

Blessed are Those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Call to Worship: Psalm 150

1st Scripture: Luke 6:12-26

2nd Scripture: Matthew 5:1-6

Hymn #133- *O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing*

Hymn Insert- *His Mercy is More*

Hymn #700- *Trust and Obey*

Introduction

This morning, we move on to consider the fourth beatitude listed here, in Matthew, Chapter 5: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” And as we have been doing all along, we will begin by considering the object of the blessing (the first portion of the verse), before considering the actual blessing itself (the second portion of the verse).

I. Blessed are Those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Coming then to this fourth beatitude, we find then (right from the outset), that it is the natural outworking of the first three beatitudes, and especially of the second, which leads to this one. If someone were to tell you, “I hate sin and evil, and their remaining effects in the world (and in me) bring me sorrow and grief,” then of necessary consequence, such a person must truly love righteousness and strive after it. The first necessitates the second, and vice versa. And so, inevitably, one who recognizes their utter dependence upon God for all things, and one who mourns the effects of the fall and sin in the world (and in themselves), and one who willingly and humbly suffers wrong for the sake of the edification of the brethren, the salvation of the lost and the glory of God, must and will, inevitably (if they are sincere in the first three virtues here expressed), yearn to grow in righteousness.

Now, let’s break this first clause up into two parts, before summing up the whole of the matter, and then moving into a consideration of the blessing, given in the second portion of the verse.

1) We begin with the word, “righteousness” in the second portion of the clause. What is righteousness? Well, from a positive standpoint, we can think of righteousness as involving doing what is right, proper, lawful, godly, honorable and well-pleasing to God. And from a

negative standpoint, we can say that righteousness is the very opposite of unrighteousness, sinfulness, unlawfulness, ungodliness, and that which dishonors and is displeasing/offensive to God. We can also state the matter this way. Righteousness involves both, not doing those things which displease and offend God, while doing those things which do please and glorify God. For example, righteousness involves both, not stealing from others, and also giving to those who are in need, at the same time. It involves not murdering others, while also doing what is necessary to preserve life at the same time. It involves not worshiping false gods and idols, while also worshiping the true and living God alone, at the same time; not taking the Lord's Name in vain, while glorifying His holy name (in our words and actions), at the same time...etc. Both, the negative and positive aspects of obedience to God's Law would be included in a biblical understanding of what the term "righteousness" means.

All in all, we can view righteousness (from the standpoint of mankind), as faithfully and accurately reflecting the glorious image of God in every sphere of our lives (in our thoughts, conversation and actions). To this end, the Scriptures teach that, man, from the beginning, was created "upright," but upon disobeying God, he plunged himself (and the entire human race) into a state of corruption, defilement and unrighteousness. This heinously lost, fallen and defiled condition of mankind, is what drives the regenerate and redeemed in Christ (who, although now reconciled to God through the shed blood of Christ), to long for the complete and realized restoration of all things, which brings us to the first portion of our clause.

2) Blessed are those who "hunger and thirst..." Those who are truly in Christ; the genuinely converted and redeemed, are blessed, because they hunger and thirst for righteousness. You see, once again, the picture here given by our Lord, portrays the idea of that which is incomplete (while in the very process of working toward completion), longing for that completion. And all along the way, it searches, and grasps, and longs for more and more growth in grace, such that more and more of Christ is formed in it. It is not those who are already personally righteous, who are blessed. If that were the case, no one on earth would be part of the Kingdom of Heaven. But rather, it is those who are on the path to, and hunger and thirst for, further righteousness. As we saw in our second beatitude, sin troubles their souls and brings sorrow to them. While it never condemns them in Christ (thanks be unto God!), it is still a

grievous reality, nonetheless. And so, the people of God work hard (they labor; they are not casual about their faith), in Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, they strive to put to death the deeds of the body, in fervent pursuit of holiness and righteousness and godliness.

