

Matthew 5:1-11

The Blessing of Being Filled

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled –
v. 6

In the course of our study of the beatitudes we have noted each step of the way a very marked spiritual progression. We begin by going down – that’s the meaning of being poor in spirit. It’s an honest acknowledgement that we are spiritually destitute. There’s a recognition that we are helpless and hopeless before God. We have no more claim to the kingdom of heaven than the devil himself and unless we face our spiritual bankruptcy there’s no way we will ever inherit the kingdom of heaven. To those who will confess their spiritual poverty, however, they are the ones that will gain the kingdom of heaven.

The next beatitude takes us lower still as we face the cause for our spiritual desolation. Why are we poor in spirit? Why are we destitute before God? What is it that makes us helpless and hopeless? In a word – it’s our sin. Our sins are what come between us and God. Our sins have cost us the blessing of God and the blessing of heaven. Our sins have earned for us the wages of death and hell – and the recognition of our sin leads us to mourn. We mourn because we know what sin has cost us. It cost us our original righteousness. It cost us paradise. It cost us God’s favor and God’s presence. It led us to spiritual darkness and left us spiritually dead.

The blessing of mourning over sin is found in the truth that it is the grace of God that enables us to even acknowledge our sin. Apart from God’s grace, you see, the sinner will deny his sin or excuse his sin or play down the wickedness of his sin, or blame others for his sin. Only those that are wrought upon by God’s Spirit will honestly face their sin for what it is and mourn because of their sin. And because they truly mourn for their sin – the comfort of God through the gospel becomes their portion.

So the first two beatitudes bring us low. This must ever be the case with those that will gain the kingdom of heaven. Pride has no place. Self-righteousness must be put away for good. But then something else happens in this spiritual progression we’re noting and this marks something of a turning point in the beatitudes. Because he’s been brought low and sees his helpless estate and doesn’t try to deny his guilt or his misery the sinner has also become willing to submit to whatever terms God’s sets before him. He’s become submissive, in other words. This is the meaning of meekness. Instead of carrying on his enmity against God he finds himself, instead, willing to surrender to God. And in His magnanimous grace – God is willing to restore to the one who surrenders the very thing that he forfeited in the fall. It is the meek, you see, that will inherit the earth. And so the third beatitude marks a change of direction. The Lord begins to lift us up. *The LORD lifteth up the meek* – Ps. 147:6.

The 4th beatitude, I believe, takes us out of the deep valley of humiliation and brings us to the mountain top. It is the realization of this beatitude that enables us to mount up with wings of eagles, as it were. And we’ll see in the course of our studies that the beatitudes

that follow this 4th beatitude take place as a result of the blessing of this beatitude. The merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers all become what they are on account of this 4th beatitude.

Look at what this 4th beatitude holds out to us – *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.* The word *filled* carries the idea of being satisfied. We find the word being used most often in the accounts of the gospels that speak of Christ feeding the multitudes. Just as there is relief in eating and drinking from the pangs of hunger and thirst and just as there follows a sense of satisfaction from an appetite that's been fed so does the same relief and satisfaction spiritually speaking become the portion of the one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. Listen to the words of Psalm 107:9 *For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.*

Do we not find in this 4th beatitude, then, the very thing that men and women of all ages and times and places are all trying to find? What is it that drives a sinner to his vice? What is it that drives a drunkard to his drink? What is it that drives the drug-user to his drugs – or drives pleasure crazed hedonists to their carnal pleasures? Is it not this very thing – they're looking for some kind of soul satisfaction? They're looking for something to satisfy not just fleshly cravings, but the deep inner longings of the soul.

They know that there's a void within. They know there's supposed to be more to life than they're finding. In the quest for meaning and purpose and peace and fulfillment they never seem to arrive. On the contrary – they seem instead to plunge even more deeply into misery even as they apply any and every form of vice to try to bring pleasure to themselves.

Ironically – the same thing can be said for many Christians. They can tell something's missing also. They can sense that there ought to be more than what they experience. Only in Christian circles such longings have to be suppressed because it would be unorthodox and a seeming denial of their religion to actually come out and say *something's not right here. There's something missing. There ought to be more.*

So many that are seeking, then, and never able to find. So many, to use Paul's words that are *ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth* (2Tim. 3:7). What is the problem – and what is the solution?

I would suggest to you that this 4th beatitude holds the answer. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.* I want to draw your attention to the prospects that this beatitude holds out to you. In a word, I want you to think with me on:

The Blessing of Being Filled

And the question I want to raise and answer very simply is this: How can we know that blessing? How can we know the blessing of being filled?

I. By Establishing the Right Perspective

There is something in this beatitude that might be regarded as somewhat subtle. It's a point, I suppose, that would be easy to miss although it is something that is obvious. The failure to see the perspective that this beatitude presents, however, I dare say explains why many Christians miss the blessing of being filled.

