



The Satisfaction of Hunger #1

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We are working our way through the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. This past week has been quite encouraging for me. After our study on meekness last week, many people contacted me to tell me how they were working through different issues in response to what we have been studying in the Sermon on the Mount. The comments went beyond “Hey, that was a great sermon.”

I was excited because there was a common denominator in what many of you said. The issues were different, but many of you have been treating this as a matter that requires personal change in your life. I am confident you represent many other people who are dealing with this issue as well as the Spirit of God works on your heart.

You should be encouraged even as we deal with the painful process of seeing our sinfulness and responding to the Word of God. When you respond to the Beatitudes, you are showing that you belong to the kingdom of heaven. You are showing that Jesus’ promises in these Beatitudes belong to you. That means that you will receive comfort. You will inherit the earth. You will be satisfied. Ultimately, you will see God.

So the process of working out our responses to this (and I’m having to go through it just like you are), is worth our effort and our application and our attention because the rewards are so great. God does not lightly bless His children.

So with that continued sense of anticipation and thankfulness, we come back to the Beatitudes this morning. As I have said to you throughout, there is a logical progression in these Beatitudes. Not every commentator sees it, but they are wrong. That’s just all there is to it. Most good commentators do.

As we start out in Matthew 5:3, Jesus says:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

He is describing a man who recognizes his bankruptcy of spirit. He has no spiritual merit before God whatsoever. As he recognizes that and reflects on his sin and unworthiness before God, it leads him to the mourning described in verse 4:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

The man who sees his spiritual poverty is a man who mourns over his sin. The man who mourns over his sin is the man who will be a man of meekness as described 5:5:

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

So this logical progression shows a spiritual development as we move along.

Now, obviously, whenever these factors are present in the life of a man or woman—this bankruptcy of spirit, this mourning over sin, this meekness of character—God is at work, because only the Holy Spirit produces those kinds of attitudes. They do not naturally flow from a sinful, unregenerate heart.

As we see these attitudes develop in our lives and as we see them develop corporately in GraceLife, we can have a sense of anticipation and encouragement that God is doing something. We are not meandering spiritually. God is doing something as we respond to His word.

Now we are going to look at Matthew 5:6 this morning, which says this:

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

The man who is bankrupt in spirit, who is mourning over his sin, who is developing meekness in his character, is a man who is going to be hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

I want to lay out two truths about a genuine Christian from this verse for you this morning. We will spend most of our time with this first point, which is this:

1. A True Christian Desires Righteousness

Very simply, a true Christian desires righteousness. Jesus pronounces this divine blessing upon people who hunger and thirst for righteousness. At first glance, it seems like a little bit of a contradiction. How can this dissatisfied state (as expressed by the idea of hunger and thirst) be something that is blessed?

The way to understand that is to see that this Beatitude pronounces God's blessing upon a person whose heart is marked by a relentless desire to be confirmed to the will of God. These verbs for "hungering and thirsting" in the Greek tense indicate an ongoing, persistent desire. This is a flame in the heart that cannot be put out. This is a passion that continues to burn.

As Jesus talks about this hunger and thirst for righteousness, understand that the hunger and thirst He is describing here isn't describing the kind of mild, gnawing pain that you have when you get a snack from the pantry or a drink from the fridge.

No. This is the hunger of starvation. This is the thirst of dehydration. This hunger and thirst is rooted in the deep poverty of spirit of a person who understands that he has no resources of his own to quench his desires. He hungers for righteousness. He thirsts after righteousness. And yet, there is nothing within him that can satisfy his longings. He looks within and finds the cupboard bare.

This person who has a relentless desire for righteousness is blessed because that hunger causes him to look beyond himself to the resources of God Himself, to the resources of Christ, to the righteousness of Christ in order to find satisfaction.

There is a sense in which you can say the entire Christian life begins with this hunger for righteousness. When the Holy Spirit convicted you of your sin and you saw that you were under the judgment of God, you realized that you needed forgiveness. You were not righteous and it caused you to flee to Christ. That is true for every Christian.

A person that hasn't seen their bankruptcy and hasn't hungered for a righteousness outside themselves is a person who has never come to Christ in the first instance. No matter how much you have been at church, until you come to that point of utter spiritual destitution and have hungered for the righteousness that comes from God through Christ, you have never come to Christ. You are still in your sins.

And so friend, if you are here and you are conscious of your guilt, and you don't know where to turn for relief for your troubled conscience, this is the place. The Bible says that righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe (Romans 3:22). Forgiveness and righteousness can be yours today as a free gift through the Lord Jesus Christ. You should jump at that opportunity while you still have time.

For those of you who are in Christ, you need to understand your conversion was only the beginning of the genuine hunger for righteousness that marks every true member of the kingdom of heaven. You don't become a Christian and then live in utter disregard for the laws of God as the no-lordship theology advocates would teach us. We condemn that as a rank misrepresentation of the Christian faith.

