

Introduction

Here in the land of plenty it is easy to forget that there are still people in this world who are literally starving to death. Images of starving people are a sobering reminder. Their ribs almost protrude through their skin. Their arms appear like brittle sticks on the verge of snapping. Weakness has engulfed their frames, and their longing eyes stare piercingly, silently asking if there is any hope. Such pictures issue a wake-up call to the self-absorbed and unconcerned. And yet, at the same time, these images depict something of the spiritual state of every human being without Christ, a reality we dare not forget either, particularly in regard to ourselves.

[Read Text and Pray]

Matthew 5:6 sets before us the fourth beatitude. In this short verse, Jesus expresses another truth about the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. He gives us four main aspects of this characteristic.

I. The Yearning

A. The citizens of the kingdom and those who enter the kingdom are marked by yearning. As with the other beatitudes which we have seen thus far, this one presents the world a puzzle. A person who yearns experiences a painful longing. There is a longing for something that is not possessed. Therefore, yearning is not identified with happiness. The wisdom of this world would say that happiness is not associated with the absence of satisfaction but with the experience of satisfaction. Look at the starving people of the world; they cannot be happy. But Jesus depicts the citizens of the kingdom—the ones to whom the kingdom belongs, the ones who will be comforted, the ones who will inherit the earth—he depicts them as individuals who experience yearning. He does it through reference to two universal human experiences. Each of us to an extent has experienced hunger. And each of us has experienced thirst.

Several summers ago the Laynes went up to the Apostle Islands. Philip, Ariail, and I paddled our kayaks for several miles along the sea caves on the

northern most point of Wisconsin. One of the safety concerns of kayaking in Lake Superior is the temperature of the water, even in the middle of summer. The cold water will quickly drain your body of its heat and life if you are in it for more than a few minutes. So as a birthday present I received a partial wetsuit and I made use of it for the kayaking adventure. It was a warm and beautiful day, and unbeknownst to me I was working up quite a sweat underneath that suit. I became incredibly thirsty; I kept having an inner impulse to put my hands into the water and bring them to my face with that cold, clear Lake Superior water. When we landed our kayaks back on shore, I was driven by one all-consuming impulse. I had to have something to drink. Someone handed me a quart of Gatorade and I guzzled every drop. I could not get enough. Next time I'll take some water with me in the boat. But that was genuine 100% authentic thirst. It was a yearning that was so intense it could hardly be quenched. But because the yearning was so intense, only one thing was on my mind at the time, and that was satisfying my thirst.

Hunger and thirst are longings springing from a need within that spur a search for satisfaction. It is important to remark these features.

1. Hunger and thirst are related not simply to desires but to a need. You need food and water to live. If you do not have them you will eventually die. People go after all kinds of things, but food and water are essential to life. You can live without the finer things. You can live without pleasures. You can live without amusements. But you cannot live without food and water. So Jesus is using experiences that relate to life, to being alive. When I came in off the lake, I did not just kind might enjoy a cold drink. My body needed fluid. I was feeling weak and tired and got a headache. And it took several hours to recover.

When Jesus speaks here of hunger and thirst, he is saying that there is a not simply a yearning but a yearning that is connected with living. Not simply "I want something," but "I must have it or I die."

2. And so when you or I experience this kind of yearning or longing we engage ourselves in an active and desperate search and effort to satisfy the craving that we are experiencing. Let's get back to shore to get that drink

of water. Let's plant some seeds, raise some livestock, go to the grocery store to obtain what will satisfy the longing and keep us alive. What we cannot do is just sit there and hope our situation will improve on its own.

C. I should point out that the people of Jesus's day felt hunger and thirst significantly more intensely than we typically do. It is hard for us to imagine the kind of conditions the people were used to who heard Jesus declare, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst." Wages were low or non-existent. Food was generally adequate but not abundant. Famine was a recurring problem. Only the wealthiest and most powerful ever got fat. Add to that the reality of living in a desert country. The sun grew hot. Sand and wind storms were common. And you did not hop in your car and drive 5 miles in 10 minutes to go to the grocery. You walked where you went. So thirst was a pressing reality, constantly nagging you for satisfaction.