You see, our Lord leaves us with a “desert” illustration here, doesn’t He? And the illustration dispenses a tremendous fragrance of fervency and sobriety; it is anything but casual and laid back, isn’t it? If you were in the desert for any length of time (something, the people of God in Israel could well have related to), eventually, while remaining continuously under the power of the sun’s sweltering rays, your mouth would grow dry, and you would become thirsty. And your stomach would begin to growl for food. Left there for a longer period of time, you would begin to grow desperate. You would crave even a sip of water and a morsel of bread. And you would frantically look around for some means of satisfying these throbbing desires, as your body continues to burn off whatever little energy remains in you.

Who would waste whatever remaining energy they had, in the desert, doodling in the sand or twiddling their thumbs? No one, of course! You would be focused. You would be very conscious about your present need and reality. You would carefully think through the best direction of travel, and all possibilities of satisfying your body’s longings. Well, in a spiritual sense, the people of God are nudged on by their love for Christ, and by a real hunger and thirst in their souls, to overcome sin and to pursue righteousness. They are not casual or careless about it. Indeed, it permeates their prayer lives. It drives them to avail themselves of every available means of grace. It brings them into an ongoing wrestling match with the flesh. The conscious reality of a battle, daily grips their souls. Do you see that here, brethren? How else can we understand our Lord’s use of the terms “hunger and thirst,” with respect to the pursuit of righteousness? There are hardly any stronger terms he could have used. Hunger and thirst pain the body, compelling us to fulfill the longing. That’s the picture of the Christian’s urgent longing for, and pursuit of, righteousness.

Having considered both portions of the first clause, let us then bring this all together, seeing this in action in a few biblical examples (one OT and one NT example), before moving on to address the specific blessing that belongs to such people.

1) One of the clearest OT representations of this idea of “hungering and thirsting for righteousness” is found in the whole of Psalm 119. I have so come to love and enjoy Psalm 119, (and in fact, I preached through the entire text several years ago, one section at a time), because it really is a theology of the (imperfect) heart that is in love with God. There, while the Psalmist deals with persecution and personal sin issues, the entire Psalm is centered upon the desire of the regenerate heart to understand, keep and “progress in keeping” God’s commands, statutes, laws, testimonies...etc. It really is a “poster child” text for “hungering and thirsting for righteousness.” We will not be reading through the entire Psalm here, for obvious reasons related to time limitation, but listen to a few scattered quotes, before we move on to our NT example.

a) “Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes! Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments. I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments” (vs. 5-7).

b) “I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches” (vs. 14).

c) “My soul breaks with longing for Your judgments at all times” (vs. 20).

d) “Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness” (vs. 35-36).

e) “It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I may learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver” (vs. 72).

f) “Your hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments” (vs. 73).

g) “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (vs. 97).

h) “Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart” (vs. 111).

i) “Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold!” (Vs. 127)

j) “I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Your commandments” (vs. 131).

k) “The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding and I shall live” (vs. 144).

This is just a very, very small sampling of the entire Psalm, brethren. But, as you can see, it really captures the heart of the soul that is in love with God and His Law. I would encourage

you to take a walk through the entire text on your own, to get the full affect of my point here. Indeed, if you are a child of God, Psalm 119 should resonate with your heart in some significant sense, as it really does portray so well, the heart that hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

2) Finally, as a NT example, consider the Apostle Paul. It ought not to be surprising that we are given some insight into the Apostle's heart, to this end, since he wrote the bulk of the NT letters, where his heart was often expressed toward the churches of Christ, which he truly loved. It would be an understatement to say that Paul, having been redeemed out of such a dark place of self-righteousness and offense toward Christ and the Gospel, fervently yearned for, and pursued righteousness. Paul was a man, constantly in the battle, not only against outside opposition, but also against the remaining influences of the flesh. And he fought hard and took this battle very seriously. That said, let me leave you with a few examples of the revealing/exposing of his heart to this end.

a) 1 Corinthians 9:19-27. Clearly, Paul was a man in the fight, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, and he gives every indication here, that it didn't come easy. There were, indeed, contrary feelings and remaining sinful desires, with which, the Apostle had to continually contend, never letting his guard down, for the sake of the gospel and the glory of Christ!

b) Romans 7:7-25. Again, Paul was a man in the battle, and he would have ultimately been driven to despair, had he not continually reminded himself that, in the end, Christ would give him the full and complete victory, even over remaining sin. Paul would find (and has now found) ultimate victory over this body of death! [See 2 Tim. 4:7-8]

And so, brethren, we find here, two examples, which greatly illustrate this blessed virtue of "hungering and thirsting for righteousness." Let us then move on to consider the blessing that rests upon those who find themselves yearning in this way.