No. When a person truly comes to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, he is transformed. God gives him a new heart that is soft to the things of God. He wants to be like Christ in his attitudes, words and actions. The true believer wants all of his life to conform to the will of God.

It is the spiritual longing that David expressed in Psalm 63:1:

O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Spiritual dehydration. He cries out with a parched spiritual throat as it were, saying God, I have got to have *You* to satisfy this hunger and thirst within me.

The true Christian pursues that desire for righteousness unconditionally whether it leads him to joy or sorrow, prominence or rejection, riches or poverty . . . it makes no difference. He hungers and thirsts for this practical righteousness which accords with the Spirit that was put within his heart at the moment of his conversion. Matthew 5:6 affirms that spiritual reality.

But we need to ask a question here. What is this righteousness that Jesus is describing? Some people have limited it to the imputed righteousness we receive in justification. I think that that is present in the text, but it cannot exhaust what Jesus has in mind.

What did He have in mind when He made this phenomenal statement, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”? There is a negative and positive aspect to it.

In the negative, the true Christian desires to avoid sin in every possible form. He doesn’t want to sin in his conduct, with his lips, or in his heart desires. He wants to be free from all that.

But there is also a positive dimension in that desire for righteousness. It is not just a negative desire of shunning sin, although that’s crucial. There is also this positive desire to live out practical righteousness in everyday life as required by the law of God.

This is immensely practical. The test of your response to this Beatitude doesn’t come as you listen to this sermon at all. The test is Monday afternoon and Wednesday evening and Friday at lunch time. It is in every aspect of your life as you understand this vitally dynamic relationship you have with the Lord Jesus Christ. It permeates every moment of every day.

To say it theologically, this verse expresses the conscious desire for sanctification.

The best place to see what Jesus meant when He talked about righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount is to see what He said in the Sermon on the Mount after He said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” We can see exactly what He meant by what He said later in the sermon.

Just as a point of Bible interpretation for those of you that don’t have any formal training, I want you to see that this is something anyone can read for themselves. This doesn’t take complex interpretive skill. You can see it for yourself right in the text.

So, as I go through these following points, ask yourself whether you want your life to conform to these character traits. Some are positive; some are negative. These are just a sample of what we could discuss.

When Jesus discusses righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount, He is addressing such practical issues as:

a. A Life without Hypocrisy

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus says:

I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus condemned those men who looked good on the outside but were full of dead men's bones on the inside. He condemned them, among other things, for their hypocrisy.

So the practical righteousness of your Christian faith means you have a desire not to be a hypocrite.

b. A Life without Sinful Anger

Look at 5:21-22, where Jesus says:

You have heard that the ancients were told 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court.

Your hunger and thirst for righteousness should be such that you don't want an angry temper in your life. A true Christian doesn't excuse himself for being a hot-tempered person, because he realizes that spirit is contrary to the righteousness of Christ.

c. A Life without Sinful Lusts

In Matthew 5:27, Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

It is not just the physical act but the internal lust that Jesus said you can't have. Obviously there is a lot more we could say about that.

d. A Life of Personal Integrity

There is a positive dimension to it and involves a life of personal integrity. Now again, I am only touching on these things. But Jesus says in verse 37 of chapter 5:

“Let your statement be yes, yes or no, no. Anything beyond these is of evil.”

So part of that righteousness is being a man of integrity, a woman of integrity who carries out the things that he or she says that he or she will do, whose word needs no further affirmation because the word is sufficient.

e. A Life without Personal Retaliation

So we talked about hypocrisy, sinful anger, sinful lusts, personal integrity. A life without personal retaliation, verses 38-39:

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

When someone wrongs you, what is your first impulse? To slap him back? To return a harsh word with a harsh word? Jesus says no. That is not the righteousness of the kingdom.

f. A Life that Loves Your Enemies as Well as Your Friends

Verse 43, Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

This heavenly righteousness that Jesus speaks about is expressed in all of those points. When the Lord, speaking through the Sermon on the Mount, calls you to live a daily life without hypocrisy, anger and lusts; when He calls you to a personal integrity that refuses to retaliate when people wrong you; when He tells you to love your enemies as well as your friends; beloved, you have to understand that this beatitude explodes on your conscience with a searching test of your personal righteousness. There is no relationship in your life and no circumstance in your life that is untouched by this command.

Jesus calls you to a pervasive, practical righteousness that impacts not only your words and conduct, but your attitudes, your desires and even your motives. This beatitude puts you under the x-ray machine and exposes every bit of cancer that is inside you.

Beloved, I implore you to come to this and let this have its work in your life. Jesus says this not to condemn us but to bless us. He says, blessed are those who hunger and thirst in this way. This is the call of righteousness. This is a call to blessing. Don’t run from it. Don’t resist it and say, “It hurts too much.” Sometimes a surgeon has to dig out the cancer with the scalpel.