D. So when Jesus pronounces blessed those who hunger and thirst, he is not speaking of a sentimental preference or "Oh, yeah, I'll have a drink if you insist." He is speaking of thirst like that of a parched kayaker coming in off the lake who hasn't drank in four hours. And he is speaking of the hunger of a starving man. It is a desperate and urgent longing, an inward ache fueled by a sense of necessity. If I do not get it I will die.

This is the kind of hunger that made four lepers risk their lives to find food. There was a terrible famine in the land and they were starving along with the city of Samaria which was under siege by Syria. Over in 2 Kings 7 we are told that these four lepers who were outside the city gate said to one another, "Why are we sitting here until we die? If we go inside the walls of the city, the famine is there and we will die there. And if we just sit here, that won't do us any good either; we'll die here as well. So let's go over to the camp of the enemy, to the Syrians. If they spare our lives we will live, and if they kill us, well we would die any way. So they rose and went to the camp. They were hungry so they risked their lives to get something to eat. The only other alternative was death.

E. And one more point regarding those who hunger and thirst. It is an ongoing experience. The tense of the verb here indicates that it is not

something that simply occurs at one point in time. Rather it is present tense. It is a hunger that continues. It has an initial and an ongoing element to it.

In sum then, Jesus is speaking of a yearning that is felt deeply and intensely. It is an ache and a longing that is experienced continually. And it is a yearning for that on which your very being depends. As such, it is a yearning that propels you to pursue satisfaction even risking your life if necessary. You could hardly use terms that express a deeper more earnest sense of want and desire.

II. The Nature of this Yearning.

A. Hunger and thirst are intense action-producing sensations. They cause us to seek food and water. But Jesus is using these experiences as metaphors for a certain kind of yearning. That becomes clear when he clarifies that he is speaking about those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. The citizens of the kingdom, those who enter by the narrow way that leads to life are those who yearn for righteousness. They long for righteousness. They ache for righteousness. They know and feel that without righteousness they will die.

B. So the second point of focus in our consideration of Jesus' fourth beatitude is the object of desire of the kingdom citizens. What is this treasure for which they must long? What is this righteousness without which they will expire?

To answer that question I am going to direct you to several various passages. We'll start in Isaiah.

Isaiah 46:12-13 – Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: I will bring my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.

In this text, God's righteousness is synonymous with God's salvation. For God to bring his righteousness is for God to bring his salvation.

Isaiah 51:5 – My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out.

The Lord again shows us that to have his righteousness is to have his salvation.

Isaiah 56:1 – Thus says the Lord, . . . soon my salvation will come and my righteousness will be revealed.

Isaiah 61:10 – my soul will greatly rejoice in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.

In the New Testament we see the same connection.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus warns, “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” He later says, “you therefore must be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect.”

In order to know the salvation of God, we must possess a righteousness that we simply cannot produce. We must have the righteousness of God. Our very lives depend upon it. This righteousness is revealed in the salvation of God. He saves in the display of his righteousness. When Jesus hung on the cross, it was a great display of the righteousness of God. The sinless Son of God displays God’s righteousness, but so does the fact that he is suffering in the place of sinners. God is displaying righteousness by preserving His holiness through the punishment of sin and yet pardoning sinners.

Romans 1:16, 17 – Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes . . . for in it the righteousness of God is revealed.

Romans 3:10 gives us the reason why we must hunger and thirst for righteousness: it is because “None is righteous, no not one.”

In the cross of Christ God displays his righteousness through Christ’s satisfaction of justice. Sinners, then, experience salvation by God’s righteousness as he justifies the ones who have faith in Jesus.

To bring it all together, what I am trying to show you is that hungering and thirsting for righteousness is intertwined with hungering and thirsting for salvation. The salvation for which we are made to yearn involves receiving a righteousness from God that makes us acceptable to him. You can't be saved without being declared righteous on the basis of the work of Christ. The experience of salvation both initially and on-goingly is an experience that involves yearning to be clothed with his righteousness and yearning to please him by living in righteousness in order to please him.

Listen to how Paul makes this point to the Philippians. (3:8ff.)

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Here Paul expresses the initial hunger for righteousness. He gives up everything else in order to gain it. The hunger he has for it outstrips his desire for all other things. They are rubbish to him. He thirsts to possess the righteousness of God in Christ. But there is more.