Think about it for a moment. We know this to be the case in Fundamental and Evangelical circles. Very often you find Christians that go from one church to another. They don't mean to be church hoppers. They know they shouldn't be. And so they try to avoid it – but at some point the issue becomes so compelling that they feel they must make a change. And so they do – and for a while things seem to work okay – but then over time the same thing happens again. The cycle repeats itself. There's something missing – or there's sin in the church or there's too much worldliness or too much legalism or not enough programs for the kids or too many programs for the kids. Church either doesn't provide enough or it becomes too intrusive in the things it tries to provide.

And as a result it seems in our day that the thing to do and the thing that many are doing is to drop out of church altogether. It's become quite popular to approach church the way we approach our children's education. We have home-schooling – why not home church? And there are increasing numbers of professing Christians that do just that. Indeed, in his polls, George Barna expresses the opinion that the most dedicated Christians across the country today are to be found in this home church movement. Here are the ones that actually do read their Bibles according to Barna. Here are the ones that show some manner of seriousness in the practice of prayer.

I don't believe such a practice is scriptural. I don't believe such practices measure up to the scriptural definition and description of what a church is meant to be. And I don't say that simply because a house may be utilized as a meeting place. I'm well aware that houses were utilized in the early church. Our church began in a house. The area in which I take issue with such a movement is not to be found in the use of houses so much as it is the issue of what constitutes a church. A New Testament church, you see, is to be made up of ordained elders and deacons and is to practice teaching, and preaching, the administration of the sacraments, as well as the administration of church discipline.

If church was merely an academic institution then perhaps the same pattern that we follow in educating our children could be utilized for church also. But church is not merely an academic institution – it's a spiritual institution and it's primary function is worship – worship which calls for the assembling of ourselves with other like-minded believers.

I see the home church movement as yet another symptom of a deeper problem which springs from a wrong perspective toward gaining the blessing of being filled. I believe there are some – perhaps many that eventually figure out that home church really isn't the solution to their dilemma either. And in some cases – I can't help wonder if the devil's work is done so well that even when a church is discovered that shows all the potential for being a source of renewal and refreshment the habit of missing church can be so

entrenched in the life of a family that they won't go to church anyway – because it becomes so inconvenient.

But back to this perspective presented by our beatitude. Look at what it says *blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled*. The blessing is clearly presented – the blessing of being filled. But the thing that becomes very easy to overlook is this: the blessing of being filled is not obtained by seeking it directly. The beatitude does not say – *blessed are they which do hunger and thirst for blessedness for they shall be filled*.

That's the thing that has to be noted – the blessing of being filled is not gained by directly seeking the blessing of being filled. The blessing of being filled, rather, is gained indirectly as a result of seeking something else. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled*. Fulfillment comes through seeking righteousness. Fulfillment does not come through seeking fulfillment.

You see what I mean when I said a moment ago that this perspective is something that is easy to overlook – yet it's something that's also obvious. If you would know the blessing of being filled, then, you must establish this perspective. You must ever bear in mind that such a blessing is gained indirectly as a result of seeking something else.

And what about the thing that must be sought? This leads to my next point. For if you would know the blessing of being filled – not only must you establish the right perspective but next – the blessing of being filled is realized:

II. By Aiming for the Right Thing

By now you will have gathered that the thing that must be sought in order to gain the blessing is righteousness. Remember the progression of the beatitudes. One of the first things we come to realize when we're poor in spirit is that we have no righteousness. We are destitute of righteousness. Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

We know that sin is our portion. We don't detect righteousness but we do detect sin and this makes us mourn. In our poverty of spirit and in our mourning condition we lament the fact that we once possessed righteousness. We were originally made righteous when God created Adam and Eve – but that righteousness is gone now. We've inherited a sinful nature even though we were originally righteous. And now we long for what we lost. We are hungry and thirsty for what was ours originally.

We are painfully aware in our conscience that God requires righteousness of us. *Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven* – we hear our Lord say (5:20). We mourn over the fact that we're disqualified for the kingdom of heaven and we long for the righteousness that would qualify us for that kingdom.

Here is where the beatitude causes us to soar. What we cannot provide for ourselves – Christ can and Christ has provided. I get to quote one of my favorite verses again. Listen to the words of Rom. 5:17 *For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more*

they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

This is the gospel of the grace of God – the thing for which we hunger and thirst is freely provided by Christ. This is the blessing of God and how blessed we are. Listen to this beatitude from Psalm 32 as it's quoted by Paul in Rom. 4:6-8:

6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

I want you to see something else from this beatitude that magnifies the grace of God. Can you not see in this beatitude the grace behind what may be called a change of appetite? How is it that a sinner, in love with his sin – a sinner who hungers and thirsts for the pleasures of his sin now hungers and thirsts for that which is the complete opposite of his sin? Is it not because through the mighty and miraculous power of regeneration the sinner's appetite has been completely transformed? Here is the test by which a Christian can measure the validity of his profession of faith. What do you hunger and thirst for now?