The test of where you are at spiritually is how you respond to it. The true Christian says, “Yes! Yes! Of course that is what I want.” This righteousness is noble and good and desirable. I want to be like that even though I understand I fall short. I fall short not for lack of the desire but for my own personal weakness and sinfulness.”

So beloved, is that your heart’s desire? If it is, Jesus says you are blessed. Even if you are wrestling with issues and struggling with sin now, if your heart desires in this direction, Jesus says, you are blessed, you will be satisfied.

I probably should leave it there, but I can’t. Because there is more to this righteousness that Jesus calls us to in the Sermon on the Mount.

He also addresses the very nature of your private devotion to God Himself. True righteousness also involves:

g. A Life Filled with Private Devotion to God

Look at Matthew 6:1. Jesus says:

Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

He goes on to say don’t do your deeds of charity, your prayers, and your fastings so that men will notice you and praise you for them. Go some place alone where only God sees. Give that kind of prayerful devotion to Him and let the Father who sees in secret reward you in secret.

I always find it disappointing in my own life that my public prayers are almost always a lot more invigorating than the ones that I pray on my knees by my bed. That’s not a good thing. I would rather guess that some of you have a similar experience if you have opportunities to pray in public or before your family. You can sound a lot more pious and righteous when someone else is listening.

It is not supposed to be that way. The depths of your passion should be expressed most fully before God alone. You don’t turn on the switch to impress somebody.

It is searching; it is so searching. The eighth thing that I would point out to you here is that this righteousness includes:

h. A Life with a Forgiving Spirit

Look at 6:14. Jesus said:

If you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Forgiveness—being willing to let a wrong go, having a willingness to set aside a grudge—is a part of true righteousness. You can't cherish any kind of sin or rebellion in any of these areas. You can't say, "I'm still mad at Henry and I'm not going to let go of it."

No! No! The Lordship of Christ over your life is comprehensive and exhaustive. There is no room for cherished bitterness or angry thoughts. None. You have to go to the Lord and confess that and say, "I want to change. Lord, forgive me for carrying this so long in light of your forgiveness in my life."

And it goes on:

i. A Life that Trusts God

Matthew 6:25. Jesus said:

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

The righteous life trusts God. A life that is full of anxiety and questioning God is not a righteous life. You say, "But oh, my circumstances are so bad." No, that is the wrong perspective. The right perspective is "Oh, but my God is so sovereign and my God is so good. I will not tolerate that kind of anxiety in my life. It has to go in order to honor the God who saved my soul."

j. A Life that Seeks the Kingdom of God

The righteous life is a life that seeks the kingdom of God and His righteousness as the surpassing priority of all of life. Verse 33:

Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

That seeking is expressed in a life of persistent, trusting prayer. Matthew 7:11:

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

Persistent trusting prayer is the mark of a life of righteousness.

Ultimately, this life of righteousness is a life that hears these things *and acts upon them*. The righteousness of which Jesus speaks is the practical righteousness of working out your salvation. Matthew 7:24:

Everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock . . .

Beloved, it is not enough for you to sit in here and listen to these things. That just increases your responsibility. You have to live this out Monday through Saturday when no one else is watching; when we are not dressed up nice in coats and ties. What ought to be thoroughly impressed upon your mind is that when Jesus talks about hungering and thirsting for righteousness, He is not making a vague call to general morality. This touches everything in your life; everything.

Spurgeon said it this way:

This desire toward righteousness is not a faint one which feebly says, 'I wish I could be righteous.' No. It is a longing which like hunger and thirst masters a man. He carries it to his work. He carries it to his house. He carries it to his bed. He carries it with him wherever he goes because it rules him with its imperative demands.

There is a sense in which we are slaves to this hunger and thirst for righteousness. We don't want to escape it; we want to see that desire fulfilled. That is a blessed condition.

All this is a lot to think about. Let me give you a few questions to help you process it. A fair question would be to say, "How do I know if I desire this kind of righteousness?" Here are a few questions to help you assess that and also to cultivate this desire for righteousness in your life. First question I would ask is this:

Do you deny all self-righteousness in your life?

That is the starting point. Do you deny any self-righteousness of your own? This brings us back to Matthew 5:3, where Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The bankrupt in spirit.

If you cling to any notion that you have done something (or that you have *not* done something) that gives you personal merit in your own spiritual bank account, you are not hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

You are still satisfied with your own.

You are still lifted up in your own heart, proud about what you have or have not done. That is the enemy to this hunger and thirst for righteousness.

But on the other hand, beloved, if you freely acknowledge, “I have no righteousness of my own. My appeal is to Christ and His righteousness alone,” you have forfeited your own claims. Now you are looking to Christ alone for your righteousness.