He goes on to say, (Philippians 3:12ff.) Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

So Paul hungers for justifying righteousness and he hungers for a righteousness in his life that reflects that he belongs to Christ. There is an ongoing, a perpetual, longing in the heart of every saved sinner to the day he dies. It is a longing for full redemption, being completely free from sin. It is a longing to be like Christ. It is a longing to know God more and more in all his glory. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "The desire for righteousness is a desire to be right with God and a desire to get rid of sin, because sin is that which comes between us and God."

Fundamentally, the yearning for this righteousness is a yearning for God himself. Paul says in Philippians the reason that he wants this righteousness from God is so that he may know God. David reflects this same thing. Psalm 63. "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my

soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water." (1)

III. The Promise to those Who Yearn.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.

When Jesus sat beside the well in Samaria he asked the woman who came to draw water to give him a drink. The woman expressed her surprise that a Jewish man would be asking a Samaritan woman for a drink. And Jesus's reply is staggering in the light of what we are studying this morning. He said, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." The woman wanted to know where Jesus would get this water since he had nothing with which to draw and the well was deep. Again he spoke, "every one who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

That is the promise to those who yearn for righteousness. They will be satisfied. They won't be thirsty or hungry again. In fact they will be like those lepers I mentioned earlier. God did a wonderfully merciful thing. It turns out that when the lepers arrived at the Syrian camp, no one was there. "For the Lord had made the army of the Syrians hear the sound of chariots and of horses, the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, 'Behold the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to come against us.' So they fled away in the twilight and abandoned everything. There was more than enough for the four lepers. There was so much they ran to tell everyone in the city to share in the abundance.

I went on a quick weight loss soup diet a couple years back. Those were the longest 5 days of my life I think. For those days I ate nothing but soup and vegetables and fruit. At the end of those days I was still in the weight loss mode, just not as restrictive, and I ate a bite of canned black beans. Hardly any food has ever tasted so good in all my life. It wasn't just that I

had not had them in a while. No they tasted amazing. Black beans won't taste like that to me today. I think I am going to have to go back on that diet to cleanse the pallet or whatever it was in order to experience that taste again. My hunger and longing deepened my satisfaction. Look, every man and every woman is born spiritually dead and spiritually dying of hunger and dying of thirst. And there is nothing so satisfying, nothing in the universe that fills our lives with goodness, eternal goodness than the righteousness of Christ, indeed Christ himself. After David uttered his words of hungering for God in the 63rd psalm, he said this: "So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food."

This is the promise of Jesus to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who long for God, who ache for him. They will be filled. They will be satisfied. Their thirst will be quenched. Their hunger will be gratified. Those who long for God will get God and they will be more than supplied. Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection is the feast for the famished that will delight and sustain them eternally. It is no wonder that he established a memorial to his death with something to eat and something to drink. To emphasize this point, Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)

IV. The Result for Those Who Yearn.

And the result of this satisfying righteousness is blessedness. **Blessed** are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled. Their hunger is filled and for that reason Jesus declares that they are blessed.

Remember the fundamental idea of blessed is that they are happy, deeply happy, joyfully happy, satisfyingly happy. Divine favor rests on them.

Humankind seeks for happiness. Everything everybody does is done by them with the calculation that ultimately what they are doing will make them happy. In each of these beatitudes Jesus commends happiness. Happy are the poor in spirit. Happy are those who mourn. Happy are the

meek. Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. But the thing is most people seek happiness by seeking happiness. In each of these cases, however, Jesus reveals that if you want to be happy, if you want to be blessed, you must not seek it. Rather, and especially in the case of the fourth beatitude, seek righteousness. Seek God's righteousness in Christ and you will be filled, and you will be happy.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, "The great tragedy of the world is that though it gives itself to seek for happiness, it never seems to find it. The present state of the world reminds us of that very forcibly. We are not to hunger and thirst after blessedness but that is what we are doing. We put happiness and blessedness as the one thing we desire, and thus we always miss it; it always eludes us. According to the Scriptures, happiness is never something that should be sought directly; it is always something that results from seeking something else. Whenever you put happiness before righteousness, you will be doomed to misery. . . . they alone are truly happy who are seeking to be righteous. Put happiness in the place of righteousness and you will never get it."

Conclusion

In closing, I give you one more thing Lloyd-Jones says about this beatitude. He writes, "I do not know of a better test anyone can apply to himself than a verse like this. If this verse is to you one of the most blessed statements of the whole scripture, you can be quite certain you are a Christian; if it is not, then you had better examine the foundations again."