The man who's been wrought upon by the Spirit of God will hunger and thirst for righteousness. He'll discover that his appetite has changed. By faith he'll receive the righteousness of Christ in the gospel and this will cause his soul to soar. This will fill his soul with peace because it placates his conscience to know that God can be just and the justifier of the ungodly. He knows that he's at peace with God because Christ has taken his sin to Himself and paid the penalty for that sin Himself through His atoning death. He knows that Christ has imputed His righteousness to him giving him a perfect standing with God for time and for eternity.

But the blessing of the gift of righteousness will not cause his hungering and thirsting for righteousness to cease. On the contrary – he'll desire more than ever, now, to measure up to the righteousness that's been given to him freely in the gospel. Righteousness freely given in his justification becomes the motivating power behind righteousness that he strives for in his sanctification.

He hungers and thirsts for righteousness, because he's been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. I said in my introduction that the beatitudes that follow this 4th beatitude spring from it. And so we can note that because the Christian enjoys the perfect righteousness of Christ and hungers and thirsts to measure up to that gracious gift – he'll become merciful, he'll strive to be pure, and he'll become a peacemaker – i.e. it will be his desire to see others make their peace with God through the gospel just like he did. And he'll persevere in his faith when he's persecuted for his faith.

How is the blessing of being filled gained, then? It can be only gained when the right perspective is established – the perspective that sees fulfillment not as the result of seeking fulfillment but the result, rather, of seeking something else. That something else is righteousness. The Christian gains fulfillment by seeking righteousness – righteousness

freely given by Christ in justification and righteousness that he strives for in his sanctification because of the free gift of righteousness. It remains for us to consider that the blessing of being filled is gained:

III. By Seeking with the Right Level of Intensity –

The Lord Jesus borrows from one of the most powerful physical forces within a man in order to describe the fervency with which righteousness must be sought after. He says *blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.*

Hunger and thirst are driving forces in the physical or material realm. It is the force of hunger that will drive a man to desperate measures when that hunger goes unsatisfied. If you can picture a straggler crossing the barren desert under the hot sun – what will his highest priority become? It will be the priority of quenching his thirst. Nothing else will matter – nothing else will have any appeal to him until he finds the water that will meet the painful and immediate need of his body.

I'm afraid that one of the reasons that many professing Christians miss the blessing of God is because they look upon spiritual things as snack food and they draw their main meals from the things of the world. Snack food is what you munch on not when you're particularly hungry but when you eat at your leisure. All too often spiritual food is taken leisurely – which is just another way of saying that church is taken leisurely – time in the word is taken leisurely – time in prayer is taken leisurely.

When our Lord draws a spiritual analogy from the physical domain of hunger and thirst I believe He's making the point that the blessing of God never comes to those who approach it half-heartedly. *For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him* (Heb. 11:6).

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon borrows from another manifestation of a man's appetite. Just as surely as a man seeks food so does he have an appetite to seek riches. Borrowing from that image, listen to what Solomon writes in Prov. 2:1ff

- 1 *My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;*
- 2 *So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;*
- 3 *Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;*
- 4 *If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;*
- 5 *Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.*

The blessing of being filled, then, will never be the portion of those that treat spiritual things like snack food. There is no reward for half-heartedness in our spiritual pursuits. Up to this point we've been considering the spiritual appetite of the people of God for righteousness or for Christ Himself who is our righteousness.

We are given a view of Christ in the book of Revelation which reveals to us something that is wholly unappetizing to Christ Himself. It is with reference to the lukewarmness of the church at Laodicea that we read in Rev. 3:16 *So, then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.*

There is nothing so unappetizing to Christ as Christians that settle in to a state of complacency. They become indifferent to their own spiritual growth. They become indifferent to the needs of others. They become indifferent to the means of grace and as a result they simply go through the motions of Christianity.

Certainly Christians in this condition will never know the blessing of being filled. But what makes the matter worse is that they seem to accept the fact that they won't know such blessing. They readily accept their own complacency.

May God save us from such a degenerative spiritual condition and may He instead awaken our appetites toward spiritual things. The blessing of fulness, comes, then – to those who view it with the right perspective – to those who aim for the right thing which is righteousness and to those who seek righteousness not in a haphazard and careless manner but they seek it with all their hearts – so much so that they hunger and thirst for it.

I wonder how your spiritual appetite is today as we bring this meeting to a close. I wonder what things you hunger and thirst for. Are your longings for the things of this world? Do you find your carnal and worldly appetites to be more powerful forces than your spiritual appetites? If you do – then you should find it comes as no surprise that you little if anything of the blessing of being filled – nor will you know such blessing until there is a serious adjustment to your priorities.

I trust that you'll seek the right things and that you'll seek them with serious earnestness. Only then can you begin to know the blessing of being filled. The potential is definitely there, then, to soar into the heavenlies as you learn to glory in the righteousness of Christ. The potential is there to know more of Christ – *more of His saving fulness see, More of His love who died for me.*

May your heart be open to the Lord that He may bring you through the progression of these beatitudes. When He does – you'll know your poverty, you'll mourn for your sin, you'll be submissive to the gospel, and the blessing of fulness will be yours as you hunger and thirst for the blessing of gospel righteousness and strive to measure up to what is freely given to you.