That is the mark of someone that is hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

But I must get more personal. Let me ask you this question:

What do you pray about when you are alone with God?

Do you pray about finances? Do you pray for help in a difficult situation? Do you ask God to bless your plans, help you sell the house at just the right point in the market?

Those things are *okay* as far as they go. The apostle Peter tells us to humble ourselves before the Lord, casting all our anxieties upon Him because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:6-7). There is an appropriate place for that in prayer.

But the one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness goes *way* beyond that in prayer. God isn't his cosmic bell boy to serve his desires at his beck and command.

No. The one who truly desires this practical righteousness asks God to help him bring forth the fruit of righteousness even if those difficult circumstances never change.

You ought to demand from yourself the desire that says, “When I get alone with God, I need to pray that He would help me be righteous even if these circumstances never change.”

You are so consumed by the desire for righteousness that your circumstances become secondary, if not irrelevant, to the way you pray. You say, “God, the thing that I most want—that only you can give by the power of your Spirit—is to help me live out righteousness in the middle of these circumstances.”

I have been learning this the hard way. A few years ago, I was in a difficult situation. My repeated prayer was, “Lord, get me out of this situation.” Months went by without any change.

So I changed my prayer. “Lord, I'll stay. Just change the circumstances.” I prayed that way for a few more months. No change.

One day it dawned on me. The model for prayer in that kind of circumstance is the model Jesus Himself exhibited the night before the crucifixion. “Father, not my will, but thine be done.” In essence, “Lord, forget the circumstances. Do what you want. Change *me*.”

Praise God for that painful process. I needed to learn to desire righteousness more than favorable circumstances. I rather imagine that some of you are in that same position. I encourage you to go to the blessed place of resignation to the will of God that says, “God, whatever you want is fine with me. Just let me be a godly man. Let me be a godly woman in the midst of this. I am done asking for you to change things, Lord. Change me so that I learn like the apostle Paul to be content no matter what my circumstances are.”

When you pray that way, beloved, you are hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

One more question to ask as you evaluate this desire for righteousness in your life.

How do you deal with sin?

Beloved, if you seek to resist sin, if you flee from temptation even though sometimes you fall, if you confess your sins to Christ, you can be sure that your spiritual appetite is healthy. You are not content to let the cancer of sin reign in your life.

But if you are indifferent to sin, if it never crosses your mind whether you are being righteous or not, if you can pursue sin in total disregard of the holiness of God and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, then you have a real spiritual problem. You should be crushed to the core as the Spirit of God exposes your heart. You do not understand what it means to be desperate to conform your life to the will of God. If you did, you would never tolerate sin like you do.

Those of you who go places you should not go on the Internet have been on my mind as I dealt with this passage. When you tolerate that kind of sin in your life, you are saying you value your sin more than you do the righteousness of God.

It is not that you need greater accountability in your life or someone to “come alongside you.” You need to cancel your Internet, cancel your television, throw away your magazines, and start pursuing God in His Word and in prayer. It is not that complicated. You can start it today. If you won’t, you’re left with a gnawing, crushing question. “Why do I value this sin more than I do the righteousness of God?”

Your fundamental problem in that situation is that you love your sin more than you love the righteousness of God. Until you change that desire and pursue God, it is not going to change. All the accountability in the world isn’t going to make any difference.

So beloved, it is time for you to put away your excuses and simply do what is right. It is not complicated.

Well, all of that has been an extended discussion to work out the significance of the first point of this message. The true Christian desires righteousness. Jesus says those who have this desire will be satisfied.

You go home and work through whether you really desire this righteousness. Spend time alone with God and say, “I do desire your righteousness, but I have been lazy and I want to repent.” Then we will come back together next week and deal with the satisfaction that comes from that kind of hunger.

Let’s pray together, shall we?

Our Father, it has been our great joy to look at your Word and see the purity and the goodness and the loveliness that the righteousness of Christ calls us to in the Sermon on the Mount. Father, there is just so much that hits our conscience. There is so much that would weigh upon us as we deal with these issues and we would struggle through them. But Father, you are faithful and I pray that you would give us your grace to be able to work through these issues and come to a place where not only is our hunger for righteousness being satisfied, but that you are satisfied with the direction of our spiritual lives.

For those that are struggling with sin, Father, I pray that your grace would come alongside them, that you would change their desire, that you would increase and affirm their desire for righteousness and sanctification and that they would look to Christ for their resource, to look to Christ for that righteousness which they themselves do not possess. Father, every relationship, every moment, every conversation should be tinged with this desire for righteousness; avoiding sin and pursuing what would really please you.

And so make us a people here in GraceLife that are marked by a hunger and a thirst for righteousness, Father. And then as you cultivate that deeply in our hearts, Father, give us the grace to know the satisfaction that Jesus promises that we would see next week.

We commit these things to you and your blessedness.

Amen.

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.