II. For They Shall be Filled

"For they shall be filled." What then do we make of this blessing which belongs to those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness?" Again, while this hungering and thirsting for righteousness is imperfect, affirming the sincerity of this yearning, the blessing here described can only be recognized and appreciated as a blessing, by those who sincerely desire to pursue

righteousness. How can we be certain of this? Because the blessing is that, they will be filled. They will be satisfied. They will have their hunger satisfied and their thirst quenched. They will come into the full blessing of that, for which, they presently yearn! You see, again, only a true child of God can appreciate this, and in fact, agree that such a blessing is wholly to be desired. For, their longing will be met and alleviated, by the full attainment of that, for which, they long.

Sin really bothers the true children of God, and they war daily against it, pursuing godliness and Christlikeness. And this battle is difficult, soul wrenching and not a fun experience. The growth is joyful, but who delights in a constant battle? But, the good news is, brethren, that those who are in the battle; those who are fighting and warring against the flesh; those who pursue godliness and holiness and righteousness, will indeed find it, increasingly in the present, but entirely in glory! And that is the blessing which our Lord states, belongs to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. That which presently plagues the children of God, in their own remaining defilement; all that contradicts their new nature and the essential character of God, will be forever put off, when our Lord returns. Brethren, what greater blessing could we be guaranteed, in the light of the present, daily war? Is this promise not worth more than silver and gold and valuable stones and gems which perish? In a nut shell, our Lord says, what the Apostle John reaffirms later on in His Epistle, namely, that, while we don't know all that we will be in glory, what we do know is this: we will soon see Christ as He is, and when we do, we will be like Him! What a glorious day when every iota of a desire for sin even, will be completely removed from us, forever! For, we will be filled! [See Romans 8:18-25].

III. Concluding Remarks

Let me ask you, this morning, do you truly hunger and thirst for righteousness? Does sin bother you? Are you grieved by remaining sinful desires, and for the remnant of anything in you that offends God? Are you in a daily battle against the flesh, where you, being conscious of the will and desire of God, fight to become more and more of what you know pleases Him, in keeping with His Word? You see, brethren, none of this is to say that we have already attained a complete *personal* righteousness (concerning our sanctification). And so, while remaining sin still grieves us, we ought not to be surprised by its remaining presence within us. It's not a

matter of being sinless in the present, so much as, it is a matter of warring against sin in the present, and striving toward and longing after (hungering and thirsting for) righteousness. It's the spirit warring against the flesh and vice versa, driving us to not fulfill the desires of the flesh; desires which are still present and evil, and which, by the Word of God (and the Spirit's aid), we are led to contend with. If you are in such a battle, then you are one of the blessed, whom our Lord describes here. If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will be filled! And so, it won't be that long until the worn, dented, blood spattered armor, will be taken off and laid aside...forever! Oh, what a day of rejoicing that will be, brethren! Let the certainty of that end, drive you to wear it now, for just a little while longer, until we reach the Promised Land in glory!

But, if you are not in this battle; if pursuing righteousness and conformity to the glorious image of Christ, God's Son, doesn't presently fit into your life scheme; if your ideals and dreams and hopes and desires are fixed elsewhere, then see, my friend, that you are on a deadly, collapsing course that ultimately leads to eternal destruction! You are in a rat race that not only fails to satisfy in the present, but which, does nothing to deliver you from the inevitable death and judgment that lies just ahead of you. [The Gospel!!!]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25