you”* (v. 19).

David declared, *“O God, Thou art my God,”* but continued, *“I shall seek Thee earnestly; my soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee, in a dry and weary land where there is no water”* (Psalm 63:1).

Paul had great visions of God and great revelations from God, yet he was not satisfied. He had given up his own righteousness *“derived from the law”* and was growing in *“the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”* But still he longed to *“know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death”* (Philippians 3:9-10).

Peter expressed his own great desire and hunger when he counselled those to whom he wrote to *“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 3:18).

John Darby wrote, *“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.”*

That is the hunger of which the fourth beatitude speaks, the hunger for righteousness that only the Father can satisfy. I’m reminded of a story about a young lady who had begun going to a Bible study but soon gave it up, explaining that she wanted to be religious but did not want to make the commitment that Scripture demands. She had little hunger for the things of God. She wanted to pick and choose, to nibble at whatever suited her fancy—because basically she was satisfied with the way she was. In her own eyes she had enough, and so became one of the self-adjudged rich whom the Lord sends away empty-handed. It is only the hungry that He fills with good things (Luke 1:53).

With this in mind, have you ever asked ‘what is the object of spiritual hunger’?

Well, it has a two-fold purpose; one for the unbeliever and the other for the believer. For the unbeliever the goal is salvation; and for the believer it is sanctification. When a person initially hungers and thirsts for righteousness he seeks salvation; it's the righteousness that comes when one turns from sin to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In poverty of spirit he sees his sin; in mourning he laments and turns from his sin; in meekness he submits his own sinful way and power to God; and in hunger and thirst he seeks God’s righteousness in Christ to replace his sin.

In many Old Testament passages righteousness is used as a synonym for salvation.

“My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth,” the Lord said through Isaiah (51:5).

Daniel wrote of the time when *“those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever”* (Daniel 12:3).

When a person abandons all hope of saving himself, all confidence in self-righteousness, and begins to hunger for the salvation that brings God's righteousness and the obedience that God requires, he will be blessed, be made divinely happy. The Jews' greatest obstacle to receiving the gospel was their self-righteousness, their confidence in their own purity and holiness, which they imagined was created by good works. Because they were God's chosen race, and as keepers of the law—or, more often, keepers of men's interpretations of the law—they felt heaven was assured. The Messiah told them, however, that the only way to salvation was by hungering and thirsting for God's righteousness to replace their own self-righteousness, which was really unrighteousness.

For believers, the object of hungering and thirsting is to grow in the righteousness received from trusting in Christ. That growth is sanctification, which more than anything else is the mark of a Christian.

No believer "arrives" in his spiritual life until he reaches heaven, and to claim perfection of any sort before then is the ultimate presumption. Children of the kingdom never stop needing or hungering for more of God's righteousness and holiness to be manifest in them through their obedience. Paul prayed for believers in Philippi that their love might

"abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:9-10).

Jesus also uses the definite article, indicating that He is not speaking of just any righteousness, but **the** righteousness, the only true righteousness that comes from God. In fact, God's very own righteousness which He has in Himself. It becomes obvious, then, that we cannot possibly have our longing for godliness satisfied in this life, so we are left to continually hunger and thirst until the day we are clothed entirely in Christ's righteousness.

So what are the results of spiritual hunger and thirst?

The result of hungering and thirsting for righteousness is being satisfied, *filled*. The word in the Greek was frequently used for the feeding of animals until they wanted nothing more. They were allowed to eat until they were completely satisfied.

Jesus' divine pronouncement is that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be given total satisfaction. The giving of satisfaction is God's work, as the future passive tense

indicates: they shall be satisfied. Our part is to seek; His part is to satisfy. Again there is a marvellous paradox, because though saints continually seek God's righteousness, always wanting more and never getting all, they nevertheless will be satisfied. We may eat steak or our favourite food until we can eat no more, yet our taste for those things continues and even increases. It is the very satisfaction that makes us want more. We want to eat more of those things because they are so satisfying. The person who genuinely hungers and thirsts for God's righteousness finds it so satisfying that he wants more and more.

God's satisfying those who seek and love Him is a repeated theme in the Psalms. *"For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good"* (Psalm 107:9).

Another Psalm we see this is in Psalm 34 verse 10: *"The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing"*

The best-loved of all psalms begins, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," and later declares, *"Thou dost prepare a table before me ... my cup overflows"* (23:1, 5).

Predicting the great blessings of Christ's millennial kingdom, Jeremiah assured Israel in chapter 31 verse 14, that in that day the Lord declares, *"My people shall be satisfied with My goodness,"*

Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar that *"whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life"* (John 4:14). To the crowds near Capernaum, many of whom had been among the five thousand He fed with the five barley loaves and the two fish, Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst"* (John 6:35).

We also see it in the following -

- *"full of goodness, filled with knowledge" (Romans 15:14)*
- *"filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19)*
- *"filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18)*
- *"filled with the fruits of righteousness" (Philippians 1:11)*
- *"filled with the knowledge of His (God's) will" (Colossians 1:9)*
- *"filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52)*

Finally what are the marks of true spiritual hunger and thirst?

There are several marks of genuine hunger and thirst for God's righteousness. First is dissatisfaction with self. The person who is pleased with his own righteousness will see no need for God's. The great Puritan Thomas Watson wrote,

"He has most need of righteousness that least wants it."

No matter how rich his spiritual experience or how advanced his spiritual maturity, the starving Christian will always say, ***"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"*** (Romans 7:24).

Second, is freedom from dependence on external things for satisfaction. A hungry man cannot be satisfied by possessions, beautiful music, or pleasant conversation. All of those things are good, but have no ability to satisfy hunger. Neither can anything but God's own righteousness satisfy the person who has true spiritual hunger and thirst.

Third, is craving for the Word of God, the basic spiritual food He provides His children. A hungry man does not have to be begged to eat. Jeremiah rejoiced, ***"Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart"*** (Jeremiah 15:16). The more we seek God's righteousness, the more we will want to devour Scripture. Feeding on God's Word increases our appetite for it.

Fourth, is the pleasantness of the things of God. ***"To a famished man any bitter thing is sweet"*** (Proverbs 27:7). The believer who seeks God's righteousness above all other things will find fulfilment and satisfaction. Thomas Watson commented that ***"the one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness can feed on the myrrh of the gospel as well as the honey."*** Even the Lord's reproofs and discipline bring satisfaction, because they are signs of our Father's love. ***"For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives"*** (Hebrews 12:6).

A final mark of true spiritual hunger is unconditionality. When our spiritual hunger and thirst are genuine, we make no conditions; we will seek and accept God's righteousness in whatever way He chooses to provide it and will obey His commands no matter how demanding they may be. God's righteousness is more valuable than anything we or anyone else in the world

can possess or offer. The rich young ruler wanted only the part of God's kingdom that fit his own plans and desires, and he was therefore unfit for the kingdom. He thirsted more for other things than for the things of God. His conditions for God's blessings barred him from them.

The spiritually hungry do not ask for Christ and economic success, Christ and personal satisfaction, Christ and popularity, or Christ and anything else. They want only Christ and want God in His wisdom and love sovereignly provides through Christ—whatever that may or may not be. The spiritually hungry cry, *"My soul is crushed with longing after Thine ordinances at all times"* (Psalm 119:20), and they confess, *"At night my soul longs for Thee, indeed, my spirit within me seeks Thee diligently"* (Isaiah 26:9).

Chuck Swindoll wrote; *"The longer I live the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude to me is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than success, than what others think, or say, or do. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it."*

Jesus knew that the way you see yourself, the way you see God, the way you see sin, will determine the way you see life. The most courageous decision you will ever make is the decision to see yourself and God and sin the way God sees you, the way God reveals Himself in the Bible; the way the Bible reveals the problem of sin and the solution for sin.

